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The Power of Provider Recommendations

Patient confidence in vaccine has been shown to increase significantly when they receive clear and compelling information from medical professionals.

With that in mind, NCDHHS has created this provider discussion guide outlining ways you can support patients in making informed decisions about COVID-19 vaccination. This guide can help you answer patient questions, provide them with accurate information, and honor and respond to their needs.

Recommendations for All Staff

Everyone who works at your practice is a trusted source of information. All staff, from front desk clerks to back office staff should be knowledgeable about vaccination, and should be able to speak to the benefits of vaccination accurately.

Step 1. Starting the conversation

The decision to get vaccinated is personal, and as healthcare professionals, our goal is to provide each patient with information they need to make an informed decision. Optimal patient-provider conversations start with listening.

LEAD WITH LISTENING

Try using open-ended questions to understand how each person thinks and feels about COVID-19 vaccination. See the tips on motivational interviewing below to help with this!
**Motivational Interviewing**

Motivational interviewing is an "evidence-based and culturally sensitive way to speak with unvaccinated patients about getting vaccinated". The ultimate goal of motivational interviewing is to help patients navigate their mixed feelings towards a health issue and assist with moving them towards healthy behavior changes (CDC, 2022).

Here are some motivational interviewing framework techniques.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open-ended questioning</strong></td>
<td>These type of questions cannot be answered with “yes” or “no” statements. Posing a question provides an opportunity for the individual to craft a response so that you can better understand your patients perception of the issue being discussed</td>
<td>“I understand you have some concerns about the COVID19 vaccines. Can you tell me about them?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affirming</strong></td>
<td>Acknowledging the person’s strengths and offering encouragement towards a change goal. This helps to build rapport and fosters confidence.</td>
<td>“You have clearly been very resourceful coping with the difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflective listening</strong></td>
<td>Involves rephrasing a statement made by the person to better understand his/her perceptions.</td>
<td>“I can definitely relate to your concerns ... and I do agree with you that there is a lot of conflicting information out there.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summarizing</strong></td>
<td>Summarizing can be used to link statements together at the beginning or during the session. Invite your patient to tell you more by asking “what else”.</td>
<td>“So you are saying that if you get vaccinated, you fear you might experience an allergic reaction?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Applying Motivational Interviewing During a Patient Visit

These steps allow you to quickly apply motivational interviewing techniques (1-5 minutes) during a patient visit.

**Step 1: Embrace an attitude of empathy and collaboration**

Show compassion, empathy, and genuine curiosity about the reasons a patient feels the way they do.

**Step 2: Ask permission to discuss vaccines**

**OPENING STATEMENT**

“If it is okay with you, I would like to spend a few minutes talking about COVID-19 vaccines and your family.”

**Step 3: Motivational interviewing**

✔ **Ask the patient a scaled question**

For example, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to get a COVID-19 vaccine?” (1 = never; 10 = already have an appointment to get vaccinated). Then explore both sides of whatever number is given.

**Step 4: Respond to questions about vaccines, health, or mental health.**

When a patient asks about vaccine safety, vaccine risks, their health or mental health, respond within the boundaries of your competence, ethics, and scope of practice.
Social Stigma Associated with COVID-19

When talking about coronavirus disease, certain words (i.e. suspect case, isolation) or phrases might have negative connotations for patients, or fuel stigmatizing attitudes. By using intentional language, we can avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes and the dehumanization of those who have the disease. Here are some examples of how to use inclusive, less-stigmatizing language in vaccine conversations.

**DO:** Talk about the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

**Don't** attach locations or ethnicity to the disease, this is not a “Wuhan Virus”, “Chinese Virus” or “Asian Virus”, even if the patient refers to it as such.

**DO:** Talk about “people who have COVID-19”, “people who are being treated for COVID-19”, “people who are recovering from COVID-19” or “people who died after contracting COVID-19”

**Don't** - refer to people with the disease as “COVID-19 cases” or “victims”

**DO:** Talk about “people who may have COVID-19” or “people who are presumptive for COVID-19”

**Don't** - talk about “COVID-19 suspects” or “suspected cases”.

**DO:** Talk about people “acquiring” or “contracting” COVID-19

**Don't** talk about people “transmitting COVID-19” “infecting others” or “spreading the virus” as it implies intentional transmission and assigns blame.

Using criminalizing or dehumanizing terminology creates the impression that those with the disease have somehow done something wrong or are less human than the rest of us. This feeds into stigma, undermines empathy, and potentially fuels wider reluctance to seek treatment or attend screening, testing and quarantine.

