



**Health
Consumers
Tasmania**

Building a Consumers Health Voice in Tasmania

COVID-19 – Vaccines and Face Masks

Survey 5

conducted 23 February – 3 March 2021

Executive Summary

DRAFT

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Executive Summary

From 23 February to 3 March 2021, Health Consumers Tasmania conducted an online survey into Tasmanians views about the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out and the wearing of masks.

A total of 94 people responded to the online survey.

The online survey was distributed via Health Consumers Tasmania stakeholders and their networks, comprising patients, carers, health consumer representatives, community volunteers and health service employees. The survey sample was a self-selecting group, representing those who are involved in the Tasmanian health system in some form or another. Their collective views are critical; they are the most likely group within the Tasmanian community to be impacted by any changes to the health system.

Key conclusions are tabled below:

Vaccines

- The local GP appears to be the major source of information on COVID-19.
 - This is followed by searching government websites (State and Federal)
 - People appear to gain their information from multiple sources
- Approximately half of those who completed the survey indicated they needed no additional information prior to vaccination. Those who indicated they would seek further information; information was required on:
 - Possible side effects from the vaccine
 - The level of safety of the vaccine
 - What vaccine would they receive
 - The long-term impact of the vaccine
 - How well the vaccine had been tested
 - Logistics – where and when will they receive the vaccination
- The majority of those surveyed (81%) believe the vaccine to be safe – 14% did not know.
- Nearly 84% indicated they would take the vaccine when it became available to them, just under 1 in 10 did not know, whilst 7% indicated they would be unlikely to take the vaccine.
 - The primary motivations for taking the vaccine were for keeping the broader community safe, and keeping themselves or their families safe – in that order
 - The few who indicated they would not take the virus, reasons provided were around safety and needing more information
- The key messages suggest to promote up-take of the vaccine were around safety – it (the vaccine) being safe or that by taking it, it will keep individuals, family and the community safe.

Face Masks

- Over half (56%) of those surveyed have used a face mask during the pandemic.

- Understandably, given the current health regulations, the most common reason for wearing a face mask was for interstate travel. Visiting the hospital was also identified as significant reason for wearing a face mask.
- Three quarters of those surveyed currently possess a face mask and the feedback confirms that most people would have no problem wearing a face mask if mandated.
- Reasons provided for not wearing a mask centred around:
 - medical reasons
 - engaging in exercise or
 - talking to those with hearing difficulties.

Overall comments from the survey can be classified into the following themes:

(in order of frequency)

- **Positive comments on where we live and positive government response**
 - “I am very lucky to live in Tasmania” and “We have been very fortunate in Tasmania to have a Premier who acted quickly, kept us regularly informed and a population who acted responsibly.”
- **Positive social response**
 - “People seem to talk more openly about mental health and checking on each other, that's a good thing” and “I think it's fast-tracked efficiencies with technology that bought on much needed change in work practices, general health and hygiene” and “only COVID has made us aware of what is important in life - family and community engagement.”
- **Complacency**
 - “I think the public and businesses have become complacent with COVID safety standards with supplying hand sanitiser in all businesses and sign in or QR codes at entry. Moving forward I think this should still be the new normal.”
- **Education**
 - “I would like to see better education on mask wearing. Most people outside health do not know how to wear one and take it off properly.”
- **Get it over with**
 - “Let us roll out the vaccine as soon as possible” and “Make it go away.”
- **Learn to live with it**
 - “We will eventually have to learn to live with it, as with other viruses.”
- **Other comments**
 - “Very frightening” and “Has caused great stress in the community, as a nation we were initially unprepared, and our most vulnerable bore the brunt of an inadequate response” and “The current information campaign is not reaching the necessary audience.”

Vaccines

Finding 1 – Where people source information on vaccines

The local GP appears to be the major source of information for this cohort, followed by government websites. What is clear, is that people seek out more than one source of information on COVID-19 vaccines.

Source	Percent
I would ask my Doctor (GP)	64.8%
Search the Tasmanian Government website	58.0%
Search the Australian Government website	51.1%
I would ask a Pharmacist	38.6%
Watch the news on TV	36.4%
Listen to the News on the Radio	20.5%
Read the News in the Newspaper	18.2%
Do not need any further information	14.8%
Search the internet other than Government websites	12.5%
Other (please specify)	12.5%
Use social media (e.g. Facebook groups)	6.8%
I would ask a family member or friend	5.7%
I do not know	2.3%
I would ask my Carer	0.0%
Total	n = 88

Other include (in order of frequency)

- ABC including ABC news app; ABC Health Report, Dr Norman Swan
- Search for and read peer reviewed articles online, Relevant academic papers, read a medical journal for research results Vaxxtracker.com NACCHO website WHO pandemic circular
- Watch special programs on TV on the subject
- Information from multiple sources. Bias from Government and GP's
- Employers and workplaces

Finding 2 – Before you decide to take the Vaccine, what information do you need?

Those surveyed have identified some areas where they would like more information on the vaccine or the vaccination process – listed in order of frequency.

1. What are the side effects from each vaccine?

- “what side-effects can I expect?”
- “worried about possible side-effects”
- “the probability of side-effects and severity”
- “side-effects of the vaccination and allergic reaction based on the vaccination ingredients”
- “has there been full disclosure regarding side-effects?”
- “if it has any negative impact on my health?”
- “is it safe from longer term side-effects?” and “what effects it may have on me in the years following?”

2. Safety of the vaccine

- “what is the safety and effectiveness of the specific vaccine we are being provided with?”
- “if people die after having it?”
- “the efficacy of the vaccine”
- “that it's safe and effective”
- “proven to be safe and effective”
- “how safe is it?”

3. Which vaccine will I receive and the process for each one?

- “what brand I am going to be given?”
- “when will I need a second shot?”
- “are all vaccines the same?”
- “which strain of the COVID-19 is it for?”
- “what is in the vaccine?”
- “how long the vaccine protection will last? Will it protect me from other strains of the virus?”
- “where and who made it?”
- “if the vaccination will work on the current 3 strains circulating?”

4. Long term impact of the vaccine

- “long term impacts/effects of the vaccination”
- “what are the long term effects?”
- “how long it is expected to offer immunisation?”
- “will it protect me in the long term?”
- “length of time expected to be effective?”
- “post-vaccination health”

5. The testing process behind the development and approval of the vaccine

- “how well tested is it?”
- “have all the test requirements been completed?”

“that it has been adequately tested?” and “proved?”
“what is the evidence around its development and use?”

6. Specific impact on my existing health care

“problems encountered by recipients in the over 70 age group”
“if it is safe for someone with an autoimmune disease to have the vaccine?”
“risks for people with chronic conditions?”
“is it safe for me to have given other medical conditions?”
“is the vaccine safe for people with health issues like Diabetes’s?” and early last year I had a chest and lung issue after working in a dusty environment”

There were a couple of comments around how the vaccine will impact on individuals’ rights to work or travel – “ill I be negatively affected (my rights to access services, financial support, businesses) if I choose to not get it.”

The other comments related to logistics around the roll-out of the vaccination, for example:

“when and where to get it?”
“how long will it take? I’m busy”
“will it cost me anything?”
“how will I be contacted or do have to make an appointment myself?”

Finding 3 – How Safe do Tasmanians believe the Vaccine is?

The majority believe the vaccine to be safe – 14% did not know.

Feeling of Safety	Percent	Number
Very safe	47.1%	41
Probably safe	34.5%	30
Not very safe	1.1%	1
Really unsafe	3.5%	3
I do not know	13.8%	12
Total	100%	87

Finding 4 – Tasmanians likelihood of taking the Vaccine

Nearly 84% indicated that they would take the vaccine when it became available to them. Again, 1 in 10 do not know, whilst 7% indicated they would be unlikely to take the vaccine.

Likelihood of having the vaccine	Percent	Number
Yes – I will definitely get a vaccine	69.0%	60
Yes – I am likely to get a vaccine	14.9%	13
I do not know / I am undecided	9.2%	8
No – I am unlikely to get a vaccine	2.3%	2
No – I definitely will not get a vaccine	4.6%	4
Total	100%	87

The primary motivations for taking the vaccine was to keep the broader community safe, and keeping themselves or their families safe – in that order.

Reasons for taking or most likely taking the Vaccine	Percent	Number
For the greater community good	83.6%	61
It will help keep me safe	80.8%	59
It will help keep my family safe	71.2%	52
I want us to beat this virus	57.5%	42
Because I want to be able to travel again	56.2%	41
I have done my own research and believe this is the best approach to take	41.1%	30
It will help us get back to work sooner rather than later	21.9%	16
My GP has recommended me to have the vaccine	9.6%	7
Because the Government has told me to have the vaccine	5.5%	4
Other (please specify)	5.5%	4
My family or carer has suggested I take the vaccine	2.7%	2
Because everyone else is having the vaccine	2.7%	2
Total		

Other reasons for taking the vaccine mostly related to work requirements – “working with vulnerable people” etc. (3) and Dr Norman Swan said to “get immunised” (1).

The few who indicated they would not take the virus, the reasons provided were around safety and needing more information.

Reasons for not or most unlikely taking the Vaccine	Percent	Number
I do not think the vaccine is safe	50.0%	3
I need more information to make-a-decision	33.3%	2
I am worried about side-effects	16.7%	1
Total	100%	6

Other reasons offered:

- There are other people who need the vaccine before me
- I don't believe in vaccines
- Finding the time outside of work hours to get a vaccine
- I don't think vaccinating the population will make any difference
- I can't physically get to a vaccination site

Finding 5 – Key Messages to promote greater use of the Vaccine

The key messages suggested to promote up-take of the vaccine were around safety – it (the vaccine) being safe or that by taking it, it will keep individuals, family and the community safe.

Messages	Percent	Number
safety levels of the vaccine	78.2%	68
the vaccine can keep your family safe	67.8%	59
the vaccine can keep you safe	62.1%	54
the vaccine will help you to travel safely	59.8%	52
the vaccine will help you participate in community events safely	56.3%	49
the vaccine will help you to work safely	49.4%	43
I do not know	1.2%	1
Other (please specify)	13.8%	12
Total	100%	87

Other comments included on the content, style or source of information were:

- “information both for and against the vaccine so it doesn't seem like a whitewash”
- “provide the truth about all aspect of the vaccine from doctors NOT the government”
- “honest and reliable; evidence based; not propaganda”
- “make an informed decision, and that the government will support you by providing transparent and accurate data on which strain it is for and possible adverse reactions”

Other comments include:

- “historical success of other vaccines we now all take for granted i.e. polio, rabies, hepatitis etc.”
- “to stop us dying from COVID-19”
- “the vaccine will help protect the economy”
- “hat vaccines do not contain the live virus”
- “long-term research results”
- “Dr Norman Swan says it's a good thing”

Masks

Finding 6 – Face Mask Usage

Over half of those surveyed have used a face mask to date.

Have you worn a face mask as part of preventing COVID-19 over the past 12 months?

	Percent	Number
Yes	56.3%	49
No	43.7%	38
Total		87

Finding 7 – Where people use face masks

People travelling was the most common reason for wearing a face mask, followed by in a hospital setting.

	Percent	Total
Interstate travel	27.8%	15
Public airport	20.4%	11
In a hospital setting	16.7%	9
Visiting vulnerable family or friends	9.3%	5
To visit a shopping centre, supermarket, Bunnings etc.	9.3%	5
Staying interstate	7.4%	4
Other (please specify)	9.3%	5
Total	100.0%	54

Other places where face masks are worn include:

- “my work environment”
- “at home whilst waiting for results from a COVID test”
- “at my vet”
- “doctor’s surgeries due to hay fever”
- “at a large group event where I would not normally have contact with attendees”

Finding 8 – Face Mask Ownership

Three quarters of those surveyed currently possess a face mask.

Do you currently own a face mask	Percent	Total
Yes	75.9%	66
No	24.1%	21
Not sure	0.0%	0
Total	100%	87

Finding 9 – What would stop you from wearing a face mask if it was Government mandated

Most people indicated they would wear a face mask, the exceptions being for medical reasons, exercise or when talking to those who struggle to hear.

