

Tips for talking about COVID-19 vaccination with patients

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, there are still important conversations to be had with patients about receiving COVID-19 vaccinations. Some unvaccinated individuals may yet change their minds. Booster shots are available for most of the population and critical for continued protection.

To support you in these discussions, we have created some tips and talking points that may make them easier and hopefully more successful. Overall, the goal of the conversation is to validate the feelings behind vaccine resistance, but at the same time to educate on the strong evidence of the benefit of vaccination. Avoiding serious illness will enable them to work productively, attend school, and enjoy time with family and friends.

Even if patients do not immediately agree to being vaccinated, if they have a positive experience with you, they may decide later to do so. Talk to your patients about their goals and link receiving vaccinations to achieving those goals.

Starting the conversation

- *What steps are you taking to support your immune system against the coronavirus?*
- *Do you have any questions I might answer about the available COVID-19 vaccines?*
- *What are your thoughts about the COVID-19 vaccination options?*
- *Did you know that you are due for a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot?*
- *Are you aware that the vaccine is safe for children and protects them against serious illness?*

Responding to concerns

If patients say they are worried about experiencing adverse effects from the vaccines:

1. General concerns

I have heard other people say that they were worried, too. Can you tell me a little more about your concerns?

2. Vaccine safety

- *It's natural to have questions about new vaccines. However, the people who developed these have been working on them for a long time – about two decades, in fact, and the COVID-19 vaccines have now been in use for over a year.*
- *The COVID-19 vaccines are meant for everyone. They have been tested on people of all different backgrounds and administered to millions of people, of all races and ethnicities.*

3. Side effects

- *While it's true there are some side effects, in most cases they are very mild, such as soreness at the injection site or feeling tired for a day or so. The vaccines have been administered to millions of people now, with very few serious adverse reactions. Thanks to the vaccines, the rates of people being hospitalized or dying from coronavirus have decreased significantly.*
- *If you work Monday through Friday, and you make your appointment to get vaccinated after work on Friday or early Saturday, you will have the weekend to recover from the mild side effects of the vaccine. You risk missing many days of work if you catch COVID-19.*

4. Mistrust of government

I have noticed that many people of differing political opinions agree about getting vaccinated. I have been vaccinated myself. Have you talked with friends, family members or people at your work or church who have been vaccinated? What do they say?

5. Belief that the pandemic is over

- *We all wish the pandemic were over; but people are still getting sick. While it's true that some people are at greater risk than others, anyone can still catch COVID-19 and have long-term struggles with it. Getting vaccinated is still the best way to reduce your risk of hospitalization.*
- *Because the virus continues to mutate, we are still seeing a high number of COVID-19 cases, even a few among people who are vaccinated. Getting vaccinated or receiving a booster shot can reduce your likelihood of experiencing a severe case.*

6. Belief that having had COVID is enough protection

Studies have shown that the vaccine provides better protection than having had the virus. People can and do get COVID twice.

7. Hesitancy to get a booster

- *Even if you have received your initial course of vaccination, you need to get a booster shot to maintain your immunity.*
- *Adults who received the Janssen (or Johnson & Johnson) vaccine should receive a booster at least two months after their shot. Pfizer or Moderna is preferred.*
- *Adults who received the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine may receive a booster of Pfizer or Moderna at least five months after their second shot.*
- *Teenagers (ages 12 to 17) must receive the Pfizer vaccine.*

8. Difficulty finding the vaccine

If vaccines are not available in your office, patients can be referred to retail pharmacies, public health departments and also to www.myturn.ca.gov.