



MEDIA RELEASE

1 February, 2021

Australian Breastfeeding Association to advocate for gender equality in clinical trials at upcoming expert panel on COVID-19 vaccine

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA), Australia's peak body for breastfeeding, is bringing together thought leaders in the field of infant and child feeding in a live digital panel on Wednesday, 3rd February to discuss the forthcoming COVID-19 vaccine and considerations for women who are breastfeeding.

Clinical trials regularly exclude breastfeeding women due to the perceived risk of uncertainty, a decision which results in a critical lack of data on the safety of vaccines and other medical interventions for this group. This often leaves breastfeeding women and their medical providers to decide for themselves whether a vaccination is safe to receive.

With no data available on the forthcoming COVID-19 vaccine and its safety for breastfeeding women, policymakers have been divided in their approach on whether to recommend access to the vaccine. In Australia, where vaccination programs are still being developed, government policy on the vaccine for breastfeeding women is unknown. A [recent announcement](#) from the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) advises that, whilst there is no data, they believe the vaccine is safe for breastfeeding mothers and their babies. This guidance differs from their advice to limit vaccine access for pregnant women. The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) also states that breastfeeding women do not need to cease breastfeeding after receiving the vaccination.

Given this lack of data and conflicting guidelines, both overseas and domestically, the ABA is aiming to ensure clarity for breastfeeding mothers on the COVID-19 vaccine and its rollout through an expert-led discussion. The ABA plans to provide the community with context around the vaccine's mechanisms of action and their personal risk levels, empowering breastfeeding women to make informed decisions when considering the vaccination. This discussion is crucial in raising awareness of the need for further research into vaccines for breastfeeding women and in providing a platform to understand what the vaccine will mean for everyday Australian women and their babies.

The panel will feature some of Australia's leading experts in infant and young child feeding, who are also recognised global experts in the field. Hosted by MC Dr Nisha Khot, OB/Gyn (RANZCOG) the panel includes: Dr Karleen Gribble, Adjunct Associate Professor at the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Western Sydney University; Naomi Hull, ABA's Senior Manager Breastfeeding Information and Research; Professor Lisa Amir from the Judith Lumley Centre at La Trobe University; and Dr Nina Chad, Infant and Young Child Feeding Consultant, World Health Organization.

Discussion will centre on the latest health policy and guidance for breastfeeding mothers, including guidance from the WHO, as well as look at gender issues in clinical trials and assess where future research can fill these gaps. Panellists will also be looking at strategies for effective communication and behaviour change, processes for decision-making, and the importance of keeping mothers and babies together.

In hosting this critical discussion, the ABA demonstrates its ongoing commitment to providing Australian families with reliable and trustworthy information and supporting, educating and advocating for Australian mothers and their babies.

Naomi Hull, ABA's Senior Manager of Breastfeeding Information and Research and one of Wednesday's featured panellists, states,

"The ABA believes that a balanced approach is needed in the provision of vaccine information and communication.

As we work towards our vision of a breastfeeding friendly community, we want to ensure breastfeeding women have all the resources necessary to make an informed decision on the vaccine and ensure the health and safety of both themselves and their baby."

EVENT DETAILS:

Wednesday, 3rd February 2021. Starting at 8pm via Zoom. The event will be recorded and all registered guests will be provided the recording even if they are unable to attend the live panel. Register at: <https://aba.asn.au/covidpanel>

MEDIA CONTACTS:

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About the Australian Breastfeeding Association:

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) is Australia's largest breastfeeding information and support service, providing assistance to more than 80,000 mothers each year. ABA also provides up-to-date information and continuing education for thousands of health professionals working with mothers and babies. It is our vision that breastfeeding is recognised as important by all Australians and is culturally normal. As Australia's leading authority on breastfeeding, we support, educate and advocate for a breastfeeding inclusive society. <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/>

Panel details:

MC - Dr Nisha Khot, Ob/Gyn

Dr Nisha Khot is a Melbourne based obstetrician with appointments at the Royal Women's Hospital and Western Health. She is on the Federal Council for RANZCOG and a board member of Rural Doctors Association of Victoria. She is an educator with interests in undergraduate and postgraduate medical education and inter professional training. Nisha is a passionate advocate for gender equity and intersectional representation.

Speakers-

Dr Karleen Gribble BRurSc PhD. Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Western Sydney University.

COVID-19 policy development regarding infants and their mothers, a tale of weighing risk.

Dr Karleen Gribble is an Adjunct Associate Professor in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Western Sydney University. She has worked in infant and young child feeding in emergencies (IYCF-E) since 2004 and is one of the authors of the Operational Guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies. She has provided advice to multiple humanitarian organisations on policy, training and implementation of IYCF-E programs including UNICEF, UNHCR, World Vision, and Save the Children. She has provided advice to health professionals, emergency responders and government bodies on IYCF-E in countries as diverse as the Philippines, Haiti, Myanmar, Syria, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Canada, and the USA. Karleen is also an Australian Breastfeeding Association Community Educator and Breastfeeding Counsellor.

Ms Naomi Hull, RN, IBCLC, MPH. Senior Manager Breastfeeding Information and Research, Australian Breastfeeding Association.

ABA's response to the pandemic.

Naomi Hull is a Registered Nurse, an International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) and has a Master of Public Health (Nutrition). As well as being a volunteer Breastfeeding Counsellor (Cert IV Breastfeeding Education), Naomi is the Senior Manager for Breastfeeding Information and Research at the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

Professor Lisa Amir. Principal Research Fellow, Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University, and Medical Officer for Lactation, Royal Women's Hospital, VIC, Australia.

COVID-19 vaccination and breastfeeding: What do we know so far?

Professor Lisa Amir, MBBS MMed PhD IBCLC FABM FILCA, is a general practitioner and lactation consultant. She has been continually certified as an IBCLC since 1989. She works in breastfeeding medicine at The Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne, Australia. She is a Principal Research Fellow at the Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University, Australia. She is the author of over 100 peer-reviewed articles, and the primary author of the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine's clinical protocol on mastitis. She is the Editor-in-Chief of the *International Breastfeeding Journal*.

Dr Nina Chad. Infant and Young Child Feeding Consultant, Department of Nutrition and Food Safety, Food and Nutrition Action in Health Systems, World Health Organization.

Should I get a COVID vaccine? Communicating with breastfeeding mothers about vaccination.

Dr Nina Chad is an interdisciplinary health social scientist, focused on prevention of infectious disease and malnutrition in children. Her research centers on developing effective behaviour change communication to improve vaccine acceptance and infant and young child feeding practices. She developed a communication package to support parents' vaccination decisions. Her professional experiences in education, behaviour change counselling, and mother-to-mother breastfeeding support in the community inform her approach to child health research. She is the Infant and Young Child Feeding Consultant to the World Health Organization's Food and Nutrition Actions in Health Systems Unit. She has worked with the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners and as Infant and Young Child Feeding Consultant to Save the Children in Myanmar in 2008. She continues to volunteer as a counsellor, trainer, and assessor for the Australian Breastfeeding Association.