Australia to push through Omicron, as total cases hit 1 million

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Australia has recorded a surge of coronavirus cases linked to Omicron and has now recorded more than a million since the start of the pandemic [Mark Baker/AP Photo]?

Sydney, January 10 (RHC)-- Australia must "push through" a rapidly-growing Omicron outbreak, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Monday, as the country's total number of COVID-19 cases breached more than one million, more than half of them recorded in the past week alone.

The situation is a turnaround for Australia, which suppressed previous waves of the pandemic through lockdowns and strict border controls and quarantines.

Having vaccinated nearly all its adult population Australia is now trying to live with the virus, but the rapid escalation in cases has put pressure on medical workers and the health system. "Omicron is a gear change and we have to push through," Morrison told a media briefing in the capital, Canberra. "You've got two choices here: you can push through or you can lock down. We are for pushing through."

The country confirmed just over 67,000 cases on Monday, compared with just under 100,000 on Sunday. Authorities said the Monday number could be an "underestimate" because some states do not include those who tested positive in at-home rapid antigen tests.

Australia has now reported 1.04 million cases since the pandemic began two years ago. Some 2,387 have lost their lives to the disease.

Morrison insisted the health system was coping. More than 3,500 people are currently in hospital, compared with about 2,000 a week ago. About 92 percent of those over the age of 16 have received two vaccine doses, and children aged from 5 – 11 began getting their first doses of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccination on Monday.

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