

Health Care Provider Discussion Guide: Building Confidence in COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines

Open the Discussion

APPROACH Start the conversation as early as possible with your patient.
ASK "Have you thought about whether or not you will get the COVID-19 vaccine when you are eligible?"
INTERNAL REMINDERS

- ✓ Do not assume vaccine acceptance from your patient.
- ✓ Encourage sharing what they have been hearing, positive and negative.
- ✓ People often remember the earliest information they hear, so it is important to have this discussion early.

Unsure *Patient is reluctant to make a firm decision*

APPROACH Acknowledge and address concerns; don't provide reassurance prematurely. (See page 2 for common concerns and FAQs.)
SAY "Sounds like you're feeling unsure. Tell me more about what you've been hearing about the vaccine."
 "I also wondered/heard about that. Here's what I learned after looking into it."
INTERNAL REMINDERS

- ✓ Be empathetic and thank patient for sharing concerns.
- ✓ Link vaccine acceptance to patient's hopes and goals.
- ✓ Cite your trustworthy sources of information. To facilitate trust, acknowledge uncertainty where it exists.
- ✓ Allow the patient to bring family or other community members into the decision-making process, if requested.
- ✓ Reinforce your personal decision to get vaccinated.

Opposed *Patient declines vaccine*

APPROACH Acknowledge and ask permission to learn more. (See page 2 for common concerns and FAQs.)
ASK "OK, I'd like to learn more about what is most concerning to you. Would you be willing to share your concerns about the vaccine?"
Consider your patient's unique viewpoint. They may have concerns due to personal experiences in the health care system or mistrust because of the history of abuse in the medical system due to racism and other forms of discrimination. They could also be concerned about safety because of the speed of the trials, their age or disability, disinformation, or mistrust of the government.
INTERNAL REMINDERS

- ✓ Your influence as a messenger matters, you are viewed as a trusted source of information. Ask permission to share your recommendation.
- ✓ If you had similar questions or concerns, share your decision-making thought process.
- ✓ To facilitate trust, acknowledge uncertainty where it exists.
- ✓ Reinforce your personal decision to get vaccinated.
- ✓ Link vaccine acceptance to patient's hopes and goals.

FOLLOW-UP After addressing concerns, provide strong recommendation for vaccination and ask again about willingness to get vaccinated.

Yes
Patient wants vaccination

Inclined *Patient is interested in vaccination*

APPROACH Affirm and recommend next step.
SAY "I'm glad we had this discussion and I appreciate that you shared your concerns with me today. Making an informed decision is important."

ENCOURAGE AN ACTION STEP

- ✓ Vaccinate same day, or schedule vaccine appointment.
- ✓ If not eligible yet, discuss eligibility timeline for the vaccine. If possible, contact them when you know they are eligible.
- ✓ Ask them to read information you provide them.
- ✓ Ask them to share the information they learned to support family and friends in making the same decision, if they feel comfortable doing so.

Refusing *Patient is not interested in further discussion*

APPROACH Advise and educate (alternative resources); provide opportunity to revisit discussion and offer additional resources from trusted sources.
SAY "This is definitely your decision. If you have any questions at all, I am here for you."
ASK "Would it be helpful for me to provide more information?"
PROVIDE INFORMATION

- ✓ One sheet handout (variety of separate topics) addressing any concerns that may have been stated.
- ✓ Websites with culturally-appropriate information.
- ✓ Phone number to call with any questions if they want to talk later.

Common Concerns & Example Responses

They've experienced racism or faced another form of discrimination when receiving medical care.

"Your experience sounds frustrating and hurtful. I've heard from other patients about negative experiences they've had when getting medical care, and I realize that discrimination exists in health care. It upsets me that this is still happening."

After listening and further exploring the patient's concerns, consider: "The vaccine is strongly recommended, but completely voluntary. I only want to make sure that you get the protection/care you need."

They mention harmful medical practices or experiments on Black and Indigenous people in the past.

"You're absolutely right. The history of medical harm should not be ignored. I acknowledge that scientists engaged in many harmful and racist practices in the name of medicine. We are trying to handle the COVID-19 vaccine differently and trying to be as transparent as possible. I want to make sure this feels like the right decision for you."

