

# The Views of Parents and Guardians on Baby and Toddler Flu Vaccinations

For children under four years old



# Contents

About us .....	2
Summary.....	3
Why we did this project.....	5
How did we do it?.....	5
Who did we hear from?.....	7
What did people tell us?.....	11
The interviews.....	19
Conclusion .....	22
What is happening with the feedback?.....	23
Thank you.....	23
Disclaimer .....	24

If you require this document in an alternative format, please get in touch with us using the details on the back page.

# About us

We are an independent voice for the people of Derbyshire. We are here to listen to the experiences of Derbyshire residents and give them a stronger say in influencing how local health and social care services are provided.

## Our mission

We are a strong, independent, and effective champion for people that use health and social care services. We will continue to influence health and care services and seek to improve joined-up care for the people of Derbyshire.

## Our vision

We want to see consumers of health and social care services being put centre stage so that service providers and commissioners listen to what they have to say and use their voices to shape, inform and influence service delivery and design.

# Summary

Between February and June 2024, we collected the views and experiences of 315 parents and guardians on flu vaccinations. This feedback was about 359 babies and toddlers. The survey was done alongside 14 semi-structured interviews.

We advertised the survey on social media and sent it to our contacts, nurseries and preschools. We also went to baby and toddler groups, soft play areas and leisure centres. We did the semi-structured interviews face-to-face in baby and toddler groups.

This was a commissioned (paid for) piece of research that we co-produced with Public Health at Derbyshire County Council (DCC). This was funded by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) in the NHS.

We did this research to influence the 2024 baby and toddler winter flu campaign.

We found that most people are positive about the baby and toddler flu vaccination.

Most people that we asked had vaccinated their children or were going to in the future. However, some felt it wasn't important or didn't want to vaccinate their children.

Three (3) important factors to address for those who said they weren't vaccinating their children:

- Practical barriers – ease of the appointment
- Flu vaccine importance – not just for vulnerable children but for all children
- Giving flu vaccination information from a trusted source.

## Key Information

- Most parents and guardians felt positive about the baby and toddler flu vaccination
- Parents and guardians may not be vaccinating their children due to busy schedules and practical barriers
- There was a lack of information on the flu vaccination for babies and toddlers

- There was a lack of awareness about the vaccine
- Parents and guardians felt it was less important for “healthy” children
- The key theme from the research was parents and guardians prioritising their children's health.

## **Key Findings**

- A total of 72% of parents/guardians felt “Very Positive” or “Positive” about the baby and toddler flu vaccination
- The most selected practical change that could be made to improve vaccination uptake was appointment reminders
- A total of 30% of parents/guardians rated the importance of flu vaccination for babies and toddlers as 3 or below, out of 5. A score of 5 being Very Positive

## **Key suggestions**

- Information given to parents and guardians: This needs to highlight not just the benefits to the wider population, but explain the risks of their child not having the flu vaccination
- Building trust and being transparent: Make sure the information given on flu vaccinations is clear, from a trusted source, and has information on safety
- Consideration for drop-in clinics: At places like pharmacies, toddler groups, children's centres
- Awareness raising: Information is received before the appointment reminder
- Appointment reminders: Consideration to be given to having flu vaccination information in the text reminder for an appointment.

# Why we did this project

## Working with Public Health at Derbyshire County Council and the Integrated Care Board

Our role is to listen to people who use health and social care services. We make sure that your feedback is heard by those who make decisions.

Some of the research we do is based on what people tell us. Other pieces of work are commissioned (paid for) by service providers like DCC and the NHS. This research was commissioned (paid for) by the NHS.

We wanted to gather feedback on the views of parents and guardians on flu vaccinations for their babies and toddlers. This was done to influence the 2024 winter campaign. We wanted to make sure the voices of parents and guardians are at the heart of decision-making.

# How did we do it?

## Engaging the public in our survey and interviews

We co-produced a survey and semi-structured interview questions with the DCC Public Health team and our volunteers.

The survey was made available in the following ways:

- Online survey link
- Posters
- Leaflets
- Postcards
- QR codes
- Paper format
- Tablet at engagements.

We collected feedback from every area in Derbyshire. We also did semi-structured interviews to get more in-depth feedback from all regions.

We then ran the survey on social media specifically targeting parents and guardians within Derbyshire with a child under four years old. The survey was shared on Facebook, X (Twitter) and Instagram.

We also sent the survey to our local contacts, nurseries and pre-schools and put it on our E-bulletin.

Our four engagement officers visited baby and toddler groups across Derbyshire. Some examples of the groups they visited:

- Twistin' Tots
- Baby sensory play
- Welly Club

Our engagement officers also visited soft play areas and leisure centres:

- Gym Tots – Shirebrook Leisure Centre
- Stay and Play
- Soft Play – Genesis Centre

The semi-structured interviews were done face-to-face in groups we visited. We ensured that we collected at least one interview from each region in Derbyshire.

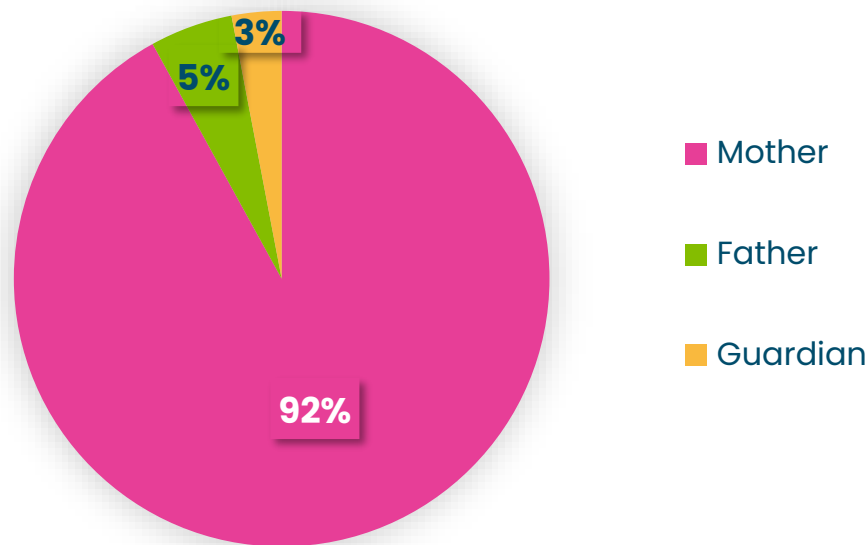
We also collected anecdotal feedback from those who didn't engage in the full interview. This is included as additional information in this report.

