
Feature



COVID VACCINE OUTREACH TO school teachers and staff

Western Sydney GP Network, in partnership with PERU, organised a COVID vaccination information and Q&A zoom meeting for school staff to address concerns.

INTRODUCTION

New South Wales (NSW) is currently experiencing an outbreak of the COVID-19 Delta variant, with case numbers rising since June 2021. Residents of Greater Sydney are in lockdown, and eight local government areas (LGAs) have been identified as areas of concern requiring additional restrictions on movement. Three of these LGAs are located within the Western Sydney Local Health District (Blacktown, Cumberland, and Parramatta).

The Delta variant is causing significant concern in our community. The NSW government has highlighted that vaccination is key to helping us move forward. However, the vaccination roll-out has been characterised by contradicting information about the preferred vaccine for people under 60 years old and lack of details about where / when / how to get vaccinated. At the beginning of Term 3, Principals contacted us regarding concerns for their school staff. They were advocating to get priority access to Pfizer vaccines, based on the information that was being relayed by the Federal Government, in order to protect not only themselves and their families, but their students as well.

To address their concerns, we planned a zoom meeting to offer a platform for teachers and school staff to meet with local general practitioners to discuss concerns and have their questions answered regarding the risks and benefits of Astra Zeneca, and access to Astra Zeneca and Pfizer vaccines.

METHODS

Prevention Education and Research Unit (PERU) Western Sydney Local Health District, in collaboration with the Western Sydney GP Network: COVID -19, hosted an information session titled **“Local access to COVID vaccinations: Q&A for school staff in Western Sydney”**. The session was promoted to all school staff in western Sydney via email and social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter). Western Sydney LHD staff working with schools were also invited to attend. Teachers and school staff were asked to register via Eventbrite. The 60-minute information and Q&A session was held on Zoom, on the morning of Friday 30 July, from 7.30 to 8.30 am. Participants were asked to email any COVID vaccine questions for the presenters prior to the session and were encouraged to ask questions during the session using the group chat function

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on Zoom. Questions submitted by participants were collated and grouped into themes at the end of the session.

The session was moderated by PERU staff, Associate Professor Smita Shah (Director), Mrs Kym Rizzo Liu (Project coordinator) and Associate Professor Michael Burke. The panel comprising of local general practitioners (GPs) Dr Kean Seng-Lim (Mt Druitt), Dr Hani Bittar (Glendenning), Dr Palu Malaowalla (Rosehill) and Associate Professor Michael Fasher (Blacktown) briefly presented on what they were doing in their practice to get people vaccinated and responded to questions from the audience. The session also included a short video about COVID-19 from Associate Professor Deborah Yates, a leading Respiratory Physician, and a recording of an interview from the Today show of Dr Kean-Seng Lim.

POST-SESSION PROCESS EVALUATION

A brief survey was distributed to all participants post-session via email with a link to SurveyMonkey.

The purpose of the survey was to assess:

1. How useful participants found the session;
2. What further vaccination information was needed; and
3. To determine what message would encourage participants to get vaccinated.

Participants were also asked three optional demographic questions (name, school, and age bracket). Survey responses were exported from SurveyMonkey into a Microsoft Excel document. Responses to the questions were coded and categorised into key themes.

RESULTS

Overall, 250 Eventbrite registrations were received. On the day, over 161 individuals participated in the zoom online

session, including primary and secondary teachers, school staff, university academics and health professionals.

Participant questions

Seven questions were emailed before the session, and 37 questions and/or comments were submitted by participants during the session via zoom “chat” option. The questions were grouped under four key themes:

Vaccine availability: The most common question received from participants was how to access the COVID vaccine, in particular the Pfizer vaccine. Participants reported being unable to book a vaccination, or being faced with long wait times e.g. “I am under 40, and it has been difficult to get the Pfizer vaccine. I have now got my name down to receive Pfizer, but the earliest I could book in is October. I’m nervous to return to school with students if I am unvaccinated and am putting my own family at risk every time I come to school.” Participants queried why they weren’t being given priority access to the Pfizer vaccine, particularly given the nature of their work and the availability of the vaccine to teachers in other local LGAs.

Vaccine administration: Questions were received about vaccine administration, including i) appropriate

wait-time between shots, ii) combining AstraZeneca and Pfizer shots, and iii) which vaccine schedule is most effective e.g. “My first shot was AstraZeneca, can my second shot be Pfizer? Would the efficacy be increased?”.

Vaccine safety: Participants also raised concerns regarding the safety of the vaccine in pregnancy, breastfeeding and for people with specific health conditions such as anaphylaxis and chronic health conditions such as diabetes.