Adapted from [Social Stigma associated with COVID-19](#).
**Step 2. Be ready to explain how COVID-19 vaccines work.**

A patient's baseline medical knowledge impacts how much new information they need in order to make an informed decision. You can provide straightforward explanations that honor each person's level of knowledge, and addresses areas of confusion. Be prepared to answer some basic questions about how the vaccines work such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is a virus?</td>
<td>A virus is a tiny, living infectious agent that causes disease and sickness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the vaccine doing once it is in my body?</td>
<td>COVID-19 vaccines teach our immune systems how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. Sometimes this process can cause symptoms, such as fever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is mRNA?</td>
<td>Messenger RNA is a type of RNA that is necessary for protein production. In cells, mRNA uses the information in genes to create a blueprint for making proteins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a viral vector?</td>
<td>A viral vector is an insect or other animal that carries disease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I catch COVID-19 from the vaccine?</td>
<td>There's no way to get COVID-19 from the vaccine, because none of the authorized vaccines in the US use a live virus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it possible to still get COVID-19 after being vaccinated?</td>
<td>Most people who get COVID-19 are unvaccinated. However, since vaccines are not 100% effective at preventing infection, some people who are fully vaccinated will still get COVID-19. This is called a “vaccine breakthrough infection.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The CDC has developed FAQs outlining the most common questions regarding COVID-19. These are best practice answers covering the basics of disease spread, prevention, mitigation, symptomatology, testing, vaccination, and more.

These FAQs are updated weekly and can be accessed at this link. You can also scan the QR code below for direct access.
Step 3: Prepare to Answer Common Questions

Below are some options you can use to continue the conversation when patients express that they may not want to get vaccinated. In every case, invite them to reach out to you any time they have more questions, or if you offer vaccination, when they decide they want to get vaccinated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If they say</th>
<th>You might ask</th>
<th>You might say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am not going to get the vaccine.</td>
<td>• Why have you made that decision?</td>
<td>I will probably ask you about vaccination again next time I see you in case you have new questions or are ready to think about it again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What would it take for you to feel comfortable getting vaccinated?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you have any questions about the vaccines?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Would you like to talk about what you can do to protect yourself right now, and where getting vaccinated fits into that?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am going to wait a while</td>
<td>• What is making you want to wait?</td>
<td>That can be a reasonable choice. I am worried though about the risk that you could get sick with COVID-19 in the meantime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is there anything that would help you feel more confident about getting vaccinated?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• When do you think you will be ready to think about it again?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I already had COVID-19.

- What is making you want to wait?
- Is there anything that would help you feel more confident about getting vaccinated?

I recommend you go ahead with vaccination even though you had COVID-19. There is a good chance you will have some protection against getting COVID-19 for a few months after being sick. But we don’t know how long that protection lasts.

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Are the vaccines safe?

All of the vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna, and J&J) provide significant protection against COVID-19. They all protect against virus-related hospitalization and death. There were no serious safety concerns in any of the clinical trials.

Who makes sure the vaccines are safe and can prevent COVID-19?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) makes sure all food and drugs are safe. The COVID-19 vaccines must pass clinical trials like other drugs and vaccines. The FDA checks the work and authorizes vaccines only if they are safe and effective. Because vaccines are given to millions of healthy people to prevent serious diseases, they’re held to very high safety standards.
If they say

I already had COVID-19.

You might say

There is a good chance you will have some protection against getting COVID-19 for a few months after being sick. However, we do not know how long that protection lasts, how this is impacted by the different variants, and people can get COVID-19 more than once.

Getting vaccinated is recommended even if you had COVID-19 to help prevent you from getting it again. Also, the vaccines may help boost any natural protection you have.

How could the vaccines be developed so quickly?

Scientists built on many years of research from other vaccines, including research on vaccines for other coronaviruses. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that can cause illnesses, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). The coronavirus identified in 2019, commonly known as COVID-19, was caused by SARS-CoV-2 leading to this pandemic of respiratory illness.

Deeper Dive:

The FDA can get vaccines to people faster through an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). After the FDA has authorized a vaccine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) independent advisory committee reviews the data before advising the CDC on recommending a vaccine for use. Like all vaccines, the FDA and CDC keep checking safety through the Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS). Health care providers are required to report serious side effects, or if someone gets seriously ill with COVID-19.
### How do the vaccines work?