# Who did we hear from?

## Parents and guardians

We heard from 315 parents and guardians from every area of Derbyshire. We mostly heard from Mothers 228 (92%), particularly those aged 30-34 and 40-44. However, we did hear from 17 (5%) Fathers and 10 (3%) Guardians.

## Relationship with the Child



Parents and guardians could respond to our survey about any babies and toddlers they currently had under the age of four. Therefore, we heard about 359 babies and toddlers in total. The breakdown is below:

- Mothers – 330
- Fathers – 17
- Guardians – 12

## Ages of the parents and guardians

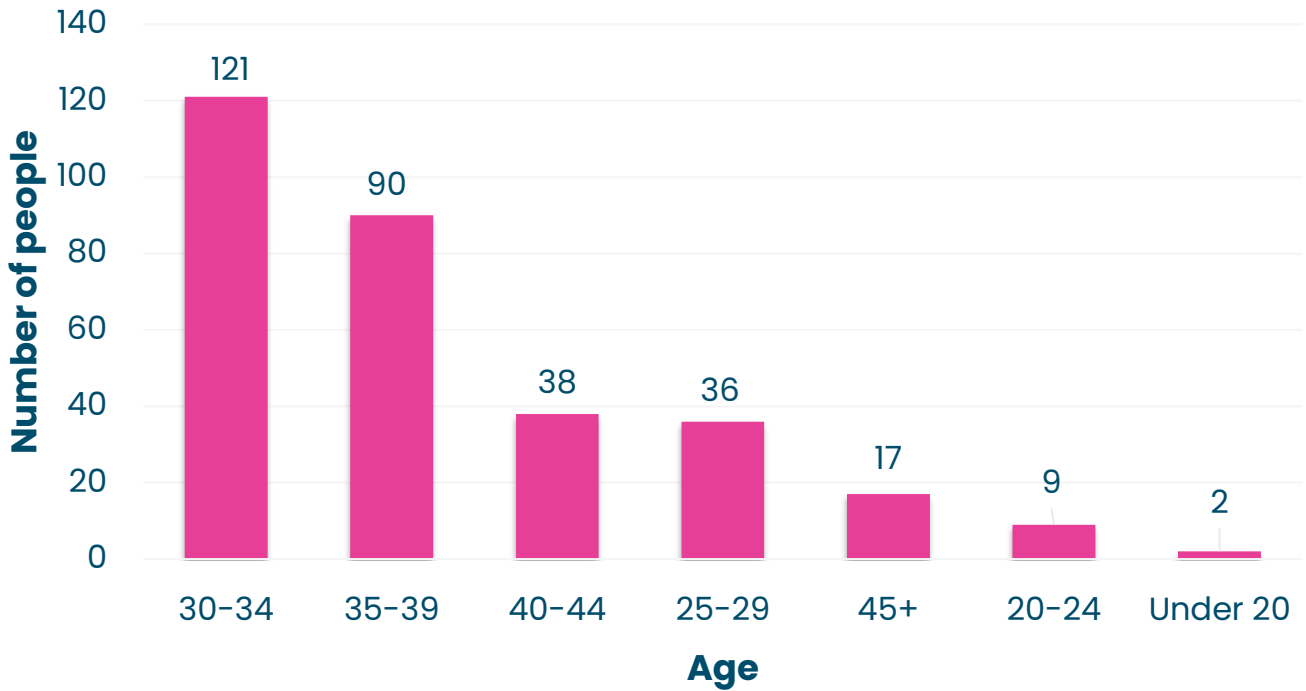
Of the parents and guardians we heard from, 121 were between the ages of 30-34, this was 39% of our responses.

The next most selected age category was 35-39. We heard from 90 people in this category, 29% of our responses.



The rest of the responses are detailed in the chart below:

## Age of Respondent

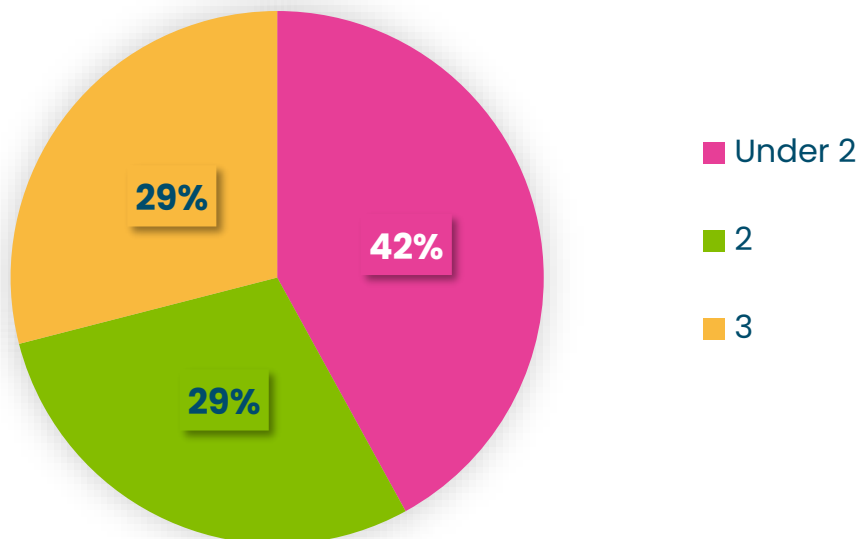


## Ages of the children eligible for vaccination

The ages of the babies and toddlers we heard about were mostly under two; 152 (42%).

However, we did have 103 (29%) aged two, and 103 (29%) aged three. The percentages are from a total of 359 children.

