

# YOUNG CHILD VACCINATION SENTIMENT

Qualitative research

Prepared for the  
Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet

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# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN

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# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

## Young child vaccination sentiment

Fast-turnaround qualitative research was commissioned to:

- How are parents feeling about their young children being back at school/kindy/day care?
- What are thoughts and feelings about COVID vaccination for their young children?
- What are the drivers and barriers to young child COVID vaccination



# RESEARCH DESIGN

## Qualitative research

### ■ Telephone in-depth interviews

- n= 30 interviews with parents (across Early Learning, primary and high school).
- each lasting around 20-30 minutes.
- broad representation by age, gender, location and school type and sector (early childhood, primary and high school, and public, independent and catholic schools).
- sample recruited through a third party to ensure a mix of parents who have chosen to vaccinate themselves/their kids versus those that have not. We also had a mix of those whose children have had COVID-19 and those who have not.
  - Child had COVID (n=15) vs Child not had COVID (n=15)
  - n=4 had their child/children vaccinated, n=10 had the primary school child vaccinated but not their younger child(ren), n=14 did not have their child vaccinated
- conducted on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2022.



# KEY FINDINGS

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# MOST FEELING THE WORST IS BEHIND US

## ■ Key impacts to date have been work, periods of isolation, lack of travel and adhering to behavioural measures

- Unsurprisingly we consistently heard how the pandemic had impacted people's work and lives.
  - They had experienced periods of lack of work due to shutdowns or work from home
  - Periods of isolation due to being a close contact or having COVID in the household
  - Behavioural changes – hand washing, sanitizing hands, social distancing, mask wearing
  - Less normal activities – dining out, gatherings/events, etc
  - Isolation from family members due to border closures or concern for elderly family members

## ■ We heard a lot of positivity about life returning to normal and our ability to live with the virus for now

- People are happy that kids are back at schools, life is returning to normality (no masks, more activities, groups gathering).
- Part of the positivity also comes from feeling that most people are vaccinated; the government is handling things well (and in fact “we are all better at dealing with this, the rules and regulations, the changes, now”); and Omicron is less dangerous.
- A minority are still wary and concerned about rising case numbers
- We did however hear some division about whether people should still need to isolate or not



*I feel like we are over the hump and returning to normality*

*I think we just really need to get along with it, I think isolation should be finished... More people are vaccinated now compared to previously so this should also improve with getting on with life.*

*It does feel like it has been put on the back burner, but we had 8000 cases ... I would like to hear a bit more about it ... being aware of changes and hotspots and breakouts.*

*I think I feel a lot more nervous than I have ever felt, in the past govt was trying to contain the spread and keep people as healthy as possible but now it seems like the restrictions have been lifted, masks removed, cases have been rising, we are living in the community, I don't feel as protected as when covid first came out. it feels like now less mandates so feel more concerning.*

# LITTLE CONCERN ABOUT RETURN TO SCHOOL

## Although greater confidence among those whose children are vaccinated

- **As we heard previously, parents were keen for their children to be back at school (from an education and social interaction point of view and due to their own ability to get on with life)**
  - Most parents we interviewed expressed little or ‘no concern’, particularly those whose children were vaccinated
  - For those whose children were not vaccinated there is some doubt/concern about their child(ren) catching COVID and becoming seriously ill.
    - However some in this group drew some confidence from the belief young kids are resilient health-wise, stories of lower impact among children, and/or their child having had COVID and not being overly unwell (“it was juts like when they get a cold or flu normally”)
  - However, there was a great deal of positivity about how the ‘Education System’ is dealing with COVID and what is being done to protect their children but also teachers – many positive comments about the changes to how schools operate at the start of the year, schools encouraging hygiene, kids staying home if they have symptoms, schools communicating about COVID cases. This sentiment was shared by both those with vaccinated and unvaccinated children.
  - While the delay to the beginning of the year was frustrating their seems to be a general acceptance it was the right thing to do – it allowed case numbers to come down; it allowed time for kids to get vaccinated; it ensured the Education system was ready and prepared.
  - There was mixed spontaneous mention of rising case numbers, most not mentioning. When asked the general belief was that it was inevitable but the Education System is prepared and coping well, although some want to hear more about what schools are doing to manage the situation.
  - Most were aware of cases in their school or nearby schools, and as per our sample breakdown, half of those with whom we spoke had children who had had COVID



