Discussion Guide for Building Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccines for Immigrants and Refugees

Conversations about the COVID-19 vaccines with your community members and clients may take many different forms and may happen in many different settings. Below you will find a proposed flow for those conversations.

Start the Conversation

Have you thought about whether or not you will get vaccinated against COVID-19?

✓ Yes, I will get it.

I don’t know.

Sounds like you’re not quite sure. Tell me more about what you’ve been hearing about the vaccine.

Conversation Tips:
✓ See the back page for common concerns and FAQs.
✓ If you’ve decided to get vaccinated, you can share how you made that decision with them.
✓ Acknowledge their feelings.
✓ You are a trusted source of information. Acknowledge where there is still uncertainty.
✓ Ask if they want family or other community members to be part of the decision-making process.

✗ I don’t think I want to get it.

Can I ask you a question: What concerns are keeping you from getting the vaccine?

Conversation Tips:
✓ See the back page for common concerns and FAQs.
✓ If you had similar questions or concerns, share your decision-making process.
✓ Acknowledge their feelings and experiences.
✓ You are a trusted source of information. Acknowledge where there is uncertainty.

Follow-up

Thank them for sharing their concerns with you and ask again about willingness to get vaccinated.

✓ I want to get vaccinated.

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:
✓ If possible, assist them in scheduling a vaccine appointment or give them information about an upcoming vaccine event.
✓ If they feel comfortable doing so, encourage them to share the information they learned to support their friends and community members in making the same decision.

✗ I don’t want to talk about it anymore.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me, I appreciate it. It’s your right to say no. If you have any more thoughts after our conversation, I’m happy to talk to you more about it.

Conversation Tips:
✓ Provide opportunity to revisit discussion and offer additional resources from trusted sources.
✓ Provide a phone number to call or where to find you with any questions if they want to talk later.
✓ Offer to call them or reach them another way to continue the conversation later.

The best way to get up-to-date information about when and how to get vaccinated is by visiting the Washington State Department of Health website CovidVaccineWA.org 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.)
Frequently Asked Questions & Example Responses

What are the side effects? (if possible, share your experience with side effects.) “Like other vaccines, the most common side effects are a sore arm, tiredness, headache/muscle pain, and fever, all of which are usually mild and go away within a few days. Side effects can be annoying, but they are also a sign that the vaccine is working. The risks of getting COVID-19 are higher than the risk of vaccine side effects.”

Are the vaccines safe? Were they tested on people like me? “Yes, they are safe. The FDA authorized or granted full approval for these vaccines after reviewing a lot of evidence carefully. Independent experts confirmed that it met high safety standards. For the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, about 30% of U.S. participants in the vaccine trials were Black, Indigenous, or other people of color. And about half were older adults. For the Novavax vaccine, about 19% of participants for the vaccine trials were Black, Indigenous, or other people of color. There were no significant safety concerns identified in these or any other groups for any of the trials.”

Is it safe to get my child vaccinated? “Yes. Vaccinations are available to children over the age of 6 months. In ongoing clinical trials for vaccinating children, no serious side effects have been detected. Children receive a lower dosage of the vaccine compared to adults. Getting your child vaccinated helps lower the risk of them getting infected with COVID-19, reduces their chance of getting seriously ill, and if they do become infected with COVID-19 it reduces their chances of needing hospitalization and lowers their risk of dying from COVID-19. For more information refer to the Vaccinating Youth link in the resources below.”

Do COVID-19 mRNA vaccines change your DNA? What’s in the vaccine? “No. The vaccines do not change or interact with your DNA in any way. The vaccines contain the active ingredient, messenger RNA (mRNA), along with fat, salts, and sugars to help them work better in the body. The ingredients are all safe and needed for the vaccine to do its job. It does not contain human cells (including fetal cells), the virus that causes COVID-19, any animal by-products including pork products, latex, metals, tracking devices, or preservatives. It was not grown in eggs and contains no egg products.”

Can the vaccines cause me to get COVID-19? “No. The vaccines will also not give you COVID-19. The vaccines teach our body’s cells how recognize and fight the coronavirus.”

Resources
- Vaccine Central (National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants and Migrants, University of Minnesota)
- COVID-19 Vaccine 101 Webinar: Guidance for those working with Refugee, Immigrant and Migrant communities (National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants and Migrants, University of Minnesota)
- COVID-19 Vaccine Know Your Rights (Washington Solidarity Immigrant Network)
- Health Care Provider Discussion Guide: Building Confidence in mRNA vaccines (Washington State Department of Health (DOH))
- Vaccinating Youth (DOH)
- COVID-19 Vaccine Equity and Engagement Community Resources (DOH)
- Therapeutics Information for Health Care Providers (DOH)
- Building Confidence and Busting Myths (DOH)
- COVID-19 Vaccine Transportation Resources (DOH)

How long does COVID-19 vaccination protection last and does it protect against infection of new variants? “COVID-19 vaccine protection does appear to decrease over time, but vaccines are still preventing against serious illness, hospitalizations, and death from COVID-19. There are now updated bivalent vaccines that were created to provide protection against the omicron variant. In order to continue protecting yourself and others, the CDC recommends that all who are eligible stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccination.”

What should I do if I got vaccinated outside of the United States? “You are considered up to date with COVID-19 vaccination when you have received a second bivalent mRNA dose unless you are 65 years or older or if you are immunocompromised.”

Do I have to show proof of citizenship to get the vaccine? “No, you do not need to be a U.S. citizen to get the vaccine. That means you do not need a social security number, or other documents with your immigration status, to get the vaccine. Some vaccine providers might ask for a social security number, but you do not have to give one. Your child does not need to be a U.S. citizen to get the vaccine. Health care providers will not ask for anyone’s immigration status. In most cases, parents and guardians will need to give consent to vaccinate youth under age 18. The Department of Health recommends that all people who are eligible get vaccinated.”

Can I get the vaccine if I am pregnant or want to have a baby one day? “COVID-19 vaccination is strongly recommended and considered safe for all who are eligible, including 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. COVID-19 vaccination has 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 their breast milk.”

Adapted from:

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