

Vaccine Confidence Discussion Guide

This guide is to help you with one-on-one conversations with people who are unsure about getting a COVID vaccine. Research indicates that many in this group want to have their concerns and doubts heard, and that they may feel their voices have been going unheard for years. They don't want to feel railroaded into vaccination; ultimately, they believe this is their decision and they want to feel they have the facts to make that decision.

General tips

- Start by listening.
- Restate their concern to show you understand it.
- Assure them that it's normal to have questions.
- Ask them to tell you more. "Can you say more about that?" "What information would you need to consider getting vaccinated?"
- Be respectful of their concerns, not reproachful.
- Avoid using shame, fear, or guilt.
- If you've had similar concerns or questions, share your decision making process.
- Recognize it may take more than one conversation for people to make up their minds.
- Watch this [video](#) by Spokane Regional Health District for discussion tips.

Start the conversation: Have you thought about whether you'll get the COVID vaccine?

I want a vaccine but I can't make an appointment.

Possible concerns:

- I haven't been able to make an appointment.
 - Help them make an appointment. For some people, pointing them to vaccinelocator.doh.wa.gov may be enough.
 - Suggest the WCHD phone line (360-778-6075) or the DOH vaccine hotline, 833-VAX-HELP (833-829-4357), where real people can help make appointments. Language assistance is available.
 - Many pharmacies like the ones at Haggen and Safeway accept walk-in appointments.
- I can't take time off work.
 - The entire process takes about 20 minutes (5 minutes for paperwork and the shot, 15 minutes for observation) so it's easy to fit in after work or as a weekend errand.
 - Describe evening options: some retail pharmacies such as Fred Meyer, Safeway, Rite-Aid, Walgreens, and Haggen offer evening appointments.
 - Describe weekend options: many pharmacies offer Saturday and Sunday appointments.
 - Explain that in Washington State, employees are allowed to use paid sick leave in order to get vaccinated and to recover from side effects like fever or fatigue after getting vaccinated. <https://lni.wa.gov/agency/outreach/coronavirus-covid-19-vaccines-and-paid-sick-leave-common-questions>
- I can't get to an appointment.

- The vaccine is available at neighborhood grocery stores with pharmacies and drugstores, not just doctors' offices. You can probably get the vaccine where you do your regular grocery shopping.
- The Washington State Department of Health has launched partnerships with Lyft and Uber to help people with transportation barriers get a free ride. Call 833-VAX-HELP (833-829-4357), press #, and a hotline specialist will help coordinate your ride. You just need the Lyft or Uber app installed on your smartphone.
- Seniors who can't leave their home can call the Whatcom County Health Department at 360-778-6075 or the Whatcom Council on Aging's Senior Vaccine Help Line at 360-746-3450 (or visit <https://whatcomcoa.org/vaccine-assistance>) to be screened for vaccination in your home. If you aren't eligible to be vaccinated in your home, either agency can help connect you to transportation to get to a vaccine appointment.
- I don't have health insurance.
 - The vaccine is available for free to anyone living in the US. Vaccine providers might ask for your insurance so they can be reimbursed for the administration fee, but if you don't have insurance, the shot will still be no cost to you.

I'm not sure if the vaccine is safe.

- The vaccines were developed too fast.
 - The vaccines use research that has been going on for over 20 years. In particular, research into coronavirus vaccines got a boost after the 2003 SARS epidemic.
 - Governments around the world have spent billions of dollars to boost research and manufacturing of the vaccines, which has sped up the process.
 - Instead of waiting for one phase of a vaccine trial to finish before starting the next phase, vaccine manufacturers ran phases at the same time. No steps in the process were skipped.
- I'm not sure the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is safe.
 - Use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was paused in mid-April after reports of six cases of a rare and severe blood clot.
 - The CDC and FDA determined that the level of risk was very low (especially compared to the risk of COVID-related clotting) and that the benefits of continued use of the J&J vaccine greatly outweighed any risk associated with it.
 - However, women younger than 50 years old especially should be aware of the rare risk of blood clots with low platelets after vaccination, and that other COVID-19 vaccines are available where this risk has not been seen. The FDA has added warnings about seeking urgent medical care if clotting symptoms occur within 14 days after vaccination, and the CDC has updated their guidelines to medical providers on how to recognize and treat these extremely rare cases.
 - It's a sign that the nation's safety monitoring system for COVID vaccines is working. After any vaccine is successful in clinical trials and approved for use, the FDA continues to monitor it for safety.
- I've heard stories about people getting very sick or dying after the vaccine.
 - So far, the vaccines have an excellent safety record. As of June 21, the CDC has recorded **317 million doses** given in the US,

