

How to Engage With Patients Hesitant to Get the COVID-19 Vaccine

The COVID-19 vaccine is key to ending the pandemic.

It is important to vaccinate as many people as possible to help them remain healthy while COVID-19 continues to circulate. Even though recent numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths are trending down, herd immunity has not been reached.

Recent reports show that approximately 20% to 25% of people in the U.S. do not want to be vaccinated. There are many reasons a patient may be hesitant about the COVID-19 vaccine. Below are some talking points to help you talk with patients who have questions.

Myth, fact, why

When talking with patients who are hesitant to get vaccinated, these strategies are shown to be effective:

- Always acknowledge the patient's concern; don't simply "correct" them and move on.
- Try structuring your response to an inaccurate belief about vaccination in a "myth, fact, why" format:
 - A patient brings up something inaccurate (the **myth**).
 - Provide them the truth (the **fact**).
 - Give them evidence to back up the fact (the **why**).

Do not simply "correct" the myth: Give the patient a rationale for getting the vaccine.

Wrong:

Patient: The COVID-19 vaccine gives you COVID-19 (**myth**).

You: The COVID-19 vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 (**fact**). You should get one.

Right:

Patient: The COVID-19 vaccine gives you COVID-19 (**myth**).

You: Many of our patients have the same concern as you do. The COVID-19 vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 (**fact**). None of the authorized and recommended COVID-19 vaccines in the United States contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. This means that a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19 (**why**).

Note: It is important to provide the **why**. If you stop at **fact**, the patient hears only, "You're wrong." When you acknowledge concerns and clarify information, you are correcting their misperception while also giving them the information they need to understand why the information you are giving them is accurate.

Common COVID-19 Vaccine Myths and How to Respond With the ‘Why’

Myth, fact, why

Myth: The COVID-19 vaccine gives you COVID-19.

Fact, why: None of the authorized and recommended COVID-19 vaccines in the United States contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. This means that a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19.

Myth: I know someone who got the COVID-19 vaccine and then got sick.

Fact, why: A few people do report getting COVID-19 after their vaccination. While the vaccines work well to prevent COVID-19, none guarantee total immunity. When a fully vaccinated person gets COVID-19, it is called a “breakthrough case.” Also, the COVID-19 vaccine takes two weeks past the last vaccination to make your body ready to fight COVID-19. People may get COVID-19 before they have full immunity. Being vaccinated helps prevent severe illness, hospitalization and death, so it is important to get vaccinated.

Myth: It is not safe to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I want to get pregnant.

Fact, why: If you are trying to become pregnant now or want to get pregnant in the future, you may get a COVID-19 vaccine. There is currently no evidence that COVID-19 vaccination causes any problems with pregnancy, including the development of the placenta. In addition, there is no evidence that fertility problems are a side effect of any vaccine, including COVID-19 vaccines.

More than 50,000 pregnant women have been vaccinated and participate in the V-Safe program, a smartphone-based tool which people can use to track vaccine side effects. The program has not identified any adverse outcomes in pregnant women. Scientists are studying COVID-19 vaccines closely, like all vaccines, and will continue to study them for many years.

Myth: The COVID-19 vaccine will change my DNA.

Fact, why: COVID-19 vaccines do not change, interact with or affect your cells’ DNA in any way. Two of the COVID-19 vaccines use a new technology involving messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA). When injected, mRNA vaccines teach your cells to make a piece of a protein that is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. When this protein appears on the surface of a cell, your immune system does not recognize it. Your system then begins building an immune response by making antibodies to destroy the intruder. This process is the same as what would happen if you were infected with the virus itself.

Once the “training” is complete, your immune system will know how to fight the virus that causes COVID-19 if you are exposed to it in the future. After your cells make the protein, they destroy the mRNA instructions.

Myth: I am not in a high-risk group so I don't have to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Fact, why: Even though you may not be at high risk to have a severe case of COVID-19, you can still get sick, possibly with one of the new mutations that are now the most common in the U.S. You can also pass COVID-19 to others, including those who may not be able to be vaccinated.

A large segment of the U.S. population needs to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to reach herd immunity and stop the pandemic. By getting the vaccine, you can help stop COVID-19, including new mutations of it. Further, you may be around other people that are at high risk. Some of these people may not be vaccinated or may not have as strong a response to the vaccine as you. By protecting yourself, you are helping to create a bubble around those at-risk contacts and reduce their risk.

Myth: I already had COVID-19, so I don't need to get vaccinated.

Fact, why: You should be vaccinated regardless of whether you already had COVID-19. That's because experts do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. Even if you have already recovered from COVID-19, it is possible to be infected with the virus again.

Myth: Being around someone who received the COVID-19 vaccine will affect my menstrual cycle.

Fact, why: Your menstrual cycle cannot be affected by being near someone who received a COVID-19 vaccine. Individuals who have received a COVID-19 vaccine cannot shed or release any of the vaccine components. In addition, none of the vaccines authorized for use in the United States contain a live virus, so it is not possible to shed it.

Many things can affect menstrual cycles, including stress, changes in monthly schedule, problems with sleep, and changes in diet or exercise. Infections may also affect menstrual cycles.

Concluding thoughts

- Northwestern Medicine recommends getting the COVID-19 vaccine because it is the **best protection** against COVID-19.
- COVID-19 vaccines have been shown to be safe and effective. They have been well-tested and have been shown to cause no long-term side effects.
- Everyone 12 years of age and older is now eligible to get a COVID-19 vaccination. Getting an appointment now is much easier.
- People who are fully vaccinated will be able to more fully participate in events and travel as communities open up.