

# Pediatric Provider Discussion Guide: Building Parental/Guardian Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccination

## Open the Discussion

**APPROACH** Start the conversation as early as possible with the parent/guardian.

**ASK** "Have you thought about whether or not you will get your child vaccinated against COVID-19?"

**INTERNAL REMINDERS:**

- ✓ Do not assume vaccine acceptance from the parent/guardian.
- ✓ 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

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

*Parent/guardian 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. What concerns are keeping you from getting the vaccine for your child?"

**Consider the parent/guardian's unique viewpoint.** They may have concerns due to personal experiences in the health care system or mistrust because of 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 child's 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 parent/guardian's hopes and goals.

**FOLLOW-UP** Thank them for sharing their concerns with you and ask again about willingness to get their child vaccinated.



### Yes

*Parent/guardian wants vaccination*

### Inclined

*Parent/guardian 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.

*Parent/guardian 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 and your child."

**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 share concerns about fertility or developmental concern with vaccinating children before they reach puberty.

"The COVID-19 vaccine has been monitored closely and there is no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccine causes female or male fertility problems as well as no evidence that it will affect puberty. The ingredients and antibodies developed following the COVID-19 vaccination have not been found to cause any problems with becoming pregnant. Professional medical organizations serving people of reproductive age, including adolescents emphasize that it strongly recommended for all to receive the vaccine."

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

"I understand. Although there is still a chance of breakthrough 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 your child does get sick after they're fully vaccinated, they will still have some benefit from the vaccine because they may only get a mild case instead of a serious case."

### They expressed concern that they don't want their child 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 12 billion vaccine doses administered safely worldwide and there are very strong vaccine safety systems to catch any warning signs early."

### They've shared that their child experienced racism or faced another form of discrimination.

"I'm sorry that happened to your child. It was horrible and wrong. Your experience sounds frustrating and hurtful." After listening and further exploring their concerns, consider saying: "The vaccine will help prevent your child from getting really sick from COVID-19. It is strongly recommended, but completely voluntary."

### 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. Scientists have engaged in many harmful and racist practices in the name of medicine. The COVID-19 vaccine is being handled very differently. Can I tell you what I know about the vaccine and the vaccine trials? I want to make sure this feels like the right decision for you."



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## Frequently Asked Questions & Example Responses

### Is COVID-19 vaccination safe for my child?

"Yes, the vaccine is considered very safe for children, and I strongly recommend getting your child vaccinated against COVID-19. The FDA approved emergency use authorization based on extensive clinical trials showing the vaccine was safe and effective. No serious side effects were detected in clinical trials of the vaccine in youth and the U.S. has very strong vaccine safety systems to catch any warning signs early."

### How severe is COVID-19 in children?

"Children can be infected with COVID-19, get sick or die from COVID-19, spread COVID-19 to others, and get serious complications from COVID-19. New COVID-19 variants are more dangerous and infectious to children than the original strains. Since the beginning of the pandemic, over 13 million children in the U.S. have gotten COVID-19 and new COVID-19 variant surges led to peak COVID-19 hospitalizations among youth. Vaccination is the best way to keep children healthy and safe."

### What are common side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine in children?

"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. Side effects were more common after the second dose than the first dose. These symptoms are a sign that the vaccine is prompting an immune response as intended. The health risks if a child is infected with COVID-19 are much higher than the risk of vaccine side effects."

### How long does COVID-19 vaccination protection last and does it protect against infection of new variants?

"Scientists are continuing to monitor how long COVID-19 vaccine protection lasts. Recent studies show that protection against the virus may decrease over time, but vaccines are still preventing against serious illness, hospitalizations, and death from COVID-19. This reduction in protection has led CDC to recommend that everyone ages 5 years and older get a booster shot after completing their primary vaccination series."

### 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."

### Does the COVID-19 vaccine change my child's 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 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."

### Does my child need to get vaccinated if they already had COVID-19?

"Yes, your child should still get the COVID-19 vaccine even if they already had COVID-19 but they should wait to receive the vaccine until after they recover and complete their isolation period. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine after they recover from COVID-19 infection provides added protection to their immune systems. 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."

For more information and resources, visit: [vaccinatewa.org/kids](https://vaccinatewa.org/kids)



The best way for parents/guardians to get up-to-date information about when and how to get their child vaccinated is by visiting [vaccinatewa.org/kids](https://vaccinatewa.org/kids) 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/](https://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 [doi.org/10.7326/M21-0055](https://doi.org/10.7326/M21-0055). doi:10.7326/m21-0055