*Eldest daughter is double vaccinated, 1st vaccination was over a month ago, well before school started and second shot was soon after school started. I think it's the right thing to do, a bit ridiculous that people don't get the vaccine*

*Fine, I'm not concerned they have cases in schools, we are kept updated from the school, we are all vaccinated. I know hygiene and sanitisers are used in schools, masks are encouraged for both our kids. Classrooms windows kept open for better air flow. Both our kids were wearing masks for the first few weeks of going back to school, now they don't wear mask.*

*"I understand why she [Palaszcuk] did it – I think they made the right choice to get those kids more vaccinated. Kids really spread stuff around, they can't help it. Wasn't going to surprise me if she put another week on it. But it was the right choice at the time*

# GENERALLY POSITIVE SENTIMENT TOWARDS VACCINATION

## ■ We generally heard positivity around the notion of adults being vaccinated against COVID

- Only 2 of our 30 participants were unvaccinated themselves.
- Most parents were vaccinated because they believed it would protect them and their family; would help protect their vulnerable or elderly family members; was the right thing to do as a member of society; and/or were required to do so for work.

## ■ We also heard a lot of positivity around high school and primary school children being vaccinated

- Those with vaccinated children tend to have acted early and had them vaccinated as soon as they could, seeking to have at least one dose before the return to school. The primary driver seem to be to protect their children from severe or critical illness should they catch COVID. Some were also keen to reunite children with vulnerable family and friends and/or ensure the family is able to travel overseas when borders open up and they feel the destination of their choice is safe
- The key drivers of vaccination for children were: a desire to decrease their risk of catching the virus (although there is some doubt about this); a desire to protect them - that symptoms will be less severe, outcomes better, less likely to be hospitalised; ensuring they can partake in all aspects of life including access to vulnerable family and friends, activities and travels



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*I have never questioned vaccines, but covid vaccines felt more forced upon us, but with my work I had no choice really. We also love to travel, and we wanted to keep our family and children safe and felt like it was something we just had to do.*

*My 9-year-old, his had one just prior to school starting, and due for his second one next week, my high school is double vaccinated prior to school starting, because I felt right thing to do when school going back, cases will rise.*



# DOUBTS EXIST PRIMARILY AROUND THE VACCINATION OF YOUNGER CHILDREN

- **Among our sample, the unvaccinated tender to be younger children, those aged 5 and under, but not all**
  - Those with kids under 5 years mentioned their children were ineligible to get vaccinated, although among this group are those who are still uncertain if they will vaccinate their children (tended to be those who had only children under 5).
  - For the unvaccinated younger children parents are hoping or believing they are resilient and/or will be less impacted by COVID than adults and older kids
  - Some reference stories or data about children being less likely to catch it and generally having mild symptoms
  - For some, this lower impact of COVID on children was their lived experience (or of those they know) and therefore gave them confidence that their child being unvaccinated would be ok – *“they are mild or asymptomatic”*
  - This belief that young children will be OK if they catch it when added to concerns about the short and long term impacts of the vaccine on children provided a strong doubt about vaccination, if not resolve that not being vaccinated was the right thing to do – *“Too many adverse reactions for me to get my children vaccinated”*. If their child also stresses about needles and/or the COVID vaccination this also adds weight to the ‘No’ decision.
  - Some referenced a lack of local and international data about children and the COVID vaccines as a key concern – information around side effects, decreased likelihood to catch COVID, and perhaps most important, less severe symptoms and better outcomes are crucial evidence parents want to see or hear
  - A possible game changer for these people is rapidly and severe rising case numbers and data (or stories/media coverage) about serious health concerns for young children – some referenced the death of the 2 year old in Sydney as reason for concern and reconsideration



*It's time to go back .... my oldest daughter has 2 vaccines, but the one in day care hasn't. We just hope she doesn't get it ... but she might be better placed as Omicron is less dangerous.*

*...a lot of data available for adults but with young children, there is less data to draw on. I'm doing my research and I haven't made my decisions yet.*

*If covid rates increase, I will definitely reconsider, a 2-year-old died in Sydney not long ago from covid, that makes you think.*


*We only know so far that there is little risk for the young ... my 3-year-old had the virus and she was fine.*

*There's not enough information about the vaccine and young children and I feel like we have time.*

*I'm open to her being vaccinated, but it will be age based as I want her to be older and more developed. Infant vaccines have had decades of research and that is more reassuring for me than something like the covid vaccine which is relatively new, in the last 12 months?*

