



Tuesday 16 June 2020 17:00 pm

### **Borders open this evening**

Further to my update last Friday, the Premier of South Australia has just announced the State's border restrictions will be lifted as of midnight tonight for people travelling directly from Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

This means people flying into South Australia from those jurisdictions will no longer be required to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival. It should be noted that this does not modify the arrangements those jurisdictions have in place for inbound travellers.

This is welcome news and rewards your successful management of the previous travel arrangements for essential industries. There is every likelihood that further changes will be made as we get closer to the full relaxation of interstate border arrangements on 20 July 2020, and I will keep you updated.

### **Asymptomatic testing trial**

The South Australian Government recently partnered with the resources and energy sectors to conduct an asymptomatic COVID-19 testing trial for inbound FIFO workers. SA Pathology delivered the testing in the four-week trial at Adelaide Airport as well as some of South Australia's drive-through testing clinics and regional hospitals.

The trial had several objectives, including:

1. Managing infection risk to key workgroups and critical operations across the State.
2. Managing public confidence relating to FIFO workers arriving in South Australia from the eastern seaboard.
3. Improving FIFO worker health and wellbeing and enabling sustainable operations.
4. Refining a process that could become critically important to industry operations if the COVID-19 situation deteriorated.

The trial was a resounding success with participants including BHP, OZ Minerals, Heathgate Resources and Senex undertaking a total of almost 800 PCR-swab tests throughout the four weeks.

Most importantly, 100 per cent of the tests have been negative, with 98 per cent receiving the news by SMS within 24 hours. Feedback from employees was almost universally positive which reflects on the professionalism displayed by the SA Pathology nurses, and this is despite some airport delays and the mildly unpleasant experience of receiving the test itself.



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However, the process has not been without its challenges. The trial deliberately focussed on identifying friction points and enhancing the process because of the complexity of multi-company work movements, the imperative to optimise wait times, test-window timing and control costs. Key issues that were encountered included:

- Communication and ensuring data integrity between companies and SA Pathology. A focus across the trial was the coordination of inbound worker arrivals and ensuring all parties knew accurately what and who to expect, where and when.
- Employee preparation, including their preliminary briefing on the process, and registration for SMS results. Companies reported that very detailed advice and purpose-built phone apps have been an important enabling measure.
- Wait times associated with the border process.
- Importance of identifying and empowering a COVID-19 Coordinator for each company who became the primary contact for employee queries and interactions with SA Pathology.
- Management of laboratory availability to suit the receipt and processing of samples to the North Terrace facilities. Testing was typically conducted late afternoon to coincide with the bulk of arrivals, necessitating changes to laboratory staffing and procedures. Also, IT changes were required for overnight processing to support the quick turnaround of SMS results for FIFO workers.

As a result of the trial, the testing process for inbound FIFO workers was refined in support of ongoing asymptomatic PCR swab testing arrangements. Further detail on the process is shown in the following [flow diagram](#) and highlights the critical steps in the testing process. Any company interested in ongoing testing arrangements should contact [Craig Martin](#), SA Pathology's Director, Business Development & Strategy. Representatives from the participating companies are also happy to share their experiences and learnings with you.

To protect the ongoing operations across the state's resources and energy sectors, it is important to heed SA Health's advice that the primary COVID-19 mitigation measure remains effective infection control protocols including hygiene and social distancing.

Asymptomatic testing is a useful tool for reducing the probability of infection on-site and yields a higher level of confidence but it also imperfect. The results are a snapshot of a point-in-time and can be compromised by the COVID-19 infection incubation period. If not managed carefully, confidence held by the workforce in testing could compromise on-site infection prevention behaviours, adding to existing pressures from emerging complacency in the broader community.

Despite this, pre-deployment testing can contribute to company risk mitigation strategies, support employee wellbeing and sustain operations in a COVID-19 environment.

Thank you to BHP, OZ Minerals, Heathgate, Senex, SA Pathology and SA Health for your contributions to the trial, as well as to SAPOL and Adelaide Airport for your ongoing support.

Stay well,

Paul Heithersay  
Chief Executive  
Department for Energy and Mining

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