



## We Australians Are Sick Of The Zero-Covid Delusion

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Yes, everything you've heard about Australia and coronavirus is true.

Yes, the entire city of Greater Sydney has been in [full lockdown since late June](#), at which time there were 82 cases in the entire state of New South Wales. Not 82 deaths, not 82 hospitalisations – 82 cases. At the time the latest lockdown was announced here in Melbourne, the total active case count was six. And no, the lockdowns aren't working – cases are rising steadily in both states.

Yes, the premier of Victoria used a press conference to admonish people for watching the sunset on the beach and has put rules in place that mean you can take your mask off to sip your coffee but not your beer.

Yes, the chief health officer of South Australia advised those attending a football game to duck if the ball gets kicked into the stands, just in case it's somehow infected. Yes, her counterpart in New South Wales told residents there to avoid being "too friendly" in the streets to keep

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transmission under control.

Yes, police in Melbourne forced a hunger relief charity to shut its doors three hours early because they thought the traffic into the warehouse was creating a “risk to public safety”. Yes, this week a rural town council decided that a planned transfer of dogs from its animal shelter to another town wasn’t worth the potential health hazard and had the dogs shot instead.

Yes, we Australians know you don’t understand it. We don’t either, if we’re being honest with ourselves. But collectively, we can’t quite bring ourselves to say out loud what a growing number of us are thinking – that our de facto national goal of [zero Covid](#) is not only impossible, but that it is also destroying us.

The plan, as I understand it (and that is no mean feat given how often our politicians have shifted the goalposts), is that restrictions will be eased once vaccination rates hit 70 to 80 per cent. Yet the current rate is only just over 30 per cent. And even when we do hit that target, it’s still unclear what will happen if – as has been the experience in other countries – hospitalisations and deaths plummet but infections rise. Already, a couple of state premiers are hedging their bets, saying that an 80 per cent vaccination rate may not be enough after all, effectively flagging that they will settle for nothing other than zero cases.

For what it’s worth, Scott Morrison, the prime minister, has fired up this week, insisting that we must stick to the plan, such as it is. But he seems to change his mind on a near-daily basis, and in any event he is reluctant to provoke parochial resentment by picking a fight with any of the state premiers. The PM is up for re-election soon, and “learning to live with Covid” is still largely a political taboo.

This is the epidemiological time warp in which Australia is mired – a country still single-mindedly focused on ending a pandemic that the rest of the world is accepting as endemic. We are fighting the last war, knowing that the delta strain is more infectious than what we encountered last year, but not yet convinced that it is so contagious that no lockdown can ever possibly hope to contain it.

When Australia – thank goodness – made it through 2020 with the lowest per capita Covid deaths of almost any country in the developed world, our opportunistic political class took all the credit, and confected a kind of Australian Covid exceptionalism. For all the pain, inconvenience and misery of lockdowns, we had succeeded in keeping coronavirus out of the country. That’s how our leaders can keep a straight face as they persist with the political fiction that Australia is “the envy of the world” at a time when those overseas are increasingly looking to us as a cautionary tale.

That’s how our state premiers can preside over shuttered businesses, dole queues and soaring mental health issues among our young, and still smile in front of the cameras while they thank the population for all the “hard work” they are doing to “keep our community safe”. But Australians aren’t buying it anymore – if for no other reason than that delta has proven lockdowns don’t actually work. And as with delta, our political class will find themselves unable to suppress the white hot resentment that is spreading rapidly among the population.

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