- CDC and FDA physicians review medical records of adverse effects, and they've determined the benefits of being protected from COVID-19 are much greater than the miniscule risk of harm from any of the vaccines.
- The risk of harm from any of the vaccines is very low, while the risks of death, hospitalization, or long-term effects from COVID are much higher.
- I'm concerned that the vaccines might affect my fertility/my pregnancy.
 - If you're pregnant, you're at higher risk for COVID-related severe illness, complications, and death.
 - According to the CDC, more than 100,000 pregnant people have gotten the COVID vaccine. Preliminary study results of people who got the mRNA vaccines (data were collected before the J&J vaccine was authorized) did not identify any safety concerns, but the CDC and FDA are continuing their monitoring.
 - Because of how the vaccines work (teaching your immune system to recognize and get rid of the coronavirus's spike protein), they aren't expected to have any effect on fertility. The vaccine trials included people who got pregnant after the trial started, and there were about the same number of pregnancies in the group of people who got the vaccine and the group that got the placebo.
 - During natural infection, the immune system makes the same antibodies to the virus as the ones that are triggered by the vaccines. If these antibodies caused infertility or miscarriage, then we would be seeing these issues in people who have had COVID. That hasn't happened.
 - Please talk with your doctor or health care provider about the vaccine and your pregnancy.
- The medical system has abused communities of people like me.
 - *Background information: Black Americans have been unfairly treated by medical researchers and caregivers for generations, with one of the most notorious examples being the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, where the US Public Health Service and the CDC enrolled participants to study the natural progression of syphilis. Participants were promised free health care but instead were deceived and did not receive treatment.*
 - Similarly, the Russian-speaking community has a low level of trust in vaccines due to experiences with the Soviet health care system.*
 - You're right, and we shouldn't forget the harm that medical research has done in the past.
 - Medical research has also overlooked communities of color when testing new medical treatments.
 - The COVID vaccine manufacturers were very aware of this history and designed their vaccine trials to include more participants from communities of color, including historically Black colleges and universities. Moderna slowed down their trial enrollment to make sure they had more participants from racial and ethnic minorities.
 - The Pfizer and Moderna trials showed that the vaccines are similar in safety and effectiveness for people of color as for White people.
- I heard drug companies can't be sued if the vaccines hurt people.
 - In the United States, anyone who believes they were injured as a result of a vaccine they received can file a claim with the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program. The

COVID-19 vaccine is no different. All claims for vaccine-related injury are managed through the same program.

- *If they want more detail:* With this national program, an individual has a no-fault alternative to the traditional legal system. This allows injured parties to be compensated without having to go through a lengthy and expensive trial and appeals process. If the injured party rejects the decision made through the program, they may choose to go through the traditional legal system. <https://www.hrsa.gov/vaccine-compensation>
- I'm worried I'll be contagious after the vaccine.
 - You cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine. The vaccines teach your immune system how to fight off a harmless protein, the one that forms the spike of the coronavirus. The mRNA vaccines do not contain any intact virus; the J&J vaccine uses an adenovirus that's been modified so it can't replicate.

I've heard the vaccine has a lot of side effects.

- The most common side effects are a sore arm, fever, chills, headaches, and fatigue. Symptoms usually only last 1-3 days and then go away.
- Reports of side effects are more common after the second dose.
- Please don't let that stop you from getting the second dose. Like the vaccines for shingles and measles-mumps-rubella, you need more than one dose for the best protection.
- Side effects are normal, and show the vaccines are getting your immune system to work.
- If you are concerned about potential side effects, take this into consideration in planning your vaccine. Make an appointment before the weekend or a break in your work schedule.

I don't like being told what to do. I don't trust the government.

- Agree that vaccination is a choice. This is their decision.
- Agree that vaccination has become political; it should be about protecting people from getting seriously ill or dying from COVID.
- Ask them to think about the sources of their information. Is it a consensus opinion from medical experts?

I don't think I need to get vaccinated. I'm healthy.

- I'm not afraid of getting sick/it's just like the flu.
 - Even if they aren't afraid of getting sick, it helps to protect the people in their lives, some of whom can't get the vaccine (such as children under 12) or for whom the vaccine is less effective (such as people who have cancer or who have received organ transplants).
 - On June 11, the Whatcom County Health Dept reported that between April 1 and May 29, there were 104 residents hospitalized for COVID. 103 were unvaccinated.
 - We're learning more and more about the health effects of COVID-19, including cardiovascular, neurological, and other effects. We do not yet know how long these effects last or if there are permanent effects on the body.
- Why do I have to get vaccinated if everyone around me is vaccinated?
 - Only 50% of Whatcom County residents are fully vaccinated (as of June 18; current info at whatcomcounty.us/covidvaccine).

- More people deciding to get vaccinated means less infections.
- Getting vaccinated protects other people with weaker immune systems, such as children, people with cancer, people who have received organ transplants, and older adults.
- The vaccine protects you from serious illness or death if you are one of the few people who get infected after vaccination.
- If I still have to wear a mask after being vaccinated, I don't see the point.
 - More and more businesses are lifting mask requirements for fully vaccinated customers.
 - You don't have to quarantine after being exposed to COVID if you're vaccinated, unless you have COVID symptoms.
 - The more people who get vaccinated, the sooner restrictions will be lifted.

I don't want to talk about it.

- Offer to discuss their decision with them in the future, if they have any questions.

Other Resources

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. "[Invest in Trust: A Guide to Building COVID-19 Vaccine Trust and Increasing Vaccination Rates Among CNAs](#)"

[Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers](#)