

# CARE

COVID-19 Attitudes, Resilience  
and Epidemiology

## CARE Survey 6: COVID-19 rapid antigen testing and changes over time

Research commissioned by the Victorian Department of Health



## **Suggested citation:**

Niamh Meagher, Katitza Marinkovic Chavez, Lauren Carpenter, Colin McDougall, Stephanie Fletcher-Lartey, David Price, Margaret Hellard, Lisa Gibbs, Freya Shearer. “CARE Survey 6: COVID-19 rapid antigen testing and changes over time.” Report to the Victorian Department of Health. University of Melbourne. December 2021.

## **Acknowledgements:**

Participants responding to the survey

Optimise study team

YouGov





# SURVEY SUMMARY

- 1,019 participants surveyed
- Survey conducted from 6th to 15th December, 2021
- Cross-sectional comparisons of each survey of approximately 1,000 participants are presented to track changes over time
- A significant proportion of the December sample are repeat participants:
  - 591 completed three surveys (July, September and December)
  - 205 completed two surveys (September and December)
  - 223 completed one survey (December only)
- Results have been weighted by age, gender and location, and are representative of Victorian adults (18+ years)

# CONTEXT OF SURVEY

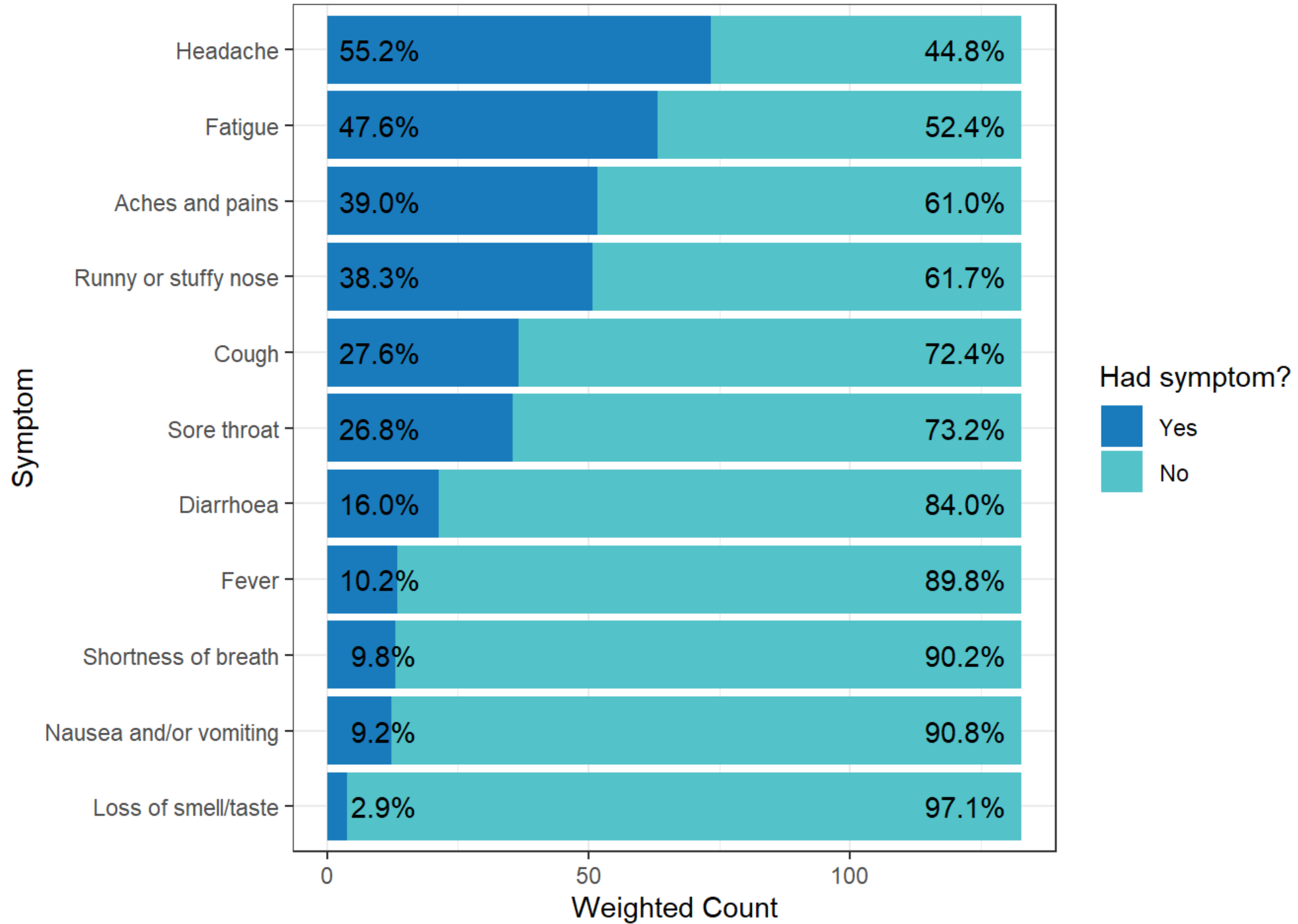
- Increased availability of self-administered rapid antigen testing (RAT)
- Very high coverage of two dose vaccination course (>90% of 12+ years)
- Updates to the recommendations for 3<sup>rd</sup> doses of COVID-19 vaccines
  - Interval between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> doses shortened to 5 months
- TGA and ATAGI approve use of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine in 5 to 11 year old children
  - Rollout of vaccines for this age group announced for 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2022
- Easing of public health and social measures
- Changes in border restrictions and testing requirements for travel
- Early stages of emergence of the Omicron variant in Australia



