A snapshot: It's December 2023. We're coming into the fifth year of the pandemic. We're currently in a wave of Covid-19 – the eighth, or ninth, in Australia, depending on who you ask.

But for some time now, **the government (specifically Anthony Albanese) has been talking about the pandemic in the past sense, as if it's over.**

In NSW, where I am, current NSW Health advice for avoiding Covid prioritises washing your hands and does not advise wearing a respirator but "being kind" to people who do. You couldn't make this stuff up.

Covid-19 is an airborne virus. Washing your hands (while a good idea generally) gives little protection from it. Wearing a respirator/N95, however, gives good protection. NSW Health is providing the public with faulty and misleading health advice.

Then there's the sheer LACK of health messaging. For example, on 24 November, the @NSWHealth Twitter/X account announced that "COVID-19 transmission continues to increase in NSW, with community transmission now moderate to high." On 25 November it posted the graphic I've included above. Since then, while we're still in the current Covid wave, @NSWHealth have posted about heatwaves, working in health in rural areas, etc., but not a word about the current wave of Covid, or how people can protect themselves and others from getting it.

When WHO announced the end of the emergency phase of the pandemic earlier in the year, they said this: "The WHO Director-General stated COVID-19 remained a serious threat to global health and, while countries should avoid complacency, it is time to transition from emergency mode to managing COVID-19 alongside other infectious diseases."

This does not mean pretending the pandemic is over, or that Covid is like other infectious diseases. By virtue of its after-effects, Covid is exceptional.

Covid is still a serious health threat, particularly when you factor in the post-Covid threats like long Covid (which can include heart and brain damage) and other post-Covid effects like heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure – Covid is known to have the potential to damage pretty much every organ in the body.

But the government's public messaging about Covid encourages people to believe either that it's all over, or that it's not that serious, by focusing only on the initial infection – which is not the problem for most people. This means that fewer people take precautions, more people end up with Covid, and (since Covid evolves in the human body) Covid gets many more opportunities to circulate and to evolve into numerous variants, as it has continued to do.

And this brings me to my third main point: **the government is encouraging people to make their own decisions about Covid safety without providing them with the information they need to do so.**

People are not being told that Covid is not, in fact, a simple respiratory disease but a vascular disease with a respiratory presentation. People need to know that when they weigh the odds of e.g. going to a party unprotected, they're not risking "just a cold", but all the potential sequelae of Covid, which include not just dying of the disease (which they might feel protected from because of their age), or ending up with debilitating long Covid, but a raft of post-Covid sequelae. This could be explained to the public in simple terms, but public health is not doing it.

This is a severe dereliction of duty. If public health bodies are not going to mandate safe(r) behaviour, they must at least give people the information they need to make their own

decisions, particularly when these decisions affect not just the people themselves, not just their loved ones, but the broader public and society as a whole.