

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?"

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 due to the speed of the trials, their 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 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.
- ✓ 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.

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 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. I acknowledge that scientists engaged in many harmful and racist practices in the name of medicine. We are trying to handle the COVID-19 vaccine differently and trying to be as transparent as possible. I want to make sure this feels like the right decision for you."

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 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 share concerns about J&J efficacy compared to the mRNA vaccines.

"Recent studies have shown decreased efficacy against new COVID-19 variants. mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are showing better protection against serious illness and hospitalizations, but being vaccinated with any of the 3 COVID-19 vaccine brands will give you better protection compared to not being vaccinated. If you are concerned about J&J's efficacy, the mRNA vaccines are also available to you."

They don't trust Johnson & Johnson because of the company's history with Black women.*

"I completely understand why you wouldn't trust Johnson & Johnson due to their history of harm targeting the Black and Latinx community, particularly Black women. It is inexcusable that their harmful marketing tactics led to increased risk of cancer. While I understand the worries you might have about their products, I can tell you that this vaccine has been shown to be safe and effective (see FAQ section for more information). If you are still concerned about this vaccine brand, the Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines are also available to you."

*In 2020, Johnson & Johnson (parent company of Janssen Pharmaceuticals) agreed to pay \$100 million to settle more than 1,000 lawsuits (out of more than 20,000) alleging that its talc-based baby powder causes cancer. Internal documents show that Johnson & Johnson heavily marketed its talcum powder to Black women for feminine hygiene. They did not include a warning that their talc-based baby powder product could contain carcinogens.

Frequently Asked Questions & Example Responses

Do I still need to get vaccinated? Is COVID-19 still a threat?

"Decreasing rates of infection and hospitalization and high vaccination rates have allowed us to move into a new recovery phase of the pandemic including lifting the statewide mask mandate in many indoor settings, but everyone should still continue to use COVID-19 measures such as staying up to date on vaccination. COVID-19 is still prevalent and I strongly recommend you get vaccinated. The vaccine will help protect against serious illness and hospitalization from COVID-19 and may also protect people around you."

Should I get vaccinated even if I already had COVID-19?

"Yes, I strongly recommend you get vaccinated despite previously contracting COVID-19 but you should wait to receive the vaccine until after you recover and complete your isolation period. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine after recovering from COVID-19 infection provides added protection to your immune system. 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."

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. mRNA vaccines are preferred for the booster dose, but the J&J vaccine is still available if you aren't able or willing to get another vaccine."

What are the side effects?

"The most common side effects are a sore arm, tiredness, headache, and muscle pain. These symptoms are a sign that the vaccine is prompting an immune response as intended. For most people, these side effects occurred within two days of getting the vaccine and lasted about a day. The health risks if you are infected with COVID-19 are much higher than the risk of vaccine side effects."

How is this vaccine different than the mRNA ones?

"J&J's one-shot vaccine is a viral vector vaccine, which uses a safe version of a different virus (a cold virus) as a vehicle to deliver protective instructions to your body. Your body's immune system then makes antibodies that know how to fight COVID-19. The vaccine does not cause infection with COVID-19, or that cold virus. It takes about two weeks after one dose to be fully protected."

What ingredients are in the vaccine?

"Like other vaccines, this vaccine contains fat, salts, and sugars to help it 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, preservatives, or tracking devices. It was not grown in eggs and contains no egg products. Is there a specific ingredient you are concerned about? Tell me more about what you've heard."

Can I get the vaccine if I am pregnant or am planning to have a baby one day?

"COVID-19 vaccination is strongly recommended for anyone 6 months and older, 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 compared with non-pregnant people. There is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines cause female or male fertility problems and the ingredients and antibodies developed following COVID-19 vaccination have 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 lactation."

Weren't there blood clots associated with this vaccine?

"The risk of getting blood clots is very low. However, Washington Department of Health and the CDC have recommended people 18 years and older choose to get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine instead of a J&J vaccine due to the potential risk of TTS, which involves blood clots and a low platelet count. Individuals who wish to receive the J&J vaccine are encouraged to reach out to their health provider."

Why are the mRNA vaccines recommended over J&J?

"There is a preferential recommendation for people 18 and over to choose to receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine instead of the single-shot Johnson and Johnson vaccine for their initial series due to the potential risk of TTS, which involves blood clots and a low platelet count. Although mRNA vaccines are preferentially recommended in most situations over the J&J vaccine, the J&J vaccine may be considered in some situations. Individuals who wish to receive the J&J vaccine are encouraged to reach out to their health provider."

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

Adapted from:

1. Communication skills for the COVID vaccine. VitalTalk. vitaltalk.org/guides/communication-skills-for-the-covid-vaccine/. Published 1/8/21.
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 2/9/21 at [acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M21-0055](https://doi.org/10.7326/M21-0055). doi:10.7326/m21-0055



DOH 820-147 June 2022 To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.