They share concerns about the vaccine that aren't factual.

"I've heard others share similar concerns, so you aren't alone in feeling that way. Would it be OK if I shared my medical perspective on this issue?"

They share concerns about politics or the government's involvement.

"You are right, it has gotten political. Would it be OK if I shared my medical perspective on this issue?" If granted permission: "I've looked at the results, and this vaccine does really protect people from COVID. I want you to have the benefit of it."

They share frustrations about not knowing when they will be eligible.

"It must be frustrating to not know when you'll be able to get vaccinated."

After listening and further exploring the patient's concerns, consider: "As we get more vaccine, more people will be able to be vaccinated, and everyone will be able to get vaccinated at some point. The vaccine has been going to those at highest risk first."

Frequently Asked Questions & Example Responses

Do you think I should get vaccinated?

"I strongly recommend you get vaccinated. The vaccine will help protect you from getting COVID-19. If you still get infected after you get vaccinated, the vaccine may prevent serious illness. By getting vaccinated, you may also help protect people around you."

How much does it cost?

"The vaccine is provided at no cost."

Do I have to show proof of citizenship to get the vaccine?

"You do not need to show proof of citizenship to get the vaccine. Regardless of citizenship or immigration status, all eligible people living or working in Washington can get vaccinated."

What are the side effects?

"The most common side effects are a sore arm, tiredness, headache, and muscle pain. These symptoms are a sign that the vaccine is prompting an immune response as intended. For most people, these side effects occurred within two days of getting the vaccine and lasted about a day. Side effects were more common after the second dose than the first dose."

How did they make and test the vaccines so quickly?

"Scientists have been working on this mRNA technology for two decades, so it's been a long time in the making. Typically, vaccine development requires much time for fundraising to complete all the steps. This time, funding was not a barrier as the whole world was invested in finding a safe option for prevention of coronavirus disease. The vaccines went through the same rigorous three phase clinical trials process as all other vaccines."

What ingredients are in the vaccine?

"The vaccines contain the active ingredient, messenger RNA (mRNA), along with fat, salts, and sugars to protect the mRNA and help it work better in the body. You may see some rumors and untrue ingredients listed online or in social media. These are generally myths. (Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines do not contain any egg proteins, gluten, pork products, metals, tracking devices, or fetal material)."

Is it safe? Was it tested in people like me?

"The FDA has authorized these vaccines now after reviewing a lot of evidence carefully. Independent experts confirmed that they met high safety standards. About 30% of U.S. participants in the vaccine trials were Hispanic, African American, Asian or Native American and about half were older adults. There were no significant safety concerns identified in these or any other groups."

Can I get the vaccine if I am pregnant or am planning to have a baby one day?

"Based on what we know about how these vaccines work, experts believe they are unlikely to pose a risk for pregnant women. However, there is limited information about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines during pregnancy. You may choose to get vaccinated when you are eligible. We can talk through this decision together."

Can the vaccine cause me to get COVID or alter my DNA?

"No. COVID-19 mRNA vaccines do not change or interact with your DNA in any way. mRNA vaccines teach our body's cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response. That immune response and making antibodies is what protects us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies."

For other frequently asked questions, visit: www.doh.wa.gov/covidvaccine/faq



The best way for your patient to get up-to-date information about when and how to get vaccinated is by visiting the Washington State Department of Health website CovidVaccineWA.org or by calling the Department of Health phone line **1-800-525-0127**, then press #. (For interpretive services, say your language when the call is answered.)

Adapted from:

1. Communication skills for the COVID vaccine. VitalTalk. vitaltalk.org/guides/communication-skills-for-the-covid-vaccine/. Published January 8, 2021.
2. Gagneur A. Motivational interviewing: A powerful tool to address vaccine hesitancy. Can Commun Dis Rep. 2020;46(4):93-97. Published 2020 Apr 2. doi:10.14745/ccdr.v46i04a06
3. Opel DJ, Lo B, Peek ME. Addressing Mistrust About COVID-19 Vaccines Among Patients of Color. Ann Intern Med. Published online February 9, 2021 at [acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M21-0055](https://doi.org/10.7326/M21-0055). doi:10.7326/m21-0055