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## Melbourne Hardens Lockdown to Combat Resurgent Coronavirus Outbreak

*Rachel Pannett in Sydney and Philip Wen in Melbourne, Australia*

6-8 minutes

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Australia's second-largest city is imposing a tough, new six-week citywide lockdown in a bid to more quickly suppress the spread of the coronavirus despite widespread community transmission.

Melbourne residents will be under a strict 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew from Sunday evening. Daily excursions will also be limited, with one person in each household allowed to buy groceries within about a three-mile radius of home. Exercise will be restricted to an hour a day and a maximum of two people at the same time, within the same local area.

Authorities are betting that the strict lockdown—similar to one that helped [eradicate the pathogen from neighboring New Zealand](#)—will achieve what less-restrictive efforts have so far failed to do: sharply lower the rate of new transmissions, including many of unknown origin.

“The best we could hope for if we didn’t make these changes is that we could get ourselves to a low number in four-to-six-months,” Daniel Andrews, premier of the state of Victoria, said Sunday. “We can’t have a six-month strategy. I’m not prepared to accept days

and days of more cases and deaths.”

Some health experts are uncertain whether the lockdown will manage to stamp out the virus, [given the extent of community transmission](#). Unlike Melbourne, New Zealand had fewer than 100 cases and no deaths when it went into lockdown. By reacting quickly, it was able to avoid the rapid community spread of the virus seen elsewhere.

Victoria has accumulated thousands of community infections since mid-June, after failures to adhere to infection-control procedures at hotels in Melbourne housing travelers returning from overseas spawned infection clusters in schools, public-housing towers and aged-care homes, and spread to other Australian states.

The state recorded 671 new cases and seven more deaths Sunday—close to a high of 723 set on July 30. Of the thousands of active cases in the state, some 760 were “mystery cases,” the premier said, meaning they were of unknown origin, highlighting the extent to which the virus has taken hold in the community.



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**Workers push trolleys past an empty shop in Melbourne's central business district. One person in each household will be allowed to buy groceries within about a three-mile radius of home.**

Photo: william west/Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

Mr. Andrews declared a state of disaster from 6 p.m. Sunday, giving police additional powers to enforce the new rules, and requested more help from the country's defense forces to enforce the lockdown. He had barely stepped away from the podium before supermarkets in the city recorded large crowds.

At one supermarket in Melbourne's northern suburbs, a security guard watched on as a digital counter monitored shopper numbers to ensure they didn't exceed a maximum of 300.

Luke Borg, a 41-year-old father of two, said he wanted to get in his regular weekly grocery shop "before pandemonium hit." In his shopping cart, he had stocked up on meat, potato chips, pasta and a case of beer. He said supermarket shelves were running low on items such as toilet paper and pasta.

Scientists are working at breakneck speed to develop an effective vaccine for the coronavirus. Their ultimate goal: to immunize enough of the world's population to reach herd immunity. WSJ explains. Illustration: Jacob Reynolds

On a typical Sunday, the digital counter would show around 100 people in the store, Mr. Borg said. "It's making people who don't normally panic, panic."

The Melbourne outbreak has shown how difficult it can be to keep the virus at bay, even in places lauded for taking early and decisive

action. Australia reported only a handful of new coronavirus cases in early June.

Authorities had [initially hoped to stem the outbreak](#) by shutting down neighborhoods ZIP Code by ZIP Code in an effort to target the worst-hit areas. In early July, when it became clear that hyper-localized strategy had failed, Melbourne residents were ordered to stay at home apart from a few exceptions, including exercise, buying essential items and traveling to work when jobs can't be done from home.

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The new restrictions are an escalation of that strategy, with more measures announced Monday. They include the closure of a swath of commerce and a requirement that construction companies reduce or limit their workforces. Businesses deemed to be providing an essential service will be allowed to remain open, such as supermarkets, gas stations and pharmacies.

Regional Victoria will move to stay-at-home restrictions from midnight Wednesday, and restaurants, cafes, bars and schools across the state will close. Victoria is Australia's second-largest economy, contributing almost a quarter of the country's GDP.

Gladys Berejiklian, the premier of neighboring New South Wales, home to Sydney, said Sunday the next few weeks will "make or break us, in terms of the way we get through this pandemic."

The state recorded 12 new cases in the 24 hours through 8 p.m. Saturday. Health authorities are now advising residents to wear

masks on public transport, in churches and in supermarkets in a bid to avoid Victoria's fate.

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