Implications of students returning to school: Four questions were raised about the implications of sending children back to school for both the safety of teachers and school testing processes e.g. “What plans would you want to be in place at a school for rapid antigen testing of Year 12 students each day?”

Post-session survey

Overall, 44 participants completed the post-session survey on Survey Monkey. The majority of participants were aged 40 years and over (Figure 1).

Usefulness of the session

Almost two-thirds of the respondents reported that the most useful part of the session was the information provided by the GPs, e.g. “People had the opportunity to ask questions of medical

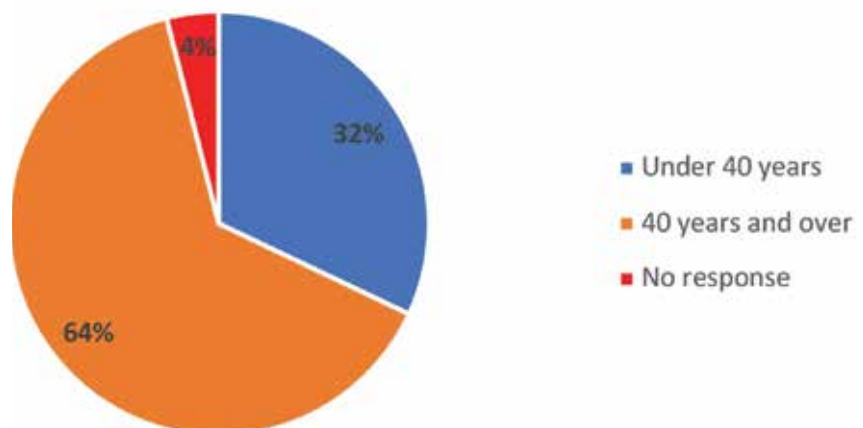


Figure 1. Age-group of survey respondents

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experts, rather than grumble and complain to each other. We were given logical and empathetic information.” Many respondents considered the GPs to be trusted sources of factual information on the safety of the vaccines, particularly AstraZeneca.

Five participants who were wanting access to Pfizer vaccines reported that “not much” about the session was useful; they felt the session didn’t offer them any options other than to get the AstraZeneca vaccine, e.g. “The Drs seemed like decent people. But honestly, I switched off when I realised it was just a push for AZ. For medical reasons, some of us cannot have it so now we are just waiting 4-8 weeks for a Pfizer appointment.” Only one respondent felt the session “added to the confusion” regarding which vaccine they should get.

Further information needed

Just over a third of the respondents requested further information on how to access the vaccine, in particular get the Pfizer vaccine, e.g. “Where can I get

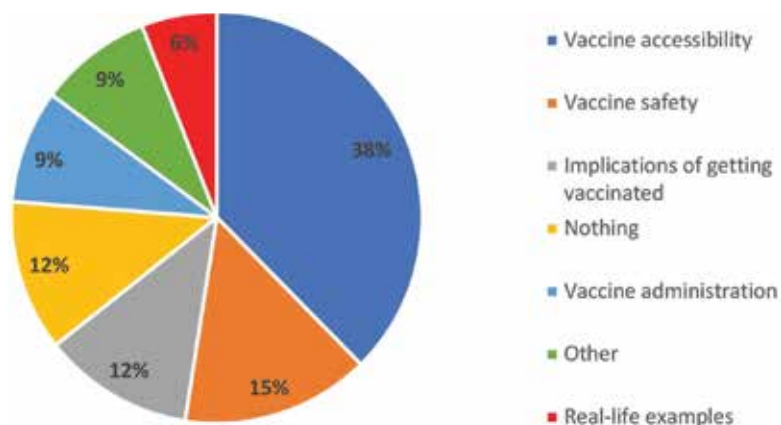


Figure 3. Participant responses to the question “What additional information would you like to know?”, grouped by theme (n = 34)

Pfizer earlier than Sept in the Blacktown area (Pfizer is still my preferred). I am 49 healthy female, mine is a choice.” Others requested an explanation for why teachers in Western Sydney had not been prioritised for the Pfizer vaccine.

Participants also requested additional information on the efficacy of one vaccination shot and wait-times between doses, and the long-term safety of the vaccine in general and for people with

specific health conditions, e.g. “Whether I’m able to get AZ due to my brain Aneurysm...” Two participants requested stories and real-life examples of people who have received the vaccine, whilst others requested information on what getting vaccinated might mean for our future freedoms and employment, e.g. “I know some of the staff do not want to be vaccinated. Will they still be able to go to work?”

