



## **Beyond hesitancy: What parents told us about childhood vaccinations**

A summary report with the real voices of parents and carers  
Neighbourhood health and wellbeing insights

# Contents

Contents ..... 1

About this report ..... 2

Why this matters ..... 2

About the study ..... 2

Resettled families ..... 2

Military families ..... 3

General parents and carers ..... 4

Cross-cutting issues ..... 5

Practical tips for parents and carers ..... 6

Recommendations and next steps ..... 6

# About this report

This summary report is based on the dissertation *Beyond Hesitancy: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Parents' and Carers' Experiences of Childhood Vaccine Uptake in B&NES, Swindon, and Wiltshire*, submitted by Thrisha Krishnakumar for the degree of MSc in Health Psychology at the University of Bath (2024–2025).

The research was undertaken during her placement with The Care Forum (TCF) and Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire. The full dissertation includes detailed methodology, analysis, and extended findings beyond what is presented here: [www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk/dissertation-parents-and-carers-experiences-childhood-vaccine-uptake](http://www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk/dissertation-parents-and-carers-experiences-childhood-vaccine-uptake)

## Why this matters

Childhood vaccinations protect against serious illnesses, but uptake has been falling across England. Parents in Bath & North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire told us their decisions aren't just about science—they're shaped by trust, personal values and how easy it is to get an appointment. This summary shares what we heard, grouped by family circumstances, and includes real quotes so you can hear their voices.

## About the study

We spoke to 10 parents and carers in depth. They included resettled families (such as refugees and asylum seekers), military families, and parents from the wider community. Conversations were analysed to understand common themes and practical barriers.

## Resettled families

Parents who had lived in countries with compulsory vaccination often assumed UK vaccines were mandatory. Trust in clinicians was strong, but unfamiliar systems and language could be barriers.

In parents' words:

**"Back home, it was always compulsory, so I never thought of it as a choice."**

What would help:

- Translated materials and easy access to interpreters during booking and appointments.
- A simple explanation that UK vaccination is voluntary but strongly recommended, with clear steps to book.
- Community outreach sessions with cultural mediators and school/nursery-based clinics.

## Military families

Families described challenges linked to mobility and continuity of care when relocating, which can disrupt appointments and record transfer.

In parents' words:

**"We move a lot, so sometimes records get lost and appointments are missed."**

**"It is hard to keep track when you are posted somewhere new every year."**

What would help:

- Rapid transfer of child vaccination records between regions and services.
- Automatic catch-up invitations following a move.
- Welcome packs for new postings with how-to-book steps and local clinic options.

# General parents and carers

Parents described four big influences: trust and authority; parenting and morality; risk and uncertainty; and how easy it is to access services. Here's what they told us:

## Theme A: Trust and authority

"If the doctor says a vaccine is needed, I do not question it."

"They kept changing the advice, so how do I know what to believe?"

**"I follow the NHS schedule and trust the recommendations from my GP."**

"One week the vaccine was safe, the next week they said something else. It made me lose faith."

"If they can lie about COVID, how can we trust them on anything else?"

"Especially after COVID, I feel like the government does not tell us the whole truth. They have their own agenda."

"I look at my own children, at how they react, and that tells me more than any NHS leaflet."

"My family and friends influence me more than politicians. If they say it worked for them, I believe it."

## Theme B: Parenting and morality

"It is about protecting not just my children but everyone else's too."

**"I would feel guilty if my child gave something to another child who was more vulnerable."**

"I see it as keeping my children safe from something I am not fully convinced about."

"It is not about being careless. It is about being careful in a different way."

"People call you irresponsible, but I think it is the opposite. I am doing what I think is best for my child."

## Theme C: Risk and uncertainty

"Everyone in my WhatsApp group was saying different things. It made me doubt."

"If it is new, I wait to see the results before I decide."

"I was more confident with the older ones. It is the new ones I worry about, because we do not know the long-term."

"My first child had every vaccine, and then she was diagnosed autistic. That timing makes you think."

"I thought about measles. I had it when I was younger, and it was awful, so I wanted my kids protected."

## Theme D: Structure of access

"The phone was always busy. Every day at eight o'clock I tried, and still no appointment."

"It is not that I do not want the vaccine, it is just too complicated to get it."

"I rang and rang, and by the time I got through, the appointments were gone. After a while, you just give up."

"I just booked online, and it was all fine. We went in, no problems at all."

"For autistic children, those clinics are a nightmare. The lights, the noise, the waiting. It just puts you off."

"I wanted to go, but with my son's needs, the setup was not suitable. It felt like they did not think of families like ours."

"We were waiting nearly an hour, with all these people crammed in. My child was already upset before we even got seen."

# Cross-cutting issues

Trust, respectful dialogue, and practical access shape decisions for everyone. Clinic design and booking processes can either reduce or amplify inequalities.

# Practical tips for parents and carers

Ask about online booking, walk-ins or community clinics if phones are busy.

Tell staff about your child's needs and request reasonable adjustments (quieter slots, shorter waits).

Use NHS/UKHSA pages for current vaccine information; write down questions for your nurse or GP.

Missed an appointment? You can rebook—catch-up vaccines are available.

## Recommendations and next steps

### **Build trust: Provide clear, consistent, and transparent communication**

Healthwatch:

- Share consistent messaging through Healthwatch channels and community networks.
- Collect and publish parent stories to normalise discussion and reduce stigma.

ICB:

- Ensure all GP surgeries and community health teams use the same messaging.
- Train staff in clear, empathetic communication techniques.

### **Respect concerns: Avoid judgment; engage with parents' values and questions**

Healthwatch:

- Organise listening sessions or Q&A clinics in community venues.
- Develop scripts for volunteers and engagement staff that acknowledge parental concerns before offering advice.
- Share stories from other parents to normalise discussion and reduce stigma.

ICB:

- Use feedback from Healthwatch to inform service improvements.
- Support staff with empathy-based communication training.

### **Improve access: Offer flexible booking, extended clinic hours, and sensory-friendly environments**

Healthwatch (support role):

- Promote new booking options and pop-up clinics through community networks when developed.
- Identify barriers through parent feedback.

ICB:

- Introduce online and phone booking options with evening/weekend slots.
- Pilot pop-up clinics in schools and community centres.
- Adapt clinic spaces with quiet rooms and visual aids for children with additional needs.

### **Address inequalities: Monitor uptake by deprivation and ethnicity to target support where it's needed most**

Healthwatch:

- Partner with local community organisations to reach under-served groups.
- Share community intelligence to identify priority areas.

ICB:

- Build a dashboard to track vaccination uptake by postcode and demographic data.
- Provide mobile clinics in areas of low uptake.





# healthwatch

in Bath & North East Somerset, Swindon & Wiltshire

Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset  
The Vassall Centre  
Gill Avenue  
Bristol  
BS16 2QQ

[www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk)

t: 01225 232 401

e: [info@healthwatchbathnes.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbathnes.co.uk)

X [@hwatchbathnes](https://twitter.com/hwatchbathnes)

f [Facebook.com/healthwatchbanes](https://www.facebook.com/healthwatchbanes)