




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

COVID-19

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women) (9.53 am): In recent weeks we have seen concerning COVID-19 developments here in Queensland. Firstly, we have seen the emergence of a new strain of COVID known as Pirola. At the same time we are seeing a spike in COVID hospitalisations. Currently there are 146 people in Queensland hospitals with the virus—twice the number of two weeks ago. This number is expected to rise.

The Chief Health Officer has today said that the rise in cases has largely been due to low booster rates in older Queenslanders. I want to stress the importance of getting your COVID booster, especially if you are aged 65 years and over. We cannot become complacent about the risk that COVID still poses to our health so, please, if you are due for your COVID booster, book one in today. It is a simple yet effective way to protect yourself, your family and the community.

Alarming, the low uptake of COVID boosters coincides with a broader trend that we are seeing across Queensland and the country. While the pandemic has subsided, a new threat has emerged. Immunisation rates have begun to go backwards, while vaccine misinformation and fatigue is on the rise. The number of Queenslanders getting the flu shot has lagged in recent years. Childhood vaccination rates are down across almost every age group, and confidence in childhood vaccines has dropped 7½ per cent on pre-pandemic levels. These trends cannot continue. That is why last Friday I brought together health experts, doctors, pharmacists and patients for Queensland's first ever vaccination summit. It was an enlightening event where we heard that COVID has increased vaccine hesitancy. The number of pregnant women getting vaccinated against whooping cough and the flu remains low, despite being crucial for the health of mums and bubs, and there are still too many practical barriers that exist for people to get vaccinated, in particular cost and access.

I want to thank everyone who contributed and helped set the agenda for what comes next. Clearly, we have to better engage with the community about the benefits and the safety of vaccination. I am urging the federal government to play a lead role here. We need to work with healthcare providers, like our GPs and our pharmacists, to ensure they have what they need to vaccinate more people and we need to get better at combating rumours and misinformation on social media. Critically, we need to do more to reduce barriers for so many families. I am so proud that we are already doing this in some spaces, such as making the meningococcal vaccine free for young people in schools. In the coming weeks I look forward to announcing what Queensland will do to increase vaccination rates.