## Age of Child



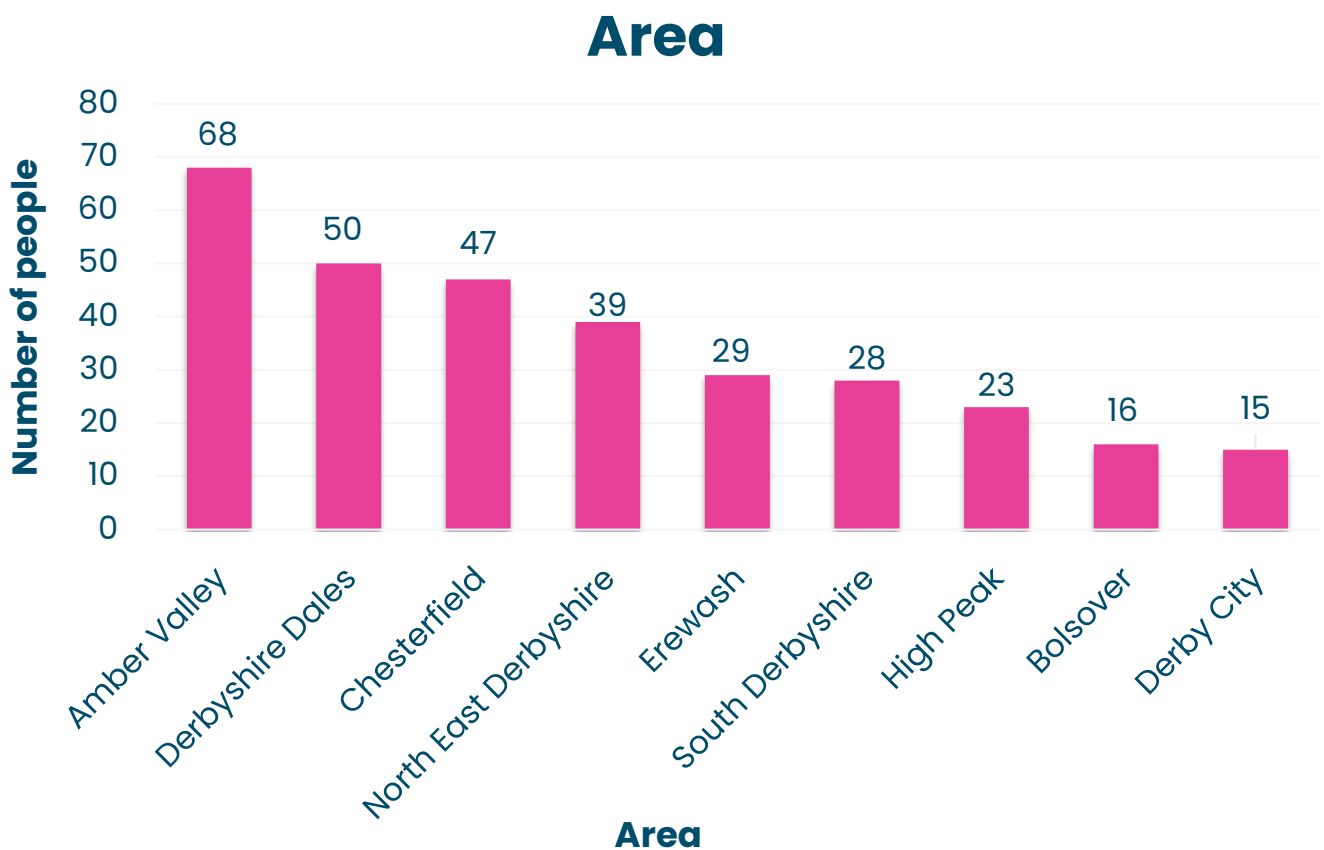
## Areas we heard from

We heard from people in every area of Derbyshire. We also had responses from 15 people (5%) in Derby City.

The area we heard from the most was Amber Valley 68 (22%). The next was Derbyshire Dales 50 (16%).

The area we heard from the least in Derbyshire was Bolsover 16 (5%).

The rest of the responses are detailed in the chart below:



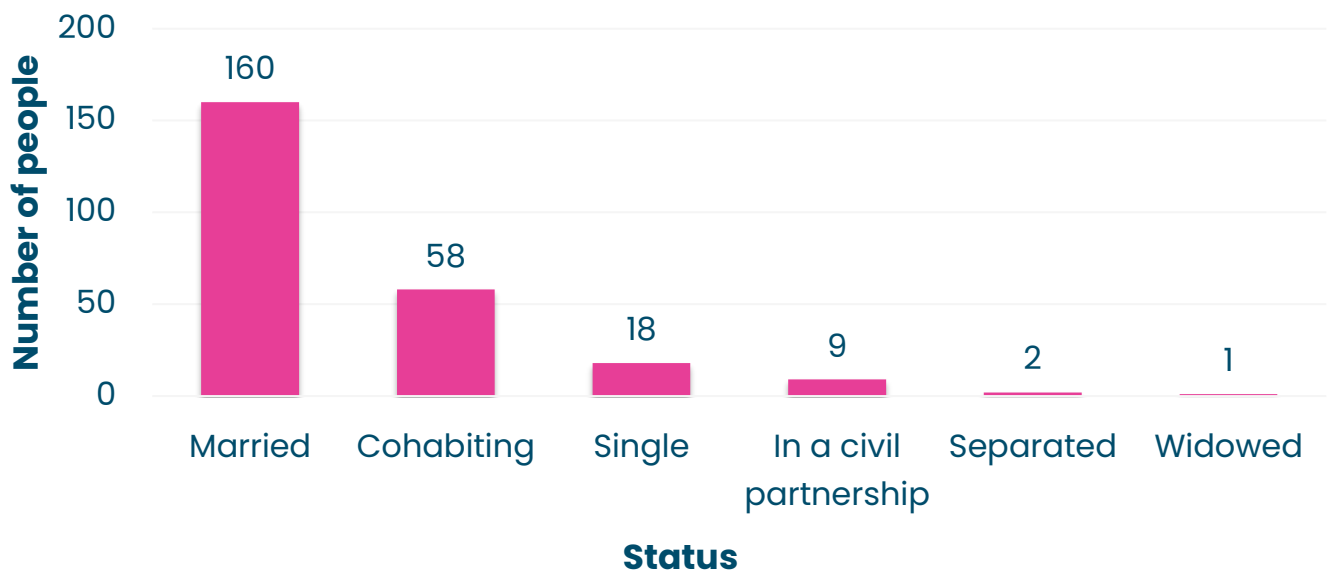
## Relationship status of parents and guardians

The next questions were optional. Of the 315 people who answered our survey, 250 (87%) answered these questions.

