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Contact:

Honourable Mark McGowan MLA  
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Dear Premier

## **MOVEMENT OF HOTEL GUESTS IN ROOMS SURROUNDING COVID-19 CASES**

On Friday 23 April 2021, I was notified that a gentleman who had completed 14 days mandatory quarantine in a State Quarantine Facility (SQF) had tested positive for COVID-19. The gentleman completed quarantine on 17 April 2021, returned to his home in Melbourne and subsequently tested positive. It was then confirmed that he had contracted COVID-19 from spread between people in two separate rooms on the same floor at the Mercure Hotel. This has resulted in speculation about the efficacy and management of hotel quarantine, specifically the location of guests who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the facility.

In response to the case of COVID-19 in a hotel quarantine worker in Western Australia in January 2021, the Department of Health commissioned a review of quarantine hotel ventilation by an occupational hygienist, Dr Laurie Glossop. In his 'Ventilation risk assessment' report, Dr Glossop suggested that moving guests out of rooms surrounding COVID positive rooms may be an effective way to reduce hotel transmission. However, all measures to manage the risk to staff and guests within state run hotel quarantine facilities must be considered before they are operationalised. As with all public health measures, there must be due consideration given to the risks and benefits of proposed actions more broadly.

If surrounding rooms are vacated for each positive case, it is estimated that this will generate approximately 210 additional movements of guests per fortnight. With the current rate of COVID-19 in the SQF guests, it is likely that 1 or more of these guests will be infectious, but not yet diagnosed, with COVID-19 during this movement.

Each movement is a precise and well-planned procedure that commonly involves 2 security guards, a cleaner, a hotel staff member, and, if needed, a health member of staff. The movement of an unknowingly infectious case creates a small but tangible risk for the staff and guests near to the movement. The risk of these additional movements for every case within our hotel system is not outweighed by the potential benefit of reduced exposure to guests in surrounding rooms and is therefore not

justified. In the recent Mercure case, movement of the guests around the initial case would have led to three infected, but undiagnosed, cases being moved, with increased risk to staff and other guests, and further consequential movements of other guests.

Where there is only one positive COVID case in a room, the following process is followed:

- I. notification is received from PathWest of the positive case;
- II. the location of the guest is marked out on the hotel floor plan;
- III. the position of security guards on the floor is reviewed. The security guard is directed to move their position if they are within 1.5 – 2.0m from the room, with the aim to get greater than 3m distance between the security guard's position and the room of the case;
- IV. identification of any other cases or non-invasive ventilation guests on that floor; where there are guests who are near to cases (e.g. a guest in the room between two cases, the guest is moved if they have had a negative 48-hour PCR test);
- V. public health will advise whether a portable hepafilter is required and the guest has agreed to have it in the room; and
- VI. where there is more than one positive case in the room, a buffer zone is created.

WA Health has a Standard Operations Procedure (SOP), which supports the implementation of a buffer zone at SQFs, where there are 2 or more COVID cases in a single room and an expected higher viral load. In this circumstance, guests in all adjacent and opposite rooms (directly and diagonally opposite) are moved.

It is important to note that in addition to the SOP, there are several mitigations to reduce the risk of room to room transmission in hotels. These include:

- placing hepafilters into the rooms of positive guests, when available;
- minimising the movement of guests to reduce the risk of walking positive guests down corridors past other guest rooms potentially spreading virus to guests and staff; and
- provision of masks to guests, and the requirement to wear them when opening doors for any reason.

For the reasons outlined above, it is my recommendation that surrounding room guests are only moved when the risk is significantly elevated, as per WA Health's Standard Operating Procedure for Buffer Zones in SQF, or on the specific advice of our public health experts.

Yours sincerely



Dr Andrew Robertson  
**CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER**

29 April 2021