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 an updated 2023-2024 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.

**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 provided.
- Ask them to share the information they learned to support family and friends in making the same decision, if they feel comfortable doing so.

**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 pregnancy status, 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.

**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.
### Frequently Asked Questions & Example Responses

#### Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I’m pregnant, lactating or planning to become pregnant?

Yes, data show that COVID-19 vaccines are safe during pregnancy. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), and Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) recommend the COVID-19 vaccine for people who are pregnant, lactating, or planning to get pregnant.

#### Is the vaccine safe for people who are pregnant?

Yes, you can get vaccinated if you are pregnant, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends the vaccine for pregnant people. There is no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccine causes any problems with pregnancy, the development of your baby, birth, or fertility.

#### Why do I need to be vaccinated against COVID-19? Is COVID-19 really that bad for pregnant people?

It is very important to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Getting COVID-19 while pregnant can lead to more severe illness and increase your risk for needing hospitalization due to complications. COVID-19 can also impact your developing baby and increase your risk for preterm birth or stillbirth.

#### Can the COVID-19 vaccine cause birth defects?

**No.** It is unlikely that the COVID-19 vaccine causes birth defects. Studies have found that birth defect rates among people who received the COVID-19 vaccine are around/below the average rates for birth defects in the general population. This means that the COVID-19 vaccine is not currently linked to cause birth defects.

#### Can the COVID-19 vaccine cause a miscarriage or stillbirth?

**No.** Rates of miscarriage after COVID-19 vaccination are among the standard rate for miscarriage or stillbirth among the general population. There is no evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 vaccine causes miscarriage or stillbirth at any rate higher than the expected average.

#### How does COVID-19 vaccination protect my baby if I am breastfeeding?

Breast milk is known to protect infants against numerous infections by passing protective antibodies from the parent to the infant. Many studies have shown that breast milk from individuals vaccinated against flu and other diseases while pregnant contains protective antibodies that can be passed to the infant. Recent studies have shown that there may be protective antibodies against COVID-19 transferred in breast milk following COVID-19 vaccination.

### What is the best time in pregnancy to get the vaccine?

**Any time, and the sooner the better!** It is safe for you and your baby to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at any stage in pregnancy. Given the risks of COVID-19 in pregnancy and complications for your health and your baby’s health, the sooner you can get vaccinated, the more protected you both will be.

### What if I am vaccinated and get a COVID-19 infection in pregnancy?

COVID-19 vaccination is effective at reducing the risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 during pregnancy. If you are to develop a COVID-19 infection, your disease is likely to be very mild and, in some cases, people have no symptoms at all. This means that your vaccine worked—it prevented a severe disease that could’ve caused a bad outcome in pregnancy or death.

### There is so much conflicting information out there about vaccine safety. How can I tell what’s accurate?

There has been so much conflicting information online, especially in the media. There are many techniques to identifying misinformation. First, identify the source of the information. Is it reputable? Sources like the CDC, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, or the Society for Maternal and Fetal Medicine are scientifically credible organizations. If it’s difficult to assess, always feel free to ask your OB provider. They are on your care team and happy to help you find accurate and trusted information about the COVID-19 vaccine. Second, find coverage on the topic from multiple sources. What do multiple experts, outlets, and organizations say about the topic? If you are unable to find the topic on multiple sources, it is likely that it is not true.

For more information on COVID-19 misinformation identification, visit WA DOH YouTube channel, youtube.com/user/WADepartmentofHealth

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**For other frequently asked questions, visit:** [www.doh.wa.gov/covidvaccine/faq](http://www.doh.wa.gov/covidvaccine/faq)

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**Some questions adapted from One Vax, Two Lives and other existing DOH Materials.**

**Resources:**

- One Vax Two Lives
- COVID-19 Vaccines While Pregnant or Breastfeeding (cdc.gov)
- Vaccines During and After Pregnancy | CDC
- Health Care Provider Discussion Guide: Building Confidence in COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines (wa.gov)