Most parents and guardians who answered the optional questions were Married 160 (65%). The next most selected answer was Cohabiting, which was 58 (23%).

The rest of the responses are detailed in the chart below:

## Partnership Status



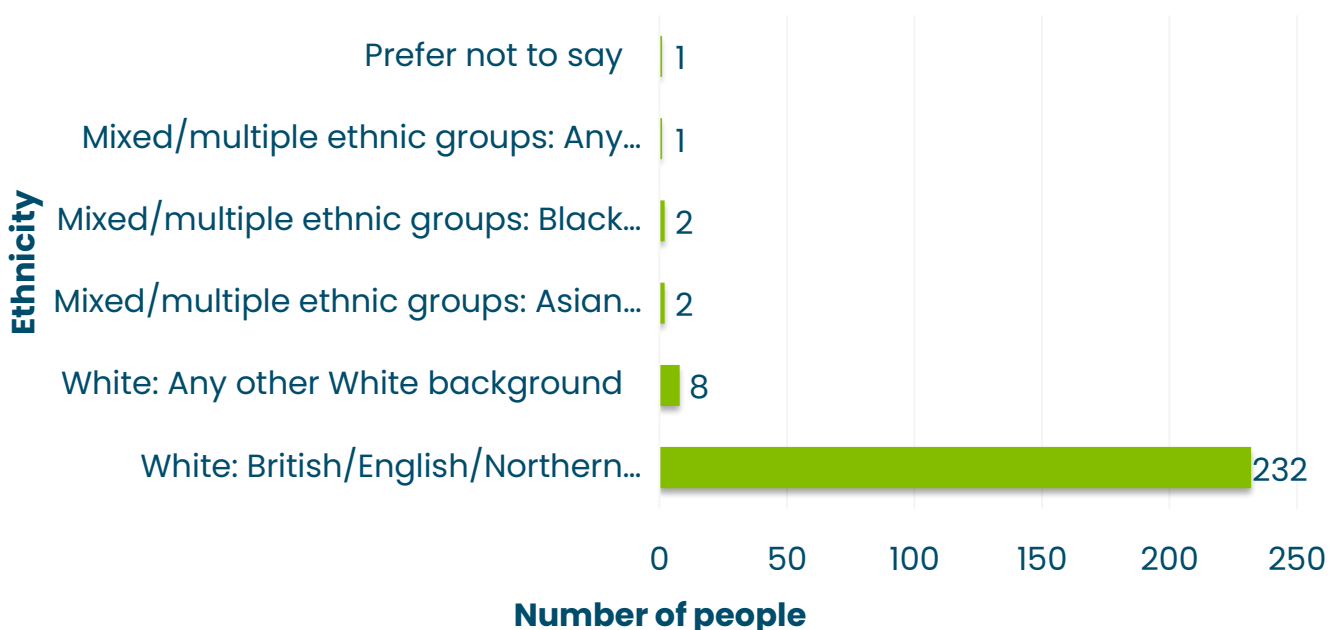
## Ethnicity

Most of our responses were from people who are White: British. However, in \*Derbyshire 90% of the population is White: British.

\*(Derbyshire County Census, 2021).

In our survey, 232 (94%) of the people who answered these optional questions selected this category. The rest of the responses are detailed in the chart below:

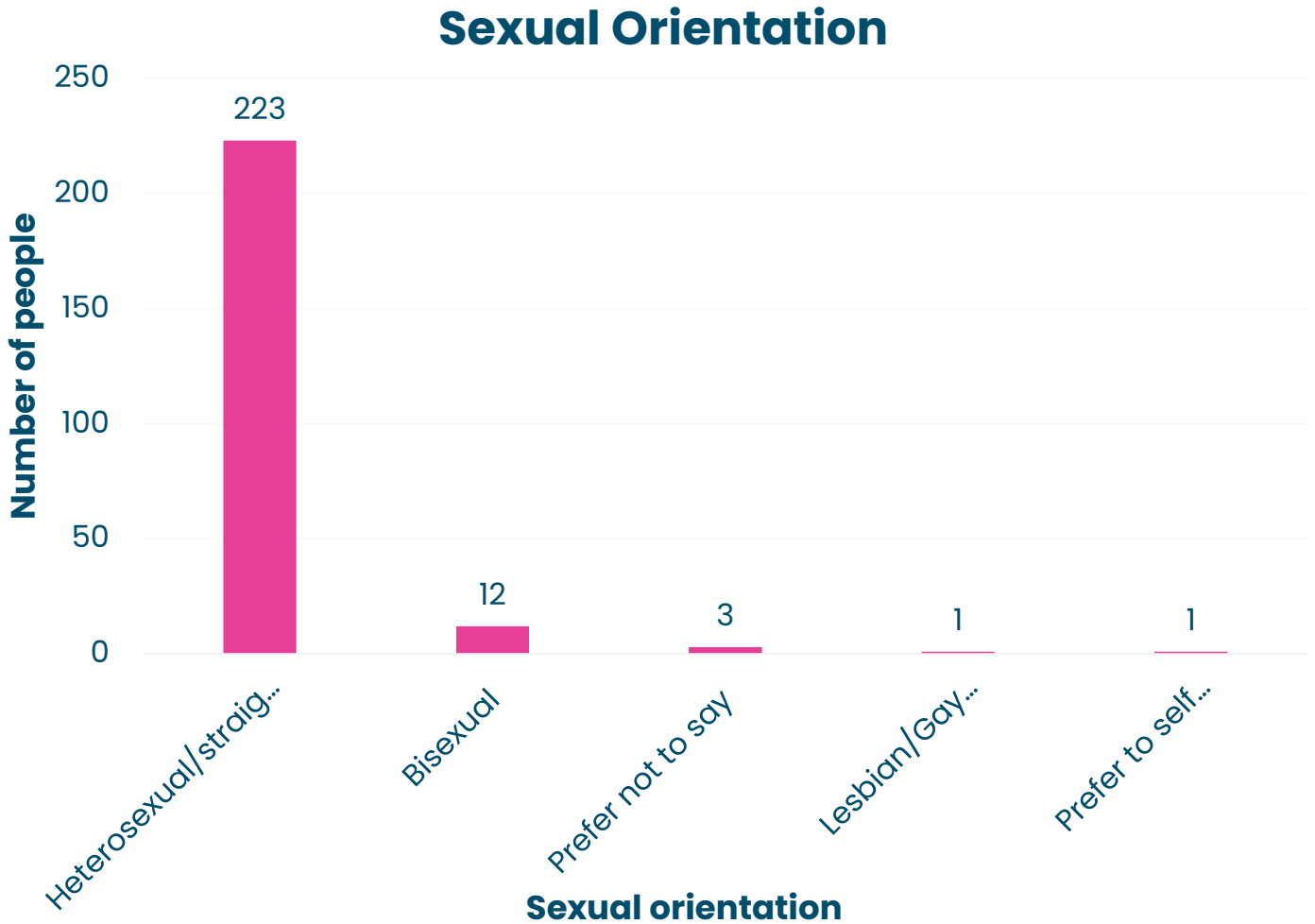
## Ethnicity



## Sexual Orientation

Most of the parents and guardians who answered our survey were Heterosexual/straight 223 (93%).

