

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 most updated COVID-19 vaccine?"

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.

Patient declines vaccine

Opposed

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 due to 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.
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.

Patient is not interested in further discussion

Refusing

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.

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 shared that they believe there is no point in getting vaccinated if they can still get infected.

"I understand. Although there is still a chance of COVID-19 infection after vaccination, the vaccines were designed to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 and are still successful at doing so. If you do get sick after you're fully vaccinated, you will still have some benefit from the vaccine because you are more likely to only get a mild case instead of a serious case."

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 expressed concern that they don't want to be a research experiment.

"I understand your hesitation, but vaccine developers didn't skip any testing steps following the appropriate safety measures including a rigorous three phase clinical trials process with very clear outcomes. The technology used for the COVID-19 vaccine has been studied for decades. There have been over 13 billion vaccine doses administered safely worldwide and there are very strong vaccine safety systems to catch any warning signs early."

Frequently Asked Questions & Example Responses

Do I still need to get vaccinated? Is COVID-19 still a threat?

"Decreasing rates of infection and hospitalization and high vaccination rates have allowed us to move into a new recovery phase of the pandemic including lifting the statewide mask mandate in many indoor settings, but everyone should still continue to use COVID-19 measures such as staying up to date on vaccination. COVID-19 is still prevalent and I strongly recommend you get vaccinated. The vaccine will help protect against serious illness and hospitalization from COVID-19 and may also protect people around you."

Should I get vaccinated even if I already had COVID-19?

"Yes, I strongly recommend you get vaccinated despite previously contracting COVID-19 but you should wait to receive the vaccine until after you recover and complete your isolation period. For maximum effectiveness, individuals who recently had COVID-19 may consider delaying COVID-19 vaccination by 3 months from the start of their symptoms or positive test. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine after recovering from COVID-19 infection provides added protection to your immune system. People who already had COVID-19 and do not get vaccinated after their recovery are more likely to get COVID-19 again than those who get vaccinated after their recovery."

Is it safe to receive other vaccines at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine?

"Yes. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) changed their recommendations on May 12, 2021. You can now get a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time that you get other vaccines."

You do not need to schedule other recommended vaccines separately from COVID-19 vaccination. A COVID-19 vaccine appointment is another opportunity to get caught up on all recommended vaccines."

What are the side effects?

"Like other vaccines, the most common side effects are a sore arm, tiredness, headache, and muscle pain, which were generally reported to be mild to moderate in severity and occurred within two days after vaccination, and most went away within one to two days. These symptoms are a sign that the vaccine is prompting an immune response as intended. The health risks if you are infected with COVID-19 are much higher than the risk of vaccine side effects."

Do COVID-19 mRNA vaccines change your DNA? What's 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. COVID-19 mRNA vaccines do not contain any egg proteins, gluten, pork products, metals, tracking devices, or fetal material. COVID-19 mRNA vaccines also do not change or alter 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."

What is Myocarditis and is there a connection to COVID-19 vaccination?

"Myocarditis (and pericarditis) are terms to describe inflammation in or around the heart. The body's immune system can often cause this inflammation in response to an infection, such as viruses. Myocarditis is not very common and rarely fatal, with less than 200,000 cases in the United States each year and less than 2% of these cases fatal. The risk of myocarditis after COVID-19 vaccination is extremely rare, but there have been a few reported cases. There have been no deaths from myocarditis determined to be caused by COVID-19 vaccination in the United States. An individual is more likely to develop myocarditis after infection with COVID-19 than from the vaccine."

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

"COVID-19 vaccination is strongly recommended for people who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or trying to get pregnant. Pregnant and recently pregnant people are more likely to get severely ill with COVID-19 compared with non-pregnant people. There is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines cause female or male fertility problems and the ingredients and antibodies developed following COVID-19 vaccination have not been found to cause any problems with becoming pregnant. In fact, some studies show that a vaccinated parent may pass protective antibodies against COVID-19 along to their baby through pregnancy and lactation."

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



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1. Communication skills for the COVID vaccine. VitalTalk. vitaltalk.org/guides/communication-skills-for-the-covid-vaccine/. Published 1/8/2021.
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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 [doi:10.7326/M21-0055](https://doi.org/10.7326/M21-0055). doi:10.7326/m21-0055