

The most concerning Covid symptom of all

Please stop scaring the children

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With many now having caught Covid, vaccinated or not, it is clear the disease is not as it seemed in the now comic videos of people falling over in the streets of Wuhan. In fact, about 40 per cent of those infected have zero symptoms, and many describe little more than the equivalent of a cold or flu.

However, there is one critical human pathology not spoken of amongst the long list of symptoms for which Covid is blamed: the abandonment of critical thinking.

Even now, as a growing list of countries abandon Covid controls, there is enormous reluctance in Australia to subject the Covid response of the last two years, medical and political, to reconsideration.

New South Wales has made the most progress, yet restrictions linger; obligatory vaccination and mask mandates among them. While vaccine certificates are, mostly, no longer required of the NSW public, those who work in aged care or health care, the ambulance service, NSW police, or at airports are fined if they are unvaccinated.

Quite a few big corporations, including BHP and Woolworths, have opted to sack unvaccinated employees, as have some law and accounting firms. The NSW SES and RFS will not allow volunteers to save lives and protect property unless they are vaccinated. Teachers must be vaccinated even though parents need not be vaccinated to enter schools.

On the day NSW Premier Perrottet largely withdrew the requirement for vaccination certificates (15 December 2021), the Chief Justice of the NSW Supreme Court imposed his own. Nobody can access a Supreme Court building unless (at least) double-vaccinated or with a medical exemption. The NSW Local Court, Children's Court and District Court, to their credit, have no such requirement.

When NSW first introduced restrictions on the unvaccinated, their purpose was to create an incentive for more people to get vaccinated. Whether such state coercion can be justified is a good question, but with over 95 per cent of eligible people now vaccinated, one of the highest rates globally, that argument no longer exists. Yet something is preventing us from returning to normality.

Sacking or excluding people who are not vaccinated is a grave matter, for which there should be a rock-solid rationale.

In fact, such a policy fails that test. Covid vaccines are not like smallpox or polio vaccines, which prevent both infection and transmission. They do not protect other people. They can, for a limited period, prevent serious symptoms, but not infection or transmission of the virus. The only beneficiary is the vaccinated person.

That is equally true in health care environments. The notion that the seriously ill or immunocompromised are safer because of a vaccine mandate assumes that the unvaccinated are a source of infection while the vaccinated are not. Health professionals, of all people, ought to know better.

It is similar with mask mandates. Obliging people to wear masks on public transport and in health facilities, for example, does not protect others. Cloth masks have been described as useless by both America's CDC and Dr Colin Axon, adviser to the UK government's advisory group, Sage.

'The public were demanding something must be done, they got masks, it is just a comfort blanket,' Axon said. 'All around the world you can look at mask mandates and superimpose on infection rates, you cannot see that mask mandates made any effect whatsoever.'

There is a simple explanation for this –the gaps between the fibres in the masks are thousands of times bigger than the virus. Unless the virus is carried in large droplets it won't be blocked.

During the Sars pandemic of 2003, caused by a coronavirus closely related to Covid, health authorities warned against claiming masks were an effective protection against the virus. NSW Fair Trading Minister Reba Meagher even warned traders that they would face fines of up to \$100,000 if suggesting masks offered substantial protection from the disease.

Professor Cossart of the Infectious Diseases Department at University of Sydney stated, 'Those masks are only effective so long as they are dry. As soon as they become saturated with the moisture in your breath they stop doing their job and pass on the droplets.' This could take as little as 15 or 20 minutes, she said, after which the mask would need to be changed.

The obvious question is, why was NSW sensible about masks in 2003, but is not now?

The answer is troubling. This pandemic has been characterised by inept public health governance, cowardly political meandering, and an irresponsible, headline-hungry media. Having been fed a diet of doom, otherwise intelligent members of the community have clung to vaccines and masks out of an inability to apply critical cognitive examination.

The country deserves better from our leaders, health bureaucrats and the media. But as anyone who understands government and governance knows, that's a forlorn hope. A mechanism is required to ensure critical thinking is always applied.

One such mechanism would be to routinely, without exception, release all health advice to scrutiny. Whether it is recommending curfews, movement restrictions, school closures, or avoiding pizza boxes and footballs, having the advice publicly available would expose it to challenge and scrutiny. At times, the advice would be supported, and perhaps even enhanced; at others, it would be ridiculed for lacking scientific rigour.

As we have seen, with very rare exception, all the health advice has remained secret and, inevitably, fostered an environment of media exaggeration, bureaucratic hubris, and political cowardice. The result is a legacy of pointless and petty restrictions, with people arbitrarily excluded from society, education and justice, leading to an inability for some to put food on

the table and the entrenchment of distrust in the medical profession, governance and public health.

Beginning with ‘two weeks to flatten the curve’, our lives were brutally disrupted and often significantly damaged by policies lacking transparency and defying reason. The rate at which we retreat from these policies will reflect how much damage our failure to think critically has caused.