Media release

1 July 2020

To mask or not to mask: that is the question!

While masks can play an important role in preventing the spread of coronavirus, the 'gold standard' defence against COVID-19 is still social distancing and hand-washing – and it is critical that all Australians continue to follow these measures diligently, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) said today.

"Social distancing remains the trump card against COVID-19 – you can't get anything stronger than that for virus protection" **RDAA President, Dr John Hall, said.**

"While some rural Australians might think they are a long way from Melbourne, there is every possibility that coronavirus can spread – particularly with the school holidays upon us – so extra care is a must at this time.

"We agree wholeheartedly that wearing masks when out and about in COVID-19 hotspots is important.

"And while COVID-19 remains with us, wearing masks on public transport (and at other times you can't avoid closely-packed groups of people) is a good precaution – even in locations outside the hotspot areas.

"With evidence of community spread (including the potential movement of infected people out of hotspot areas) some general practices and other health services may also ask patients to wear a mask while in their waiting rooms and when seeing their clinicians.

"But don't be mistaken – wearing a mask is not your golden ticket to COVID-19 freedom.

"Even if you choose to wear one, maintaining stringent social distancing and hand hygiene is an absolute must. Masks are an added level of protection – not a replacement for other precautions."

ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said: "A crucial time to wear a mask is if you suspect you have COVID-19, as wearing a mask greatly reduces the likelihood you'll spread the virus.

"But even then, please don't turn up unannounced at your local general practice. Ring ahead first to find out what you should do.

"Generally, if you are experiencing a cough, runny nose, fever or other coronavirus symptoms, we will recommend you get tested first and self isolate while you await the results.

"If you have symptoms, you should definitely wear a mask on your way to and from getting tested – particularly if you have to catch a cab or public transport, or know you'll be in close proximity to people on the way.

"Until you receive a negative test result, it is also important to wear a mask in your own home, if you share the house with other family members.

"And if you end up needing to go to your local general practice or hospital with COVID-19 symptoms, pro-actively wearing a mask on your way there – and once you arrive – is also essential."

If you wear a mask, you will need to ensure you are wearing it properly. This includes:

- putting the mask over your nose and mouth (not just your mouth)
- adjusting the nose band to ensure the mask is sitting properly over your nose
- tying the mask properly at the back of your head and neck (or using the elastic properly)
- making sure you don't touch the outside of the mask when taking it off
- discarding the used mask in a bin, and then washing your hands thoroughly (or sanitising them with an alcohol-based sanitiser) before you touch anything else.

Find more information on how to protect yourself, your family and community from COVID-19 at www.health.gov.au.

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A high resolution photo of ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, is available here:
https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/968

A high resolution photo of RDAA President, Dr John Hall, is available here:
https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/687

Available for interview:
Dr John Hall - RDAA President
Dr Ewen McPhee - ACRRM President

Media contacts (RDAA)
Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890
Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638

Media contacts (ACRRM)
Petrina Smith on 0414 820 847
ACRRM National Office on 1800 223 226