**TESTING**

# SYMPTOMS EXPERIENCED

- Half (49.9%) of all participants had at least one COVID-19 symptom in the previous 4 weeks (46.6% in September)
- The most commonly reported symptoms were:
  - Headache (22.8%)
  - Fatigue (20.6%)
  - Aches and pains (19.5%)
- 113 (11.1%) of participants reported 2+ key symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, loss of smell or taste)
  - Compared to 84 (8.1%) in September
  - 12 (1.1%) participants reported both fever and cough



# SYMPTOMS & TESTING

- 376 (36.9%) participants reported having at least one symptom and did not get tested (37.3% in September)
- Reasons for not getting tested were broadly similar to the previous survey
- Compared to participants in the September survey:
  - More participants believed that their symptoms were unrelated to COVID (37.9% vs. 32.3%)
  - Fewer participants chose self-isolation instead of testing (2.8% vs. 7.0%)
- There is still a significant minority (11.0%) who believe they don't need to get tested any more because they are vaccinated



# TOP REASONS FOR NOT GETTING TESTED WHEN SYMPTOMATIC

	<b>December 2021</b>	<b>September 2021</b>
Thought symptoms were not related to COVID (e.g. allergies, common cold)	37.9%	32.3%
Other	30.0%	32.9%
I have been vaccinated for COVID-19 so I don't think a test is necessary	11.0%	11.6%
Symptoms were only mild	10.8%	8.8%
Chose to stay home (self-isolate) instead	2.8%	7.0%
Time constraints (e.g. work/care responsibilities)	1.9%	1.0%
Waiting time for test too long	1.8%	0.7%

