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SARS screening winds down in NT, but vigilance maintained

Territory hospitals will no longer routinely screen all patients for SARS following an announcement by the World Health Organisation that the virus has been contained, Minister for Health and Community Services Jane Aagaard announced today.

"Hospital and surgery signs relating to SARS will come down tomorrow," Mrs Aagaard said.

"Restrictions on elective surgery for those recently returned from SARS affected areas have also been lifted.

"However, continued vigilance by health care workers is critical. Arrangements at borders will stay in place for the time being and specific guidelines have been drawn up so that any suspicious cases will still be isolated until further investigations are completed."

Mrs Aagaard congratulated the Department of Health and Community Services for its management of SARS in the NT.

"While we can consider ourselves fortunate to escape any cases at the beginning of the epidemic, a well-coordinated and timely response on the national scale, together with a local response which was both immediate and thorough, ensured that any risk to Territorians was minimised," she said.

"The Department responded to the global outbreak in an efficient, thorough and professional manner; a response which augurs well for the NT should there be similar threats to the health of Territorians in the future."

The NT’s response to the epidemic was coordinated by the NT SARS Coordination Committee which was chaired by the Department’s CEO, Robert Griew, and steered by the Centre for Disease Control (CDC).

"I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the CDC and to thank its Director, Dr Vicki Krause, for taking the lead in coordinating the local response, implementing the national policy and disseminating information daily throughout the NT," Mrs Aagaard said.

"I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of hospital infection control staff and emergency department staff who worked tirelessly to implement those guidelines."

Australia had five probable cases of SARS – none of which went on to be confirmed. In the NT two cases were investigated but were later ruled out. There was at no stage any spread of the virus in Australia.