

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 or any boosters 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.

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 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.

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 for any boosters 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.

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.

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 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 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 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're worried that pharmaceutical companies rushed the production of the vaccine for financial gain.

"The COVID-19 vaccine was developed quickly, but the clinical trials to examine the safety and efficacy were not rushed. Vaccine development and testing often takes years because there is a lot of bureaucratic and administrative hurdles that often take a long time. Due to the pressing public need, these administrative blocks were minimized without compromising the many months needed to conduct thorough testing."

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 12 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

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 still birth 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 breakthrough 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 breakthrough infection, your disease is likely to be very mild and, in some cases, people have no symptoms at all with a breakthrough infection. 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](https://www.youtube.com/user/WADepartmentofHealth)

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

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

Resources: