

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to express our view on Australia's Covid-19 response.

We have a [REDACTED]-year-old who, because of the government's strict rules, cannot be vaccinated in this country. The majority of under 5-year-olds have been neglected in this ongoing pandemic.

For all other infectious diseases that we have vaccines for, under 5-year-olds are a priority. We have council-run vaccine programs to ensure that they receive them. But, for some reason, Covid-19 is being allowed to run rampant in a completely unvaccinated cohort when we know that toddlers are more vulnerable than the wider population. The vaccine should be available for under 5-year-olds. This is a novel virus and we don't know the long-term effects. This is a risk that we're unwilling to take with our child.

Ventilation is also not a priority in the majority of daycares/kindergartens/schools. For this reason, we cannot send our child to early childhood education if we also want to keep him safe from Covid-19. This means that, as a two-parent family, we cannot both work at the same time and we have had to reduce our work days so that our child can be safely looked after. This has affected our income and our mental health as we have less socialisation. We work in an industry that relies on networking and the demonisation of masking in this country means that we're treated as freaks. So it's become easier for us to just not engage in work functions and our future employment has probably been affected.

Because our child has been too young to mask until recently, it has made accessing healthcare dangerous for him. We have had to delay care and ask for special precautions (eg. healthcare workers masking, outdoor appointments, alternative access to buildings). Little kids inevitably have accidents and that's stressful enough without having to worry about them catching a dangerous virus in the emergency department/GP's office.

Ventilation and masking should be normalised and encouraged, particularly in high-risk areas like healthcare, public transport, supermarkets and also places where people spend most of their time like offices and schools. The messaging shouldn't be that vulnerable people have to protect themselves, it should be that we, as a society, have to protect each other.

As someone who had [REDACTED] as a teenager (and I still feel the lingering effects of it), I am at greater risk of developing Long Covid. I also have a parent with [REDACTED] who is at higher risk of severe complications from Covid-19. The government seems to have forgotten about people like us and decided that the lives of the vulnerable and immunocompromised are less important than the rest of Australia going back to their pre-pandemic lives.

Disabled people and the elderly are people too and they have just as much right to live their lives and not be sacrificed for a sense of normalcy. The response to any future pandemics should understand that their lives are just as valuable and their contribution to Australian society just as needed.

Thank you.