The rest of the responses are detailed in the chart below:



# What did people tell us?

## People's feelings about the flu vaccination

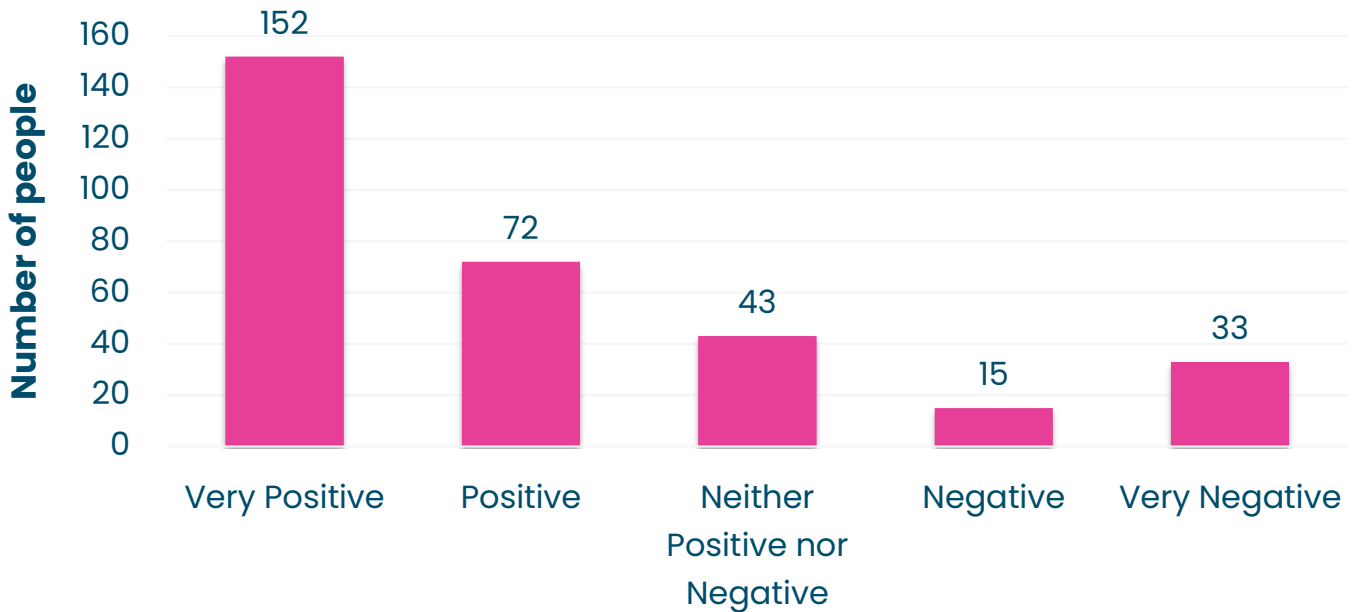
A total of 152 (48%) people who answered our survey felt "Very Positive" about flu vaccinations for babies and toddlers.

The next most selected feeling was “Positive”, 72 (23%) of people selected this answer.

Therefore 71% of the parents and guardians who answered our survey didn’t have a neutral or negative response to the flu vaccination.

The other responses are detailed in the chart below:

## Feelings on Flu vaccination



### Parents and guardians feelings

The people who felt “Very Positive” or “Positive” said:



“The children didn't have any adverse effects and never got the flu.”

“I want to give them every help I can so they will be having it. Especially the youngest as he has chronic lung disease.”

“I want to protect my child.”

“Easy and quick no injection just a nasal spray.”



The people who felt “Very Negative,” “Negative” or “Neither Positive nor Negative” said:



“I do not believe it is that effective.”

“Made my child feel worse.”

“I don't trust the vaccines; I don't feel there is enough information for parents about it.”

“I feel it is beneficial for some children e.g. those that are immune compromised, but I do not see it as essential for all young children.”



The 46 people who felt “Neither Positive nor Negative” mostly spoke about:

- Being unaware
- Fitting appointments into a working parent’s schedule
- Not feeling it's important.

Most parents and guardians were positive about the flu vaccination. They spoke about protecting their child or children from getting the flu and protecting others.

Those with children or family members who are more vulnerable were generally more positive about the vaccine. They felt it was important to ensure their child was safe as well as family/friends who could be vulnerable/at risk. Many parents with healthy children and family members thought the vaccine wasn't important or necessary.

## Flu vaccination choice

Of the parents and guardians, we asked, 150 (46%) had vaccinated their child/children against flu.

However, 158 (49%) parents and guardians hadn't vaccinated their child/children against the flu. There were also 17 (5%) who had not decided.

We asked those who had decided why they had made this decision.

Those that had vaccinated their children or were going to in the future said:



"I want to protect my child against all diseases and viruses to give them the best start in life."

"My youngest was born 14 weeks premature and left hospital on oxygen. So, for him to get flu would be awful."

"It not only helps to protect them but also to protect the more vulnerable public, like those with a low immune system."



Most people who wrote more information about their decision were positive. Many spoke about protecting their child against the flu. The sentiment from the written responses was 70% positive.

However, 11% of people felt neither positive nor negative towards the vaccine. They stated that it was another "hassle."

One person said that they had received a text a month before and got no reminders after this, so didn't get their child vaccinated.

The 18% of people who had a negative sentiment when explaining their decision mostly spoke about:

- Building their child's immunity up without the vaccine
- General apathy - not understanding the point
- Side effects outweighing the benefits of the vaccine
- Lack of evidence of how effective it is.