# OTHER REASONS FOR NOT TESTING

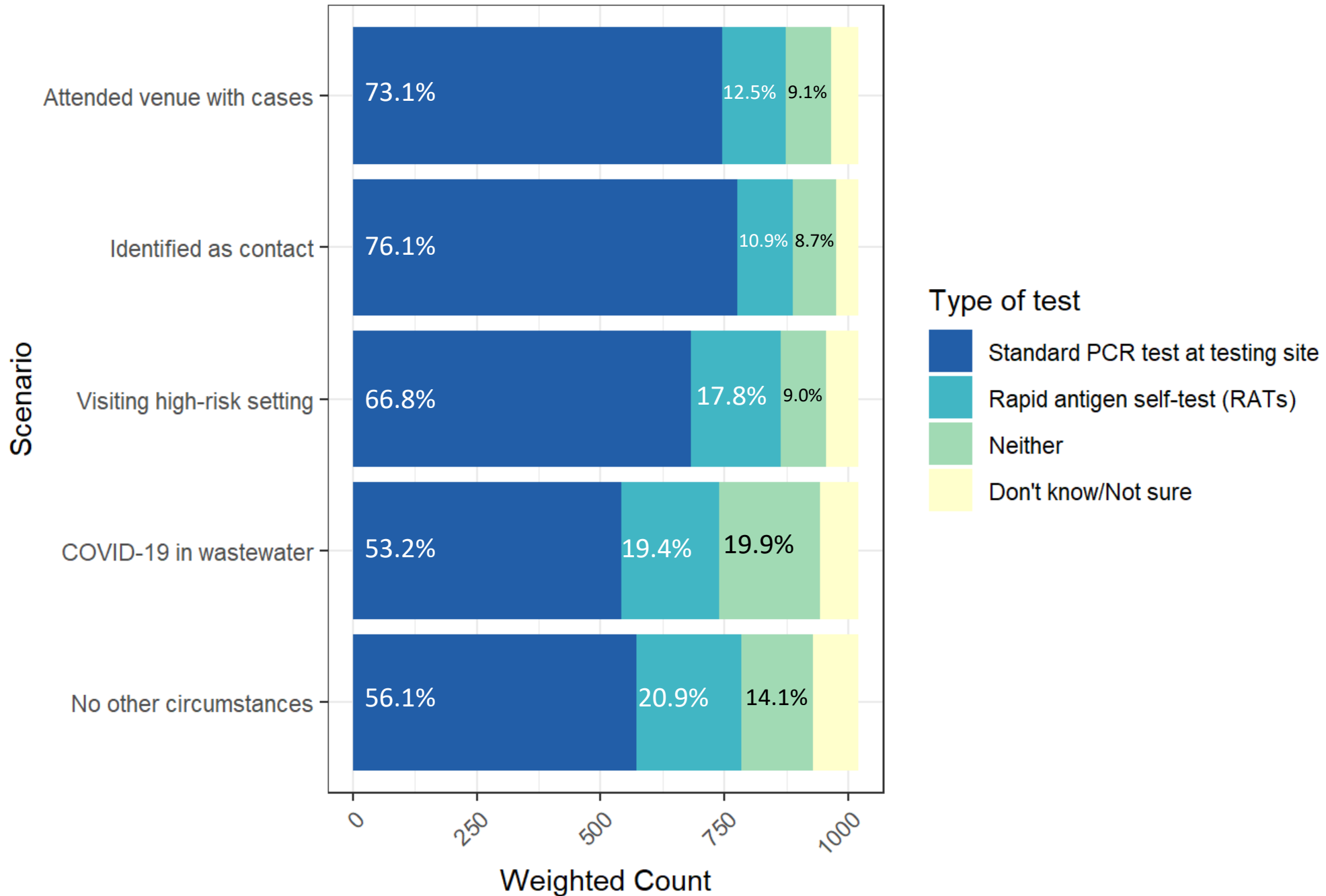
- Other responses indicate that when making a decision about testing, participants consider:
  - Their health status: *“These symptoms are normal for me as I have a chronic medical condition, if they were to change I would then get tested”*
  - Acute health conditions: *“I am a seasonal asthmatic and get hay fever”*
  - Their risk of exposure: *“Have had no contact with anyone whatsoever. I have not left the house and no one has been here”*
  - RAT results: *“Used at home test that returned negative”*
  - Vaccination status: *“I am fully vaccinated”*



