

Australians urged to work from home as COVID hospital cases surge



A woman wearing an N95 mask on a street in Melbourne, Australia.

Sydney, July 21 (RHC)-- Australians have been urged to work from home and wear masks indoors as the number of people in hospital with COVID-19 nears record levels. The country is in the midst of a third wave of coronavirus, driven by the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron subvariants, and earlier this month broadened

access to second booster shots to deal with the surge in cases.

Daily cases climbed to 50,248 on Tuesday, the highest in two months. Some 5,239 Australians are currently in hospital with COVID-19, just short of the record 5,390 recorded in January.

“We need to do some things differently at least for a short period of time,” Australia’s Chief Medical Officer Paul Kelly told ABC Radio on Wednesday, as he predicted the number of people admitted to hospital will soon hit an all-time high. “We know that working from home is a very key component of stopping what we call macro spreading.”

At a press conference later, however, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said that working from home was a matter between companies and their employees and noted that it was simply not possible for some people.

“Businesses will continue to make those decisions,” Albanese was quoted as saying by the Sydney Morning Herald. “They need to make them on the basis of safety. But also, for some people, we need to recognize that they can’t work from home. “It’s a matter of getting the balance right. I’m confident that with a bit of common sense applied, we can do that.”

Australia began relaxing strict health measures related to the coronavirus towards the end of last year, once most of the population had been fully vaccinated against the virus, but the high transmissibility of the Omicron variants has tested its plan of ‘living with the virus.’

More than 300,000 cases have been recorded over the past seven days, with the health system strained by an increasing number of nurses and doctors either sick or in isolation because of the virus.

Australia has already reinstated support payments for casual workers who have to quarantine due to COVID-19, but while authorities recommend wearing masks indoors, they have not made it mandatory.

About 95 percent of Australian residents over the age of 16 have had two doses of the coronavirus vaccine, and more than 70 percent have had a booster shot, which helps protect people against severe illness.

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