Again, as the question asked earlier about how positive people felt; many people said the flu vaccination was “more important” for vulnerable children and their families. Therefore, they didn’t understand why they would give it to their child who wasn’t vulnerable or at risk.

Those who hadn’t decided yet said:



“I have not made a decision yet as I have no up-to-date information.”

“I need more information to decide.”

“I need to understand the pros and cons.”



The parents and guardians who hadn’t decided yet, mostly said it was because they needed more information.

Those who did not vaccinate their children or weren’t going to in the future said:



“They have a God-given immune system to protect them and build natural immunity to the flu virus.”

“I do not feel it is necessary for that age bracket. I feel by this point they would have been exposed to various illnesses and it is good for their immune system to have this exposure.”

“The after-effects both my children experienced weren’t positive at all.”

“Because it is to help older people not my children. It's not necessary.”





As stated earlier, some parents and guardians didn't think it was necessary or important enough to make the appointment. They also spoke about side effects and it "not being worth it".

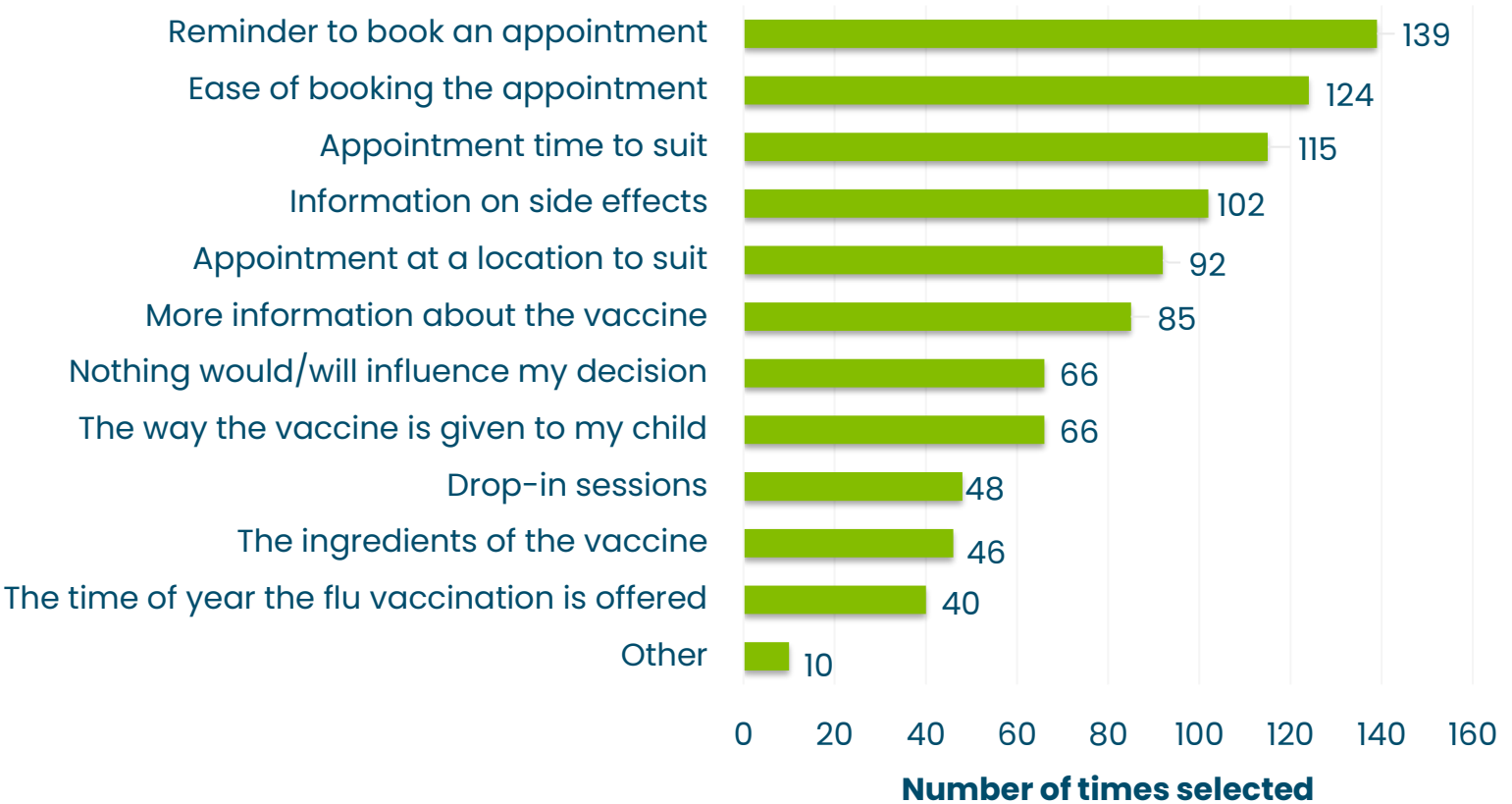
The main themes on people's decision to vaccinate or not were:

- Prevention
- Protecting vulnerable groups
- Trusting professionals/science
- Building natural immunity
- Safety concerns.

### What would help parents and guardians decide?

We gave parents and guardians multiple-choice answers asking whether any of the following would help them decide to vaccinate their child/children.

### Practical Changes



People could select multiple answers to this question.

## The most selected practical changes

Most people selected appointment reminders. This was also written by people explaining why they had made their decision to vaccinate or not. The next most selected was the ease of booking an appointment.

The 71% of parents who felt positive about the flu vaccination mostly spoke about reminders and making sure it was easy to book an appointment.

The people who selected “Nothing would/will influence my decision” spoke about:

- Distrust
- Difficulty getting through to their GP
- Believing in natural immunity.

The people who selected “Other” spoke about:

- Needing to know more information on flu cases in babies and toddlers
- Wanting it to continue to be the nasal spray
- Making sure the flu vaccine is available and letting parents know.

## Additional considerations

- Drop-in sessions were mentioned by parents and guardians in their written comments
- Availability was mentioned as a barrier by several parents.

## Was there a difference between areas?

Aside from how easy it was to access their GP, there wasn't much difference between areas. All over Derbyshire people spoke about text reminders being important.