	Percent	Total
I would always wear a face mask if the government required it of me	73.6%	64
Medical problems (e.g. breathing difficulties, mental health condition)	21.8%	19
During strenuous physical activity	13.8%	12
Need to communicate with those who are deaf or hard of hearing	9.2%	9
Disability	2.3%	2
I do not like masks no matter what the law says	0.0%	0
I do not know	1.2%	1
Other (please specify)	6.9%	5
Total		87

Questions people had on face masks include:

- “are two masks (e.g. cloth mask plus N95) more effective?”
- “how do I determine the quality of the mask?”
- “what options are there for reusing it?”
- “how to protect the environment from too many masks being disposed of”
- “how can we better support those who need them to have access to them?”

- “we have had mixed messages: ‘don't wear’ to ‘do wear’ a face mask – it is still unclear”
- “please outline the source/s of the assertion that face masks are both safe and beneficial – particularly those with Asthma”
- “when is it ok to not wear a mask if it has been mandated? When I was at Launceston airport people who were eating and drinking were not wearing a mask, the guidelines on distance between yourself and a stranger and mask wearer could be made clearer.”

Finding 10 – General comments about COVID-19

Positive comments on where we live and positive government response

- “consider myself lucky to be living in Australia”
- “I am very lucky to live in Tasmania”
- “I am fortunate in that I live in a remote place with fresh air, clean water. I can use technology to engage with Zoom meetings with members of my Faith. I like peace and quiet and engage in the arts. So, the pandemic presented no difficulties for me”
- “We have been very fortunate in Tasmania to have a Premier who acted quickly, kept us regularly informed and a population who acted responsibly”
- “I think the Tassie government have done a great job in keeping us all safe”
- “I consider Tasmanian government and health advisors have done a fantastic job of keeping us informed and updated”
- “Government in general and health professionals have been doing a fantastic job of keeping us informed and keeping us safe. Thankyou”

Positive social response

- “I think in Tasmania we have been very fortunate to have limited exposure that has allowed Tasmania to prepare for the future better. We need to make sure that information gets to all people in the community - not just the IT literate population”
- “I think it's fast-tracked efficiencies with technology and brought on much needed change in work practices and general health and hygiene. Many people have said that they haven't been getting as sick due to hygiene, social distancing and people staying home when sick”
- “people seem to talk more openly about mental health and checking on each other, that's a good thing”
- “only COVID has made us aware of what is important in life - family and community engagement”
- “I now appreciate the huge role that Primary Health Care plays in the lives of the all of us and start to fund this area (which includes public health and epidemiology) a lot better - prevention rather than continual funding of hospitals only”
- “I think a positive to come from this COVID-19 is that we take more care. As well as taking some positive out of what we have learned. For example: screens to protect other from transmission of virus to others -like they now have in supermarkets and doctors surgery's”

Complacency

- “I think the public and businesses have become complacent with COVID safety standards with supplying hand sanitiser in all businesses and sign in / QR code at entry. Moving forward, I think this should still be the new normal”
- “people in Tasmania seem very complacent. Being vaccinated shouldn't make people feel so safe they take risks”
- “it is important not become complacent because we have few or no cases in Tasmania”
- “the rules and regulations should be universal. The same rules to apply for everyone”

Education

- “more education to the public”
- “I would like to see better education on mask wearing. Most people outside health do not know how to wear one and take it off properly”

Get it over with

- “let us roll out the vaccine as soon as possible”
- “make it go away”
- “be great to get rid of it”

Learn to live with it

- “we have to be aware it's always there and learn to live appropriately”
- “we will eventually have to learn to live with it, as with other viruses”
- “are pandemics likely to become more frequent in the future?”
- “is it going to return? and could it be worse than what we are experiencing at the moment”

Other comments

- “the current information campaign is not reaching the necessary audience”
- “very frightening “
- “has caused great stress in the community, as a nation we were initially unprepared, and our most vulnerable bore the brunt of an inadequate response”
- “we need to think about others and just be kind”
- “as an older person my window of opportunity to travel has had a 1-2 year reduction”
- “I hate that we mistrust each other and look at each other with suspicion. We used to care for each other when we got sick. Now we glare at someone who sneezes. It becomes about blame and fault.”