

# GPs face \$20k fines for using serology tests to diagnose coronavirus

Use of the tests for diagnosis has been banned in two states

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GPs could face fines up to \$20,000 for improper use of coronavirus serology tests after at least two states have prohibited their use for diagnostic purposes.



Minister for Health Greg Hunt announced last month that the Federal Government had secured 1.5 million of the point-of-care tests to be used in general practices in the fight against COVID-19.

"They will allow us to assist with greater testing of health workers themselves to give them the confidence and — where appropriate — patients," he said at the time.

The tests, given fast-track approval by the TGA, detect IgM and IgG antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 from venous or fingerprick blood samples placed on a test strip.

While they can produce results in about 15-30 minutes, experts have raised concerns about false-negative rates and warn they are unreliable for detection of acute COVID-19.

The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia on Wednesday warned the tests had a "fundamental limitation" because antibodies could take up to 12 days to develop, long after a person becomes infectious.

Instead, PCR tests, which detect fragments of the virus and have been used in Australia so far, should continue to be the diagnostic gold-standard test, it says.

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- *Greg Hunt's 1.5 million point-of-care tests for GPs of 'limited use' for diagnosing coronavirus*

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Now, two states have used emergency powers to prohibit anyone from using a point-of-care serological test as an acute illness diagnostic tool.

The tests are due to arrive "within days", according to the Federal Government.

In WA, GPs who offer the tests can be fined up to \$20,000, while companies face fines of up to \$100,000 under the state's Public Health Act.

The WA Department of Health said they made the declaration because of concerns about the "serious limitations" of the tests, which offered an "unacceptable risk" of community transmission due to false negatives.

Health officials stressed that the serological tests could be used as a screening tool for people after they have had the infection or for the purpose of public health research.

SA also announced a ban on Thursday, with officials declaring that use of the tests "may adversely affect the prevention, control and abatement of the serious public health risk presented by COVID-19".

The State Government said the ban would apply to anyone outside SA Pathology employees or public health services, with police able to issue fines of up to \$1000 to GPs and \$5000 to companies that offered the test.

The TGA itself advised that serology testing could not determine if someone was infectious, adding that the tests were generally used to provide historic information about viral exposure.

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### More information:

- [WA statement](#)
- [SA statement](#)

**We have compiled a list of resources to help GPs combat coronavirus, which can be read here. Or click here to read the rest of our coronavirus coverage.**

**Current Australian coronavirus statistics - 3 April 2020**

**Total:** 5224 confirmed cases, including 23 deaths:

- 88 in ACT
- 2389 in NSW
- 20 in NT
- 835 in Queensland
- 385 in SA
- 71 in Tasmania
- 1036 in Victoria
- 400 in WA

**Source:** Department of Health, Coronavirus health alert