Some people spoke about not being able to get through to their GP. One person stated, “It's a pain”.

Some areas asked for drop-in clinics to make it easier. This was mentioned specifically by people in North-East Derbyshire and the High Peak.

All areas mentioned making it easier to book an appointment and some spoke about making it available at pharmacies.

It was regularly mentioned in all areas that the nasal spray was positive.

However, one parent said they would like the option of the injection, as it would be easier not to require proof of allergies.

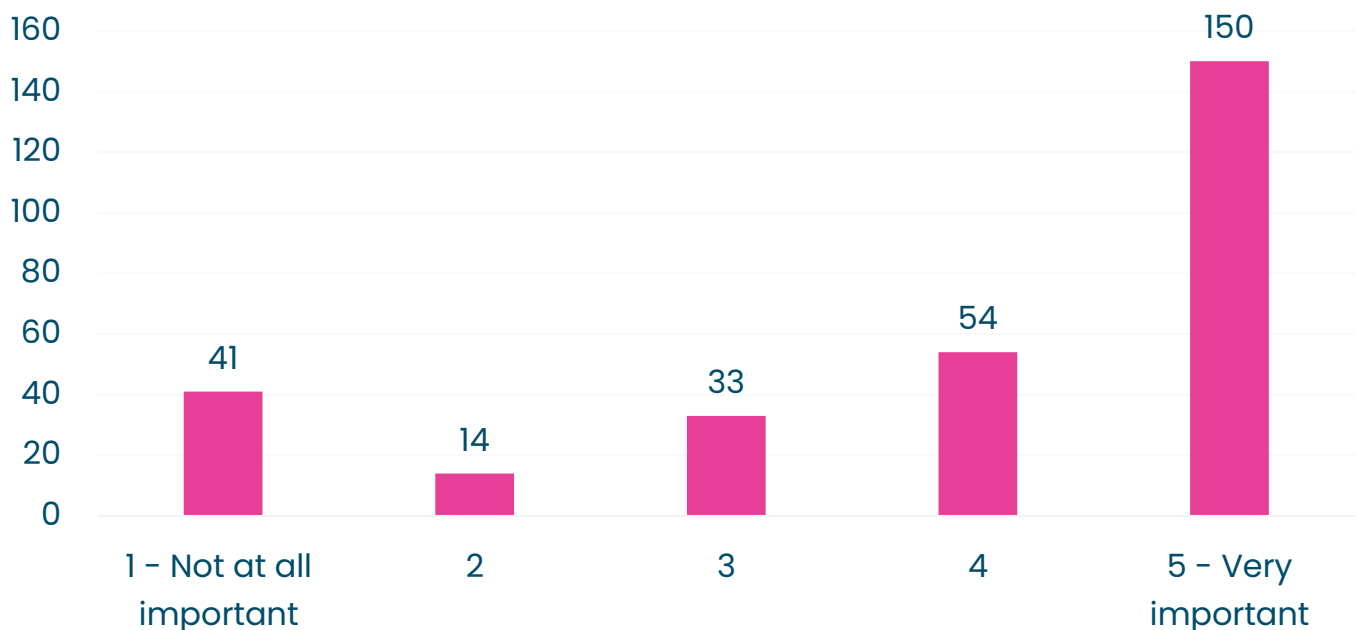
### How important do parents and guardians feel the vaccination is?

Of the parents and guardians, we asked, 150 (51%) rated the vaccination as 5 – Very important.

The next most selected answer was 4, 54 (18%) of people selected this answer.

The other responses are detailed in the chart below:

### Importance Rating



A total of 30% of parents rated the importance of the vaccination as 3 or below out of 5.

We asked parents to tell us more about this. Again, some parents and guardians said they feel it is more important for those with a low immune system or who are vulnerable.

It was mentioned that because they had not heard much about it, it had made them feel it wasn't important:



"I have not heard much about it, so I don't get the impression it's extremely important."



It was also mentioned that people felt it wasn't important for children who are not at childcare settings/school:

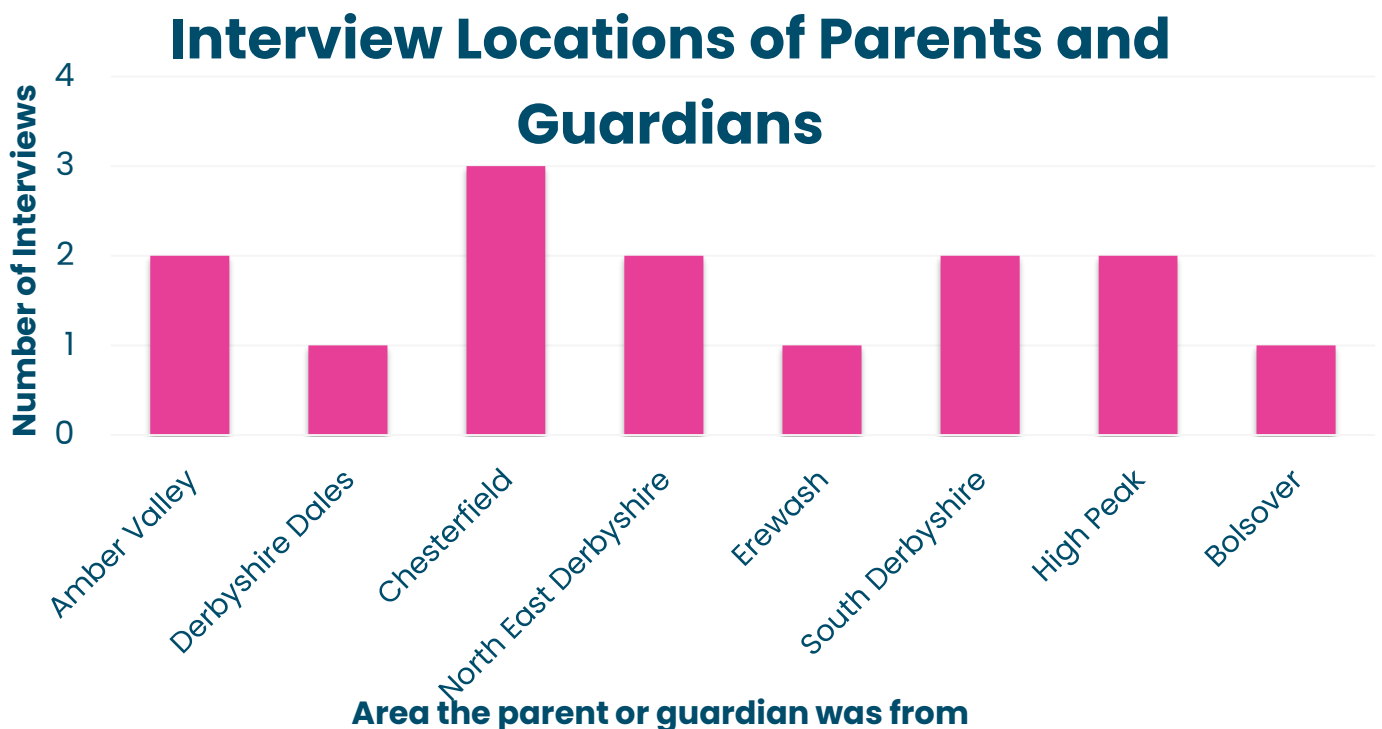


"I don't think for us it's high risk, as our children do not attend any childcare settings."



## The interviews

Along with the survey we did 14 semi-structured interviews with parents and guardians. These took place in every area of Derbyshire:



The main themes from the interviews were:

- Side effects – parents saying their child had side effects or were worried they would
- Practical reasons – such as forgetting after the text or struggling to book in with their GP/make time
- General apathy – many parents feel, “it’s not an important one”
- Vaccine misinformation – some conspiracy theories mentioned
- Positive responses – no issues with the vaccine at all
- Information and awareness raising – not enough out there
- Natural Immunity – people feeling that they would prefer their child to get their “natural immunity” up
- People being unaware – didn’t know the vaccine was available.

One parent we interviewed spoke about the lack of trusted information. This was also something that was highlighted in our survey by several parents:



“At the GP surgery you are ushered in and out – there’s no time to ask any questions”

“I need information and evidence that it works. There is no research out there to prove it works. I need to know what’s in it.”



They also spoke about receiving three texts but no information on the texts and nowhere they could ask questions about the vaccine.

Most people spoke about practical reasons and making it easier to book an appointment. Although some said it was “easy” to book in, others have struggled to get through to their GP.

Parents stated again that reminders are important. Someone also spoke about drop-in sessions and how this has worked well previously.



“When he was younger, he went to a drop-in clinic ... they had a marquee up and the nurses were there for the day. I think this worked well and don't know why they don't do things like that nowadays.”



Several people spoke about being unaware and the need to raise awareness with parents and guardians.



“Most people with babies and younger children are unaware that toddlers could be given the flu vaccination. Most only become aware when they receive the text message.”



One parent mentioned that they are unlikely to take up the flu vaccination for their two-year-old because they aren't at nursery or mixing with other children. They felt it was more necessary when they started school.

This was also something that was mentioned in our survey by two parents. This could be part of the reason 30% of parents and guardians rated the importance of the vaccination as 3 or below out of 5.

Another parent spoke about feeling positive about vaccinations in general but not about the flu vaccination. This was due to being unwell after it.

Natural immunity was also spoken about again as a reason not to vaccinate.



“I'm not a fan of these different substances entering my child's body. I believe that the body is capable of fighting all the diseases itself, but I do immunise my child for diseases which have been tested a long time ago.”



### **Additional Information**

We also gathered some general anecdotal feedback from groups we went to during the research period.

Many of the themes from this feedback were similar to the interviews:

- Natural immunity
- General apathy
- Vaccine misinformation
- Information and awareness raising
- Practical reasons – getting through to their GP.

However, there were a few different suggestions:

- “It would be great if the vaccination could be offered at toddler groups.”
- “Have sessions at children's centres where parents and children can wait in a non-clinical environment.”
- “Could there be an option of giving the vaccine when people are already going to the GP for another reason, so it reduces the number of trips?”
- “Could it be advertised on social media?”

## Conclusion

We found that there was generally a positive attitude towards flu vaccinations for babies and toddlers. Most parents and guardians have vaccinated their children, or plan to vaccinate.

The key reasons for parents and guardians to vaccinate their babies or toddlers for flu were the ease of booking the appointment, prevention and trusting information from professionals.

For parents who did not vaccinate their babies and toddlers against flu, safety concerns were mentioned as well as their preference for “building natural immunity”.

However, it's clear from our survey that if practical changes are made such as appointment reminders with vaccine information, then this could influence the uptake of the flu vaccination.

Some parents and guardians who felt positive about the vaccination didn't vaccinate their babies and toddlers due to practical reasons.

We also found that clear information and communication with parents and guardians play a key role in vaccination decisions. Some parents and guardians didn't vaccinate their children as they didn't know the "pros and cons" or "what was in the vaccine".

In the semi-structured interviews, parents told us they would like more information about the vaccination. There seems to be a need for clearer and more detailed communication.

It was also clear that the awareness levels varied, with some parents and guardians not knowing it was available.

The most common theme that came out of both the survey and the semi-structured interviews was prioritising their children's health.

## What is happening with the feedback?

The feedback has been shared with decision-makers at DCC's Public Health team and the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB). The data from this survey will help influence the 2024 winter baby and toddler flu vaccination campaign.

## Thank you

Healthwatch Derbyshire would like to thank everyone who took part in this survey. We would also like to thank the DCC Public Health team and our volunteers for helping us produce this survey.



# Disclaimer

The comments outlined in this report should be taken in the context that they are not representative of all young people within Derbyshire but offer useful insight.

It is important to note that the engagement was carried out within a specific time frame and therefore only provides a snapshot of people's views as shared with Healthwatch staff and volunteers.

They are the genuine thoughts, feelings, and issues people shared with Healthwatch Derbyshire. The data should be used in conjunction with, and to complement, other sources of data that are available.

Healthwatch Derbyshire,  
Suite 14,  
Riverside Business Centre,  
Foundry Lane,  
Milford,  
Belper,  
Derbyshire  
DE65 0RN

[www.healthwatchderbyshire.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchderbyshire.co.uk)  
t: 01773 880786  
e: [enquiries@healthwatchderbyshire.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchderbyshire.co.uk)

 @HWDerbyshire  
 /HealthwatchDerbyshire  
 Healthwatch Derbyshire  
 hwderbyshire