All the currently authorized vaccines give your body temporary instructions to make a protein. This protein safely teaches your body to make germ-fighting antibodies against the COVID-19 virus. These germ-fighting antibodies are then ready to fight off the real COVID-19 if it ever tries to attack you. Your body naturally breaks down everything in the vaccine.

### Will I be able to choose which vaccine I take? If so, which vaccine is the best vaccine?

The CDC recommends the Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines as the best choice for preventing infection from COVID-19 in those aged 6 months and older. There is ample supply of both vaccines in North Carolina and across the country. But receiving any vaccine, including the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, is better than being unvaccinated. However, people with a history of thrombosis with thrombocytopenia, a condition defined as blood clotting with low platelets, should not receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

### For how long will the vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

We know that the vaccines can protect people from COVID-19 illness for at least two to six months. We’ll know even more about how long the immunity from the vaccines lasts as people have been vaccinated for a longer period. With the spread of the Delta variant and more recent studies, boosters were recommended to strengthen and extend protections against COVID-19. With additional data, we will know if COVID-19 vaccines will need to be given yearly, like the flu shot.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If they say</th>
<th>You might say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does an additional dose differ from a booster dose?</td>
<td>An additional dose is intended for those who did not build the necessary immune response with the standard vaccine dose, while a booster dose is administered when the initial immune response to a primary series has weakened over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why should children get the vaccine?</td>
<td>Children are vulnerable to the virus like everyone else, and COVID-19 cases in children can result in hospitalization, deaths, MIS-C (inflammatory syndromes) and long-term complications. COVID-19 vaccination is an important tool to help protect everyone 6 months and older from COVID-19 and its complications. Vaccines are available for everyone 6 months and older. Getting children and teens vaccinated against COVID-19 can help keep them from getting really sick if they do get COVID-19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the difference between the adult version and the pediatric version of the COVID-19 vaccines?</td>
<td>The key difference between adult and pediatric vaccines is the dose size. Both of the vaccines for children 5 and under have smaller doses than the adult versions. The vaccines for children 5 and under were formulated for infants, young children, or adolescents and tested rigorously in those age groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Suggested answers about vaccine side effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If they say</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there side effects from the vaccine?</td>
<td>No long-term side effects were reported in clinical trials. Temporary reactions after receiving the vaccine may include a sore arm, headache, feeling tired and achy for a day or two, or in some cases, fever. In most cases, these temporary reactions are normal and good signs that your body is building protection! You can take medicines like Tylenol or Ibuprofen after receiving your shot to help with these temporary reactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there any concerns with getting kids vaccinated before they reach puberty?</td>
<td>No. There is no evidence that any vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, can cause female or male fertility problems. There is no evidence that vaccine ingredients, including mRNA, or antibodies made following COVID-19 vaccination would cause any problems with becoming pregnant now or in the future. Similarly, there is no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccine affects puberty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some of the common vaccine side effects for children?</td>
<td>Younger children may experience fewer side effects after COVID-19 vaccination than teens or young adults. For children 4 years and older, side effects are more common after the second dose and can include: pain, swelling, fever, tiredness, headache, chills, muscle or joint pain, and swollen lymph nodes. For children 3 years and younger, common side effects can include: pain where the shot was given, swollen lymph nodes, irritability or crying, sleepiness, and loss of appetite.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If they say

Does the vaccine affect fertility?

You might say

No. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends vaccination for all eligible people, including those who may want to get pregnant. There have been no safety data to suggest that the vaccines impact the ability of a woman to get pregnant. Similarly, the Society for Male Reproduction and Urology recommends that men who desire fertility should be encouraged to get vaccinated. The American Society for Reproductive Medicine has also stated that there is no evidence of fertility loss due to COVID-19 vaccines.

What side effects are they concerned about? Is there a specific vaccine or side effect that they are worried about? Do they think the vaccine will cause something worse than COVID-19?

None of the vaccines contain fetal cells or fetal tissues. Fetal cells were used in research to develop all three vaccines. Vaccines commonly use fetal cells in development. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines do not require the use of any fetal cells to produce the vaccines. In order to produce the vaccine, the Johnson and Johnson vaccine uses fetal cells that were isolated over 30 years ago.

Can anything in the vaccine be tracked?

Nothing in the vaccine can be tracked. The vaccine is naturally broken down by your body after it finishes making you stronger.
### Suggested answers for helping patients navigate to a vaccine

#### Identify
Are they having difficulty finding a vaccine provider? What resources do they need?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Where will