Message to encourage vaccinations

Participant responses to the question “What one message would encourage you to get vaccinated?” were varied but could be categorised into five broad themes (Table 1). The most common theme was the safety of the vaccine (Figure 4). Five participants responded that they were already vaccinated, or were booked to receive their vaccination, and one participant responded that this information session was enough to encourage.

Discussion

The COVID information and Q&A session responded to the many questions and concerns western Sydney school staff had regarding the COVID vaccine.

Post-session survey responses indicate that participants found

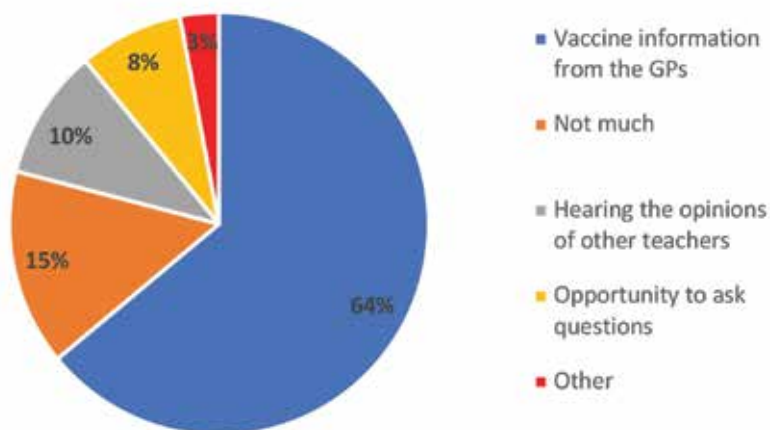


Figure 2. Participant responses to the question “What did you find useful about this meeting?”, grouped by theme (n = 39)

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Table 1. Key themes in participant responses

Theme	Participant quotes
Safety of the vaccine	“That the AstraZeneca vaccine is as safe to take as the Pfizer. Currently the AZ has been demonised and people are scared to take it.”
Availability of Pfizer	“No encouragement is required. It’s simply a matter of limited access, limited venues to get the vaccination for Pfizer.”
Benefits outweigh risks	“I liked the analogy of the house is on fire, are you going to wait for the Ferrari when BMW is ready to go now.” [BMW referring to AstraZeneca and Ferrari to Pfizer vaccine].
Protecting the health of themselves and others	“Vaccinate to help yourself, your loved ones and friends you have not yet met.”
Personalised advice	“To be encouraged to take the vaccine that suits my situation. Personal advice”.

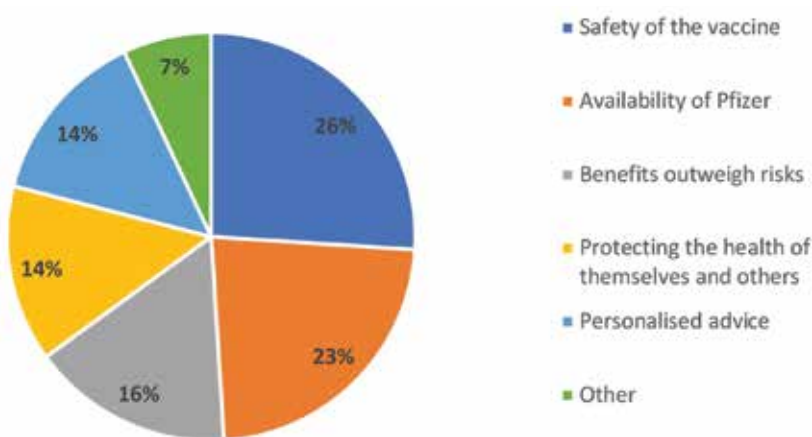


Figure 4. Participant responses to the question “What message would encourage you to get vaccinated?”, grouped by theme (n = 43)

the session to be both useful and informative. Participants valued hearing from the local doctors about COVID vaccine opportunities. Although many of the vaccination questions were addressed during the session, Pfizer vaccine accessibility continues to be a significant issue for school staff. Due to time constraints, questions that were not addressed during the session were

collated and the responses were sent to all participants.

Conclusion

Overall, participants found the information and Q&A session engaging and informative. Session feedback highlighted the need for further community engagement and the importance of listening to the concerns

of workplace groups such as teachers and school staff.

On participant commented, “This session was absolutely brilliant.

“It was extremely reassuring to hear local doctors answer the key questions and concerns that teachers are currently facing. Their ability to support all of their answers factually and authentically gave me great confidence (and I’m sure to everyone on the call) of the need to be vaccinated urgently. I have since changed my appointment to get the AZ rather than wait for 6 more weeks to get the Pfizer vaccine. It was a shame that more teachers weren’t privy to such conversations,” said Noelene Callahan.

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