# INFORMATION SOURCES

- As we have heard throughout the pandemic there are a variety of trusted sources and they differ from individual to individual
- Among those whose children are vaccinated there was high trust in the Queensland Government, Queensland Health its websites and information. The mainstream media was generally well regarded, although thought to sensationalise or over dramatize whenever they can.
- All mentioned trust in GP's, their GP's and health professionals.
- Among those with children who can be vaccinated but aren't yet, there is less trust in Government and media. However, we didn't hear distrust of Government, although did hear this for media among a few.
- Family and friends who have been vaccinated, had their kids vaccinated, and/or have had COVID also tended to be trusted sources of information. The lived experience of those around us and whom we trust is very powerful.
- For those less trusting of Government or media there tend to be a variety of personal preferences for information such as Facebook, and friends or family who are in healthcare
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*I probably trust my friends more but overtime I have started to believe on more Facebook articles and I can trace back and they are legit and makes sense*

*[QLD Health] I think they push vaccination safety and need for vaccination too much to really respect their opinion.*

*First, my GP who treats all of us, we regard our GP highly, and by all means information through QLD and federal government. I have some friends in medical field who I would trust also ...*

*If I had to tier, I would trust my GP, my medical friend then the QLD health.... I'm fairly happy with the QLD govt approach, through this entire situation, I think they have done a good job compared with other states.*

*I try and read as many information sources from the QLD gov as possible, avoid the mainstream media. Listening to the specialists. Not from the politicians, but from the CHO.*

# MOST PLAN TO CONTINUE THEIR NORMAL FLU VACCINATION ROUTINE

## Although some uncertainty around children

- Most of those who normally get the flu vaccine are planning on doing it again this year. For some this is something only the adults and older kids in the household do and if this is the case there are no plans to change this.
- However, some mention having had it pre-COVID but not since COVID and now being unsure.
- There was however a desire to hear more about this and whether people still need the vaccine this year.
- There is also some desire for reassurance that if you have had the COVID vaccine, you are ok to, and should still get your normal flu shot
- There were a minority who were unsure as to whether they would get their kids to get a flu shot this year as they were unsure about the safety of COVID vaccine with the flu shot for kids, particularly given the lack of data available for children. There was also a mention that it had been difficult to get the kids through the two shots and the drama involved in an additional shot may not be worth it.

*We all get the shot each year and will do it this year as well.*

*We normally get the get the flu jab but this year I'm not sure. Some parts of me say yes, but I'm not working with the public at the moment... I also wonder what happens when it's combined with COVID Vaccine – and do they even know?*

*My wife does because she's a nurse. I don't think we've gotten the kids done. I've had it twice in the last 5 years, but only in moments of convenience like walking past the chemist and seeing it advertised.*

*I have had it but I haven't had it since covid. I think last flu vaccine I got was 2018. I'm not sure what to do now.*

*I will be getting the flu vaccine this year, my partner also, not sure if my child can have the flu vaccine, but not sure, probably.*



# SUMMARY

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# SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

- On balance, parents are feeling quote positive about the current COVID situation in Queensland and in Queensland schools. Some continue to look for daily updates and continue to want this information, but most feel like we have moved on.
- There is a desire for Government (and media) to provide important updates – if numbers spike, hotspots, any key changes to rules or recommendations.
- Among those whose kids are vaccinated, the key drivers where the belief it will protect them if they catch COVID (better outcomes); it may reduce the likelihood of catching it; it is the right thing to do as a member of society; and to return to normal relationships with vulnerable family members.
- Among those with unvaccinated children, some are waiting for their children to be eligible age. Others are waiting until they are a little older, when they feel more confident to vaccinate them.
- For others, the key concern is around side effects and safety. They feel there is a lack of clear information or data that can confirm this – they need reassurance it is safe for them to vaccinate their children.
- Alongside this is the need to be reassured around the efficacy of vaccination for children and the need for it – many believe children only get mild symptoms so don't need it. Data that can show reduced severity of symptoms and reduced hospitalisation among children is needed. The recent death of a 2 year old in NSW was raised as a thought provoker and something that could challenge their beliefs around the need for child vaccination.
- A significant rise in case numbers was also a potential game changer for some, again pointing to them weighing up risk vs reward with child vaccination and the current equation, at least in their minds, weighing heavily on the side of risk.