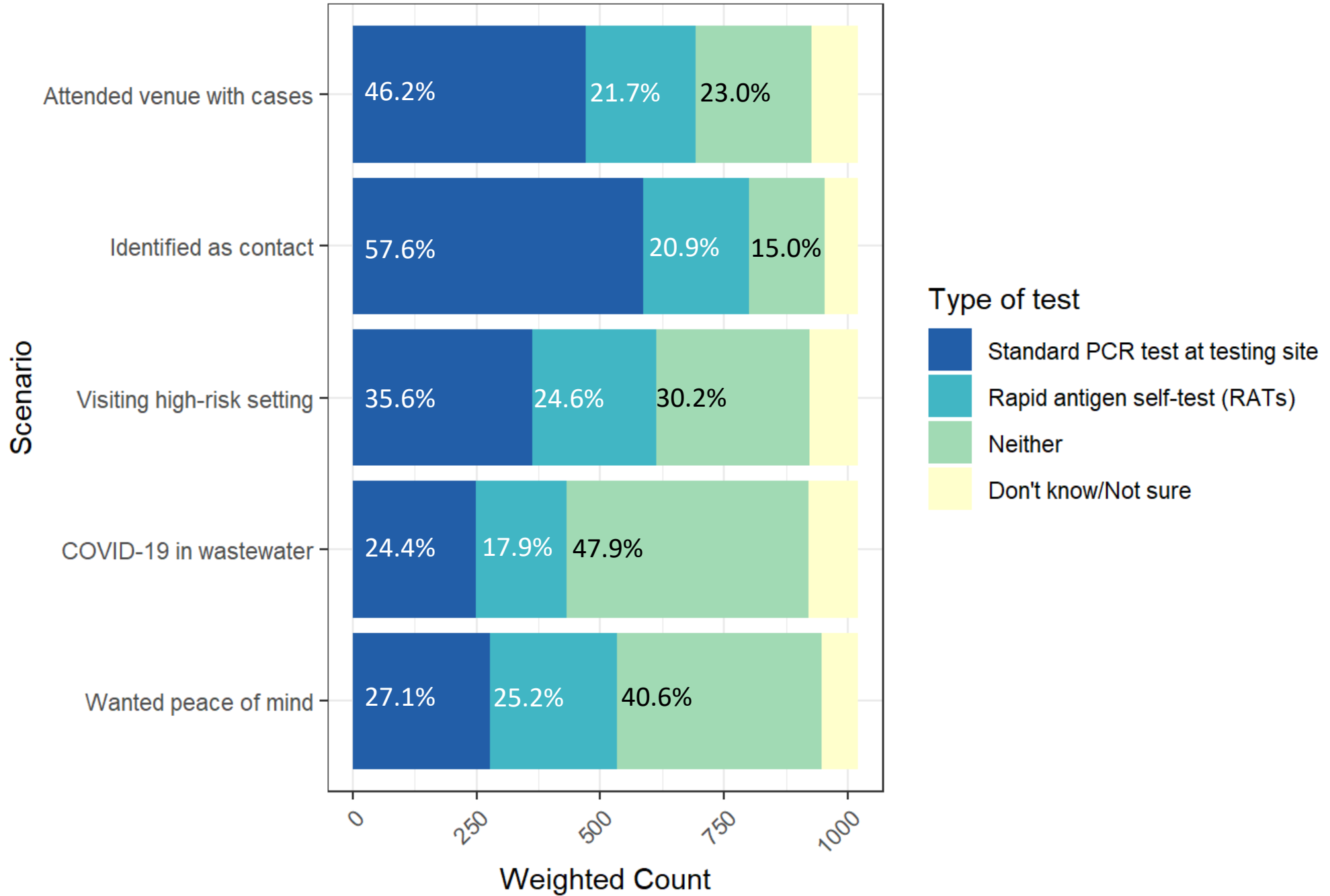
# RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING

- The majority of participants would choose PCR testing over rapid antigen tests (RATs) in most situations
- Individuals with no symptoms were more likely to report using a RAT than individuals with symptoms
- Experience of symptoms remains a major driver of test seeking behaviour
- 89.7% of participants who would use a RAT indicated they would seek confirmatory PCR testing if the RAT was positive

# If I experienced COVID-19 symptoms AND...



# If I experienced no COVID-19 symptoms AND...



# PCR FOLLOW UP AFTER RAT

- Examples of reasons provided by participants who indicated they would not seek a confirmatory PCR test if they got a positive RAT:
  - *“I would assume I was positive and self isolate”*
  - *“Because I already have a result”*
  - *“I trust the test. It wouldn’t be available if it wasn’t accurate”*
  - *“Too time consuming”*
  - *“Don’t like things shoved up my nose”*
  - *“Because they are not trustworthy”*
  - *“Because I don’t want to get put into a camp or put under house arrest if I test positive”*

## For more information on:

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