

Aspen on the ground for Australian Open quarantine

Andrew Brown

IT'S set to be the biggest test of Victoria's hotel quarantine system since the state went into lockdown last year.

As some of the world's biggest tennis stars arrived in Melbourne for two weeks of mandatory quarantine before the Australian Open next month, Canberra-based Aspen Medical will be helping manage operations ahead of the tournament.

More than 100 Aspen Medical staff will be on hand across three quarantine hotels that have been designated for arrivals associated with the Australian Open.

More than 1200 people are expected to touch down in Melbourne for the first Grand Slam of 2021 in coming days, before they complete 14 days of quarantine with some of the strictest arrangements in place. As part of its role in helping to run hotel quarantine operations, Aspen staff will be administering daily COVID-19 tests of players, coaches and support staff.

Its estimated Aspen will carry out more than 50,000 COVID tests in just two weeks.



Novak Djokovic arrives in Adelaide late on Thursday. Picture: Getty Images

However, it won't just be COVID tests that the Canberra company will be focusing on as part of their role with the Australian Open.

"Our role is providing testing and clinical check-ups for the players and tournament staff during hotel quarantine," an Aspen Medical spokesman told *The Canberra Times*.

"We are also providing first-aid services at the practice courts."

It's believed Aspen will be carrying out a similar function for the Australian Open as they have in previous roles servicing the cruise line industry last year as well as hotel quarantine operations in other jurisdictions.

While some of tennis's

biggest names are joining in to Adelaide to participate in lead-up tournaments, including Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Serena Williams, Aspen's role has been confined to just operations in Melbourne.

Those arriving in Adelaide will, however, be subject to the same hotel quarantine conditions as their counter-

parts in Melbourne. The first of 15 charter flights carrying in players and officials for the tournament arrived in Melbourne from Doha on Thursday night.

Flights arriving from Abu Dhabi, Los Angeles, Dubai and Singapore will also touch down in coming days.

While the associate agent with the Australian Open will be confined to their hotel rooms for the majority of the 14 days in quarantine, players will be allowed to train for the tournament under strict conditions.

If players test negative for COVID-19 on the second day of their quarantine, they will be allowed to practice on the court with a designated support person for two hours, followed by a 90-minute gym session and a 60-minute session at a nutrition centre before being taken back to their rooms.

However, players will need to have tested negative for the virus before their flight into the country in order to still be allowed in.

Such an arrangement has disrupted the plans of Grand Slam winner Andy Murray, who missed his charter flight

after testing positive for COVID-19.

He has not been officially ruled out of the tournament but would need to test negative before he's even allowed to complete two weeks of quarantine.

US tennis star Madison Keys has ruled herself out of the Australian Open after testing positive.

Despite the rule, US world number 50 Tennis Sandgren was allowed to board his flight from Los Angeles despite testing positive for COVID-19 earlier this week.

The former Australian Open quarter-finalist was deemed to be no longer contagious and a case of viral shedding, having been struck down with COVID-19 in November.

Before the 1200-strong international contingent's arrival, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews rejected criticism of the Australian Open going ahead. He said the grand slam was allowed to proceed on public health advice and added it is a massive jobs creator.

The two-week tournament will begin on February 8.

-with AAP

CORONAVIRUS No local transmission as two new cases emerge in hotel quarantine

Another day with no new Vic infections

Benita Kolovos

VICTORIA has recorded no new local or interstate coronavirus cases for a ninth day in a row, as the state government defends its border restrictions with Greater Sydney. The state reported zero local cases and two new cases among international travellers in hotel quarantine on Friday from more than 15,000 tests.

However, the Department

of Health and Human Services received notification of a very low positive result on Thursday. "That person has had multiple tests over the last 24 hours, all of which have been subsequently returned negative," Health Minister Martin Foley said on Friday. He said it was likely the case was either a false positive or persistent shedding from a historic infection. The person will remain in isolation until they

receive the results of further tests. They are not linked to a known case or exposure site.

It comes as Mr Foley defended the state's border restrictions with Greater Sydney. While the state reopened its border to regional NSW on Monday, thousands of Victorians have been stranded in Greater Sydney for more than two weeks as it is classified as a "red" zone. Greater Brisbane, which emerged from a three-day

lockdown earlier this week, also remains a red zone.

Mr Foley said the government is constantly reviewing the red zones, taking into account the number of active cases and mystery cases in both states. "Let's be clear, there's almost 200 cases circulating in the Greater Sydney community since December 16th, not just on the northern beaches," Mr Foley said. "We're more than confident that our colleagues in

New South Wales are mopping this up, but there have been chains of unknown transmission for many weeks now in Sydney."

Mr Foley said the restrictions would change when the risk lowered. "I understand the frustrations and the dislocation this is causing but even more so I understand the frustration and dislocation that another cluster outbreak in Victoria would cause," he said.

Some 128,833 permit applications have been approved since the state's new permit system came into effect on Monday, including 20,841 in the last 24 hours. A total of 1106 exemptions for those in red zones have also been processed. Premier Daniel Andrews on Thursday said the government was looking to reduce the red zone in Sydney to local government areas, but did not set a time frame.

MEMORY WALK & JOG

Get active. Beat dementia.

Sunday 28 February 2021 7:00 AM

Barrine Drive, Lake Burley Griffin, Canberra, ACT

Register now!

memorywalk.com.au/CAN2021

Whether you walk, jog or run, together we will beat dementia to the finish line.