

Discussion Guide for Building Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccines for People Experiencing Homelessness

Conversations about the COVID-19 vaccines with your guests, neighbors, 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.

I don't think I want to get it.

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

Can I ask you a question: What information would help you make this decision?

Conversation Tips:

See the back page for common concerns and FAQs.
 If you've gotten 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.

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 don't want to talk about it anymore.

I'm glad we had this discussion and I appreciate that you shared your concerns with me today. Making an informed decision is important.

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.

Encourage an Action Step:

If possible, vaccinate same day, 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.

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](https://www.covidvaccine.wa.gov) 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.)

Common Concerns & Example Responses

They've experienced racism or faced another form of discrimination when receiving medical care.

"I'm sorry that happened to you. It was horrible and wrong. Your experience sounds frustrating and hurtful." After listening and further exploring their concerns, consider saying: "The vaccine will help prevent you from getting really sick from COVID-19. It 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. Scientists have engaged in many harmful and racist practices in the name of medicine. The COVID-19 vaccine is being handled very differently. Can I tell you what I know about the vaccine and the vaccine trials? I want to make sure this feels like the right decision for you."

They express concern about not having health insurance to cover the COVID-19 vaccine

"I understand your concern. Children 18 years of age and under have access to COVID-19 vaccine, and all recommended childhood vaccines, at no cost in Washington through the Childhood Vaccine Program. Additionally, for adults 19 and older without health insurance the Bridge Access Program temporarily provides updated 2023-2034 COVID-19 vaccines at no cost through December 2024."

They share concerns about politics or the government's involvement.

"You are right, it has gotten political. Ultimately though, this is about your health and the health of your community. The vaccines are very effective at preventing people from getting sick."

They share that they don't really think they need to get it.

"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 up to date on your COVID-19 vaccination, 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 expressed concern that they don't want to be a research experiment.

"I understand your hesitation, but the people who developed the vaccines didn't skip any of the necessary safety measures. The vaccines were tested thoroughly before being offered to the public, and the science behind them has been studied for decades. There have been over 13 billion vaccine doses given safely worldwide."

They share a concern that it will negatively interact with drugs they are using.

"There is no specific information on how the vaccines interact with drugs. However, if you use drugs, you are more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19. If you continue to use drugs while COVID-19 is still spreading, it's recommended that you get vaccinated. The benefits outweigh the risks."

Frequently Asked Questions & Example Responses

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

"Yes and yes. COVID-19 is still infecting people every day and I strongly recommend you continue to stay up to date on vaccinations. The updated vaccine will help protect against serious illness and hospitalization from COVID-19 and may also protect people around you."

Do I need to get vaccinated if I already had COVID-19?

"Yes, it is recommended that you get vaccinated even if you already had COVID-19. Studies have shown those that have had COVID-19 and been vaccinated have less chance of becoming re-infected. If you have been infected with COVID-19, you may choose to wait 3 months from start of symptoms or positive test to get vaccinated."

Is it true that the side effects are bad?

"It is understandable to be worried about 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 from getting COVID-19 are higher than the risk of vaccine side effects. (If possible, provide them with information about hotel vouchers or possible places to stay to recover from side effects.)"

What ingredients are in the vaccine?

"Like other vaccines, the vaccines contain 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. Is there a specific ingredient you are concerned about? Tell me more about what you've heard and we can research it together."

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."

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 throughout the pregnancy and their breast milk."

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 2023-2024 vaccines created to provide protection for yourself and others against current variants. In order to continue protecting yourself and others, the CDC recommends that all who are eligible stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccination."

Can I get vaccinated if I have other medical conditions?

"Yes. COVID-19 vaccination is especially important for people with health conditions like heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, or obesity. People with these conditions are more likely to get very sick from COVID-19."

Is it safe to receive other vaccines at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine?

"Yes. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) changed their recommendations on May 12, 2021. You can now get a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time that you get other vaccines. You do not need to schedule other recommended vaccines separately from COVID-19 vaccination. A COVID-19 vaccine appointment is another opportunity to get caught up on all recommended vaccines."

For other frequently asked questions, visit: 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 January 8, 2021.
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 February 9, 2021 at [apjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M21-0055](https://doi.org/10.7326/M21-0055). doi:10.7326/m21-0055