

City of Ballarat's Update on COVID-19

The COVID-19 emergency is an unprecedented event in recent history. The City of Ballarat has instigated its Response and Recovery Pandemic 2020 Plan for its staff, ratepayers, residents and the broader community.

The City of Ballarat is urging all residents to stay at home unless they need to go outside for food, medical care, exercise, work or education (when it cannot be done from home).

Indoor and outdoor gatherings are restricted to two people (except for members of your immediate household and for work or education). These restrictions are now being enforced in Ballarat, with on-the-spot fines of \$1,652 for individuals and \$9,913 for businesses issued to those who breach the restrictions.

NOTE: This is an extremely fluid situation and events are changing daily.

All information listed below is correct as at 3.30pm, Friday 3 April but is subject to change. Please keep up-to-date by visiting ballarat.vic.gov.au

Rate relief comes at a cost to Ballarat City Council

Financial modelling by the City of Ballarat shows that its decision to provide financial relief to residents and business impacted by state and federal government COVID-19 restrictions will come at a significant cost to the city's finances.

At its meeting on 1 April 2020 Council resolved to defer the final rates instalment payment from 31 May to 30 June 2020 and not to charge interest on outstanding rates.

The impact of this decision will result in an unanticipated and unbudgeted cash-flow problem at the end of this financial year of some \$12 million.

In releasing the figures, City of Ballarat CEO Justine Linley, said the need for a clear understanding in the community about the cost of providing rate relief to residents was very important.

"The perception that Council has an unlimited source of income and an unlimited reserve of funds is one that needs correcting. Despite careful budgeting, no council or government at any level has the necessary funds in reserve to provide the financial and social support needed for an entire nation responding to a pandemic. The City of Ballarat is no different in this regard.

"The real difference for Ballarat and many other regional and rural councils, is that our sources of income are far more limited than metropolitan councils as we are heavily rate dependent.

"However, within our financial limitations we are responding to the immediate needs in our community, as are the other two levels of government.

"We are proceeding with caution and deliberation, as our community would expect, and as is our duty as a responsible, accountable local government authority. It is our obligation to be financially responsible and not unduly compromise future generations with significant debt burdens.

"We are acutely aware of the hardship in our community as a result of COVID-19, many Council workers are also on the front line providing essential services such as childcare, immunisations for babies and children, in-home care for the elderly, Meals on Wheels, removing waste and providing environmental health advice" Ms Linley said.

The City of Ballarat's financial modelling also shows Council's budget will be detrimentally impacted by \$20 million this financial year as a result of measures it has chosen to introduce including rate relief, late rate payment, and downturn in Councils' income as a result of waiving or delaying some fees and charges. All of these measures are being implemented to support residents who have lost their jobs, income or business as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

The City of Ballarat is advocating at a state and federal level for immediate financial support to help meet the cost of rate relief measures already agreed to.

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The City of Ballarat does not offer flu shots

The City of Ballarat is urging residents seeking flu vaccinations to book in with their local GP, medical centre or pharmacy to receive the vaccination.

The City of Ballarat stopped providing this service in 2018. The City of Ballarat's Maternal and Child Health nurses still administer childhood and infant immunisations – but no flu vaccinations for children or adults.

With the spread of COVID-19 (there is currently no vaccine for COVID-19), it is more important than ever for people to receive the flu vaccination to protect themselves from getting the flu and/or the development of flu-like symptoms, triggering the anxiety, inconvenience and disruption of 14 days of self-isolation.

Flu vaccines can be obtained from doctors, indigenous health services, pharmacists, hospitals and community health services.

Ballarat Community Health provides a workplace flu vaccination program which is being administered from a variety of off-site clinics across Ballarat to adhere to social distancing policies.

Ballarat Libraries online resources still available

All City of Ballarat's libraries remain closed until further notice – but that doesn't mean you can't access a whole range of resources.

- You can still join our libraries online and borrow e-books
- We would prefer you keep your library items at home until we re-open. We have extended the due date on all loans until we re-open and we will not charge fees on items currently overdue
- You cannot currently pick up held items, but they will still be there for you when we re-open
- Wait until the libraries re-open to pay any current fines. We can't take payments by phone or online at the moment
- The Home Library Service is currently closed
- We will provide regular updates about library services on our website and social media pages, so stay tuned.

Looking after your mental health

It's important to look after your mental health and wellbeing while you are staying at home.

Many of us are feeling overwhelmed and anxious during this difficult time.

- Compassionate Ballarat has partnered with Federation University to deliver a new series of weekly webinars to help guide us through the COVID-19 outbreak.

Every Wednesday between 11.30am and 12pm, the webinars will feature leading Ballarat experts discussing a range of supportive topics.

The first webinar on 8 April will be presented by experienced psychologist Sam Luxemburg, who will provide mental health tools to help navigate the coming months. [Join the webinar here](#)

- Lifeline has put together some useful tips and strategies so we can look after ourselves and others. [Find out more here](#)
- Beyond Blue recognises and understands the feelings of anxiety, distress and concern many of us are experiencing in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To access Beyond Blue's free 24-hour counselling service, call 1300 22 4636 or visit beyondblue.org.au