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**GEELONG**

# All the latest Geelong health news for week of May 30

**Many Geelong carers looking after elderly people in their homes still have not been vaccinated against coronavirus, with providers pushing to bolster rates among staff.**

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Tamara McDonald, Geelong Advertiser

 Subscriber only | June 3, 2021 6:27pm

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MANY Geelong carers looking after elderly people in their homes still have not been vaccinated against coronavirus, with providers pushing to bolster rates among staff.

Home Instead Geelong has about 200 care staff, owner and director Giovanni Siano said.

He estimated about 50 had received their first shot.

“At the moment we really can’t make (vaccination) compulsory,” he said.

“But in saying that it is highly, highly recommended, so much so that we tell staff every week to ensure they get vaccinated.”

But he said staff were encountering issues securing appointments due to the recent rush in demand for jabs.

“We’re doing a push to make sure we get to 80 per cent,” he said.

“The latest outbreak has given us a wake up call.”

He said he personally supported mandatory vaccinations in healthcare settings.

Workers in in-home aged care became eligible for COVID-19 vaccination in Phase 1b.

Over the last six months demand for the in-home aged care service had been incredible, Mr Siano said.

Mr Siano said there had been instances of people leaving residential facilities to return to an in home care model following widespread Covid outbreaks last year in facilities.

Prestige Inhome Care acting chief executive Thea McCroary said the service had a care team of about 150 in the Geelong region, supporting around 350 clients.

Ms McCroary this week said in Geelong about 30 to 40 staff had been vaccinated out of about 150.

“We believe there may be more than this, but that have not advised us as yet and some may choose not to disclose this,” she said.

Ms McCroary said with factors including an accessible local vaccine hub available in Geelong, it was hoped these numbers would rise.

“We strongly encourage staff to get vaccinated, and are facilitating access to vaccinations centres where possible,” Ms McCroary said.

She said the organisation had a target of 80 per cent for vaccination among care staff.

City of Greater Geelong director community life Robyn Stevens said council employed 290 community care workers to deliver in-home support to about 4800 clients.

“These services are funded via a number of government funding streams,” she said.

“In line with Federal Government guidelines vaccination is not mandatory, however the City is strongly supporting and encouraging all of our community care workers to get the COVID-19

vaccine.”

**BARWON HEATH TO RESUME  
ELECTIVE SURGERY BLITZ**

BARWON Health will recommence a blitz of operations from Friday after non-urgent elective surgeries were paused during the week-long lockdown.

Barwon Health spokeswoman Kate Bibby said about 100 non-urgent elective procedures were postponed during the restrictions.

“We have continued to perform emergency surgery and urgent elective surgery during this period,” she said.

Ms Bibby said in April, Barwon Health opened an additional two theatres at Building B – the former Geelong Private Hospital site – as part of a blitz to treat additional patients who had care deferred over the past year.

“This will gradually reduce our waiting list,” Ms Bibby said.

She said Barwon Health would recommence undertaking its blitz on elective surgery after the lockdown lifted.

“We appreciate the community’s understanding during this time,” she said.

The elective surgery waitlist at Geelong hospital grew from 1981 patients on December 31 to 2113 on March 31.

Barwon Health Surgical and Critical Care Directorate clinical director Simon - Williams last month said most of the growth in the elective surgery waiting list was a result of COVID-19.

However, there had also been an increase in demand for emergency surgery, population growth within the area and more specialist clinics resulting in referrals for surgery, Dr Williams said.

Non-urgent elective surgeries were paused twice in 2020 due to coronavirus.

## **YOUNG PEOPLE URGED TO SEEK SUPPORT DURING LOCKDOWN**

GEELONG’s youth are being urged to seek support if they are experiencing stress or anxiety during the snap coronavirus lockdown.

Barwon, Child, Youth and Family chief executive Sandy Morrison said headspace Geelong remained open during lockdown to support young people and their families.

“There has been no notable increase to the number of calls to headspace Geelong since the state lockdown came into effect last week,” he said.

“However, we expect many young people in our community will be experiencing a range of emotions as they readjust their lives once again to this week’s COVID-19 circuit breaker restrictions.”

Mr Morrison said all of BCYF’s support services, including headspace Geelong, continued to operate throughout the pandemic.

“As in previous lockdowns we have adjusted the way we deliver many of our services with the majority of our programs being delivered remotely over the phone and via video chat to help minimise risk and stop the spread of COVID-19,” he said.

Mr Morrison said feelings of anxiety, isolation and feeling overwhelmed were normal reactions to the existing situation.

“Anyone experiencing these feelings should, as best as possible, keep engaged with the activities that support their wellbeing,” he said.

“It can also help to focus on the small everyday things that support your mental health and wellbeing.”

If you or a loved one needs help call headspace Geelong on 5222 6690.

## **‘RECKLESS’ COVID CONSPIRACY FLYERS SLAMMED**

‘IRRESPONSIBLE’ material spruiking that people can “say no” to protective public health measures has been dropped in local letterboxes.

The flyers say “there are laws that provide protection for you to say no” and direct readers to the “Reignite Democracy Australia” website.

“We are not anti or pro-vax,” the website claims.

“We are pro-choice.

“That means we don’t accept any mandatory medical procedures or services.”

Corangamite MP Libby Coker said the pamphlets being distributed on the Bellarine encouraging people not to get vaccinated were irresponsible and dangerous.

“To suggest people should not get vaccinated is one thing but to provide a link to a website that features “legal advice” on how to avoid wearing masks is just reckless and puts everyone’s health at risk,” Ms Coker said.

“I urge those distributing the flyers to stop and ask themselves if their actions are in the community’s best interests.

“While it is not mandatory to receive a vaccination there is an overwhelming weight of evidence, based on the science, to do the right thing and get the jab as soon as possible.”

It’s understood the pamphlets have also been distributed in Torquay.

Barwon South West Public Health Unit director Professor Eugene Athan said Barwon Health encouraged people to access information about vaccination and Covid-19 from reputable sources, such as Barwon Health, the Department of Health, and the Federal Government.

“Both Pfizer and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines have been approved by the TGA and are safe and effective,” Prof Athan said.

“We strongly recommend that the community follow the advice of the chief health officer for their own protection and the protection of the community.”

It is not the first time Geelong region residents have received controversial flyers in their mailboxes throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

Material spruiking the anti-vaccination agenda was dropped in Bellarine Peninsula letterboxes earlier this year.

Barwon Health at the time said the sources cited on those flyers, which referred to several websites promoting anti-vaccination material, were not reputable.

PEOPLE are being urged not to project frustrations around accessing the Covid-19 vaccine onto workers.

Local GP and Western Victoria Primary Health Network clinical spokeswoman Dr Anne Stephenson said people had expressed frustration when they hadn't been able to secure an appointment to receive the vaccine.

“I'm not aware of reception staff being abused, but there seems to be an increased sense of urgency from patients in response to the latest outbreak and lockdown,” she said.

“It's important to remember that medical reception staff have been working intensely throughout the pandemic with a significant personal risk of being exposed to Covid-19.

“They have managed anxious patients and make sure clinics adapt to Covid-safe practices.

“They are not responsible for vaccination programs, and people should treat them with the respect and courtesy they deserve.”

Barwon South West Public Health Unit director Eugene Athan said people in the community have been understanding that Barwon Health staff were providing the best care possible during this period of overwhelming demand.

“We ask that people continue to get tested with any Covid-19 symptoms, be patient with the

vaccination process, stay informed, and follow the chief health officer advice to help protect the community,” Prof Athan said.

There are so far no Covid-19 cases in our region. Barwon Health confirmed on Monday there were 35 people isolating in the Barwon South West region, due to attending a tier one exposure site.

– **TAMARA MCDONALD**

# GEELONG RESIDENTS TURN OUT IN FORCE FOR VACCINATIONS

GEELONG residents turned out in force to get Covid-19 vaccination jobs at the weekend, earning the praise of health authorities.

The Community Vaccination Hub at the [former Ford factory](#) in Norlane became the busiest place in town on Saturday and Sunday as long lines of walk-in recipients waited patiently, with about 3000 jobs delivered across the region.

“Demand for [Covid vaccinations](#) continues to remain high; the Geelong community has come out in droves to get vaccinated and we thank everyone for doing this,” Barwon Health spokeswoman Kate Bibby said on Sunday.

“On Saturday, just under 1600 vaccinations were provided and demand has remained steady (on Sunday) and we anticipate vaccinating around 1300 people.

“It is still preferred that people book an appointment, either online or by calling the state government hotline.

“We will add more clinics to our website booking portal daily; we encourage the community to check the website regularly for updates.

“We will have a limited number of walk-in appointments daily.”

A surge of interest in vaccinations took hold late last week after Victoria was thrust into its fourth lockdown because of another outbreak.



 Signing in for a vaccine at Barwon Health's old Ford site hub. Picture: Alan Barber

All residents aged 40-49 became eligible for their first Pfizer vaccine shot on Friday, and that demographic was well-represented in queues at Norlane at the weekend.

Those who walked up without a booking reported waiting about two hours to get a jab on Saturday, and will now wait three weeks until they can get their second and final dose.

The vaccination blitz came as more than 17,000 doses were administered on Saturday by state-commissioned services across Victoria.

It raised the total number of jabs delivered in Victoria to 460,000.

Authorities also processed 45,000 tests for Covid-19 on Saturday, recording five new cases of community transmission.

While police warned they would be out in force during the seven-day snap lockdown, they did not provide figures on how many fines were issued in Geelong at the weekend.

But Geelong's ghostly quiet roads and shopping strips suggested most people had heeded the public safety messages. Sports grounds across the region that would usually have been pumping with activity also fell silent as light recreational fitness took over from organised competition.

The state government remained tight-lipped on whether the seven-day snap lockdown would be extended past Thursday night.

"It is a day-by-day proposition," Health Minister Martin Foley said.

"What we have been clear and upfront on every day is that each day we review (the situation) based on the intelligence and material we have got before us."

– **HARRISON TIPPET**

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