

Herald Sun

[Rebekah Cavanagh](#) and [Genevieve Alison](#), Herald Sun
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[POLICE & COURTS](#)

Coronavirus: Delays, health scare in Melbourne legal system

The looming fear over coronavirus has sparked delays and a health scare in Melbourne's legal system with one accused waiting in a cafe instead of attending court and another barred from returning to Australia.



██████████ was due to face Melbourne Magistrates' Court.

The threat of the deadly [coronavirus](#) has reached Melbourne's legal district, sparking delays in cases and a health scare as one accused who was meant to be in quarantine tried to attend court.

Chinese national ██████████, 24, was due to face Melbourne Magistrates' Court on Thursday charged with drink-driving and failing to stop after an accident in January last year.

But instead he remained in a cafe nearby after contacting his lawyer George Balot from there, who advised him not to attend the courtroom and to return home to isolation.

It comes as the *Herald Sun* can reveal another court case was adjourned for almost eight months this week due to an accused being barred from returning to Australia due to the outbreak of the deadly virus.

The woman was also due to front Melbourne Magistrates' Court on Monday on 18 charges relating to the keeping of dangerous dogs.

Her lawyers told the court their client was banned from entering the country and sought an extension on her case to October.



An accused was advised not to attend Melbourne Magistrates' Court. Picture: Stuart McEvoy

Meanwhile, [REDACTED] lawyer, Mr Balot, who only had communication with his client over the phone, told magistrate John Bentley of his concerns [REDACTED] might have coronavirus.

[REDACTED] had returned from Shenzhen in southeastern China on February 20.

Authorities had warned him to remain in quarantine at home for two weeks to ensure he had not contracted the infectious disease.

Mr Bentley took the rare move of sentencing [REDACTED] in his absence, as opposed to adjourning his case.

[REDACTED] who had blew more than double the legal limit (.115 per cent) when he crashed into a car on Wellington Parade in just after midnight on January 24 last year, avoided conviction and was fined \$1000.

Mr Bentley also stripped him of his licence for 16 months.

A court spokesman said: "These are the first matters we are aware of where people have not appeared in court because of concerns about the coronavirus.

“If a person is concerned a health issue may impact their ability to attend court, we would encourage them to contact the court venue as early as possible to discuss options for how the matter may proceed.”

[Prime Minister Scott Morrison](#) on Thursday extended the China travel ban for another week.

The federal government this afternoon declared it was introducing the first phase of Australia’s emergency response plan against the deadly coronavirus, saying “the risk of a global pandemic is very much upon us”.

In Australia, there have been 15 cases in the general population and all have been cleared and discharged.

Mr Morrison said Australians were still able to go to school sports, sporting matches, concerts and other large gatherings.