

Asthma meds may hold key to virus fight

EXCLUSIVE SARAH ISON

A common asthma medication could drastically reduce the symptoms of coronavirus, according to a Perth academic.

Edith Cowan University PhD candidate and medical doctor Sanjay Ramakrishnan is conducting a trial — led by the University of Oxford — that is showing great benefits for patients who are given inhaled budesonide, the drug commonly found in asthma inhalers.

Dr Ramakrishnan said he and his team made the discovery by accident, after noticing many patients with lung problems were not suffering from severe symptoms after contracting COVID-19.

“If you have a lung pandemic, you’d expect people with lung disease to turn up more frequently to hospital,” he said. “Oddly, for us it was the opposite. We were warning all of our patients ... and then very few of them turned up (to hospital). That wasn’t just us, it was the same in Italy, France, the US, China.”

This pattern prompted the researchers to consider the “common factor” between the patients and they came to a simple answer — inhaled steroids.

While not preventing COVID-19 infections, further tests showed the inhaled steroids “prevented the severe form of the syndrome”, and it halved the number of people who had persistent symptoms after four weeks of falling ill.

“About one in five people who have mild COVID, those that don’t end up in hospital, have persistent symptoms for a minimum of six weeks,” Dr Ramakrishnan said. “And one in 10 have persistent symptoms that last three months.”

The trial included 146 people, half of whom took 800 micrograms of the medication twice a day. Of those who were given the steroids, just one had symptoms progress to the point of needing to see a GP, while the rest experienced a quick decline in high heart rates and fevers.

Dr Ramakrishnan said while the vaccine was the “gold standard”, access to it was “patchy”, with about four billion people around the world expected to miss out this year.

“The real value of this treatment would be in developing countries,” he said.

The study is still under peer review and is expected to be published in the next few weeks.



ANNABEL HENNESSY

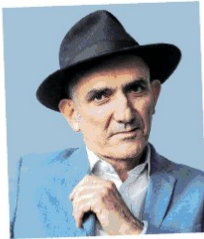
Australia’s top musicians including Paul Kelly, Missy Higgins and Bernard Fanning have written to the Federal Government pleading for it to step in to help “keep the show on the road”.

More than 3500 music industry artists, workers, venues and businesses have signed the open letter, calling for JobKeeper to be extended or an industry specific rescue package, which is being released today.

Signatories include Hunters and Collectors, Kate Miller-Heidke, Birds of Tokyo, Josh Pyke, Midnight Oil and Sneaky Sound System.

New data has found the music industry is operating at just 4 per cent of its pre-COVID levels.

Music representatives Australasian Performing Right Association and Australasian Mechanical Copyright Own-



ers Society found that during the 2018-2019 financial year its members submitted reports that showed payment for more than three million performances.

But for the same period after the pandemic hit this fell to just 100,000 performances.

APRA AMCOS said since March last year there had not been a single national tour by an Australian artist or a festival run at full capacity.

The letter says JobKeeper should be extended or a new special wage subsidy introduced for the music industry.

“Extending JobKeeper, or providing an industry specific wage subsidy package, will keep the show on the road,” the letter says.

“This doesn’t just make cultural sense, it makes economic sense. The arts and entertainment sector contributes around \$15 billion per year in GDP, employing close to 200,000 highly skilled Australians. We can’t afford to lose the skills and businesses of our industry. The result for Australian music and live entertainment would be catastrophic.”

The letter said the industry was in crisis as a result of COVID-19. “Each time there is another COVID-19 cluster or a quarantine breach, any plans to trade again are halted. Musicians, sole traders, venues, clubs, festivals, music

businesses and the industry remain out of work,” the letter said.

“Billions of dollars for hospitality and tourism generated from Australian music remains stifled.”

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg has said JobKeeper will end next month, but flagged continuing support for industries such as tourism.

The scheme has given businesses hit by the pandemic fortnightly payments to cover wages for their employees.

“(JobKeeper) has always been a temporary program. When we initially designed the program, it was for six months,” Mr Frydenberg said on Monday.

“We extended it for another six months and it is estimated to cost around \$90 billion.

“With respect to other targeted support, that’s an issue that we are working through right now.”

Accused beauty breacher now behind bars

TIM CLARKE

The beauty therapist who sparked a police search when she allegedly went AWOL from quarantine will sit out the rest of her isolation behind bars after appearing in court.

Ashlee Marie Jackson, 22, returned to WA from Victoria on February 7 and was ordered into two weeks lockdown.

But last Sunday, just seven days into the quarantine period, Ms Jackson was allegedly spotted in Victoria Park, prompting police to start looking—and asking for the public’s help

in tracking her down, but not to approach her if they did see her.

CCTV images, which police say were of her — wearing a black shirt, black shorts, a dark jumper tied around her waist, black shoes and carrying a black handbag — were also circulated on social media, prompting a torrent of online comments, most uncomplimentary.

Another post from a former beauty spa employer in Cottesloe reassured clients she had not worked there or visited for six months.

With the search centring on areas around Ferndale and Lynwood, a

Facebook post by Ms Jackson indicated she may have also been near Langford — after she warned her followers of a speed camera in the area.

Hours later, police revealed she had been found, and arrested.

And just under 24 hours after that, she made a brief appearance in Perth Magistrate’s Court via phone, when three charges of failing to comply with a direction under the Emergency Management Act were read to her.

She did not plead to the charges or apply for bail. She will face court next week — the day after her self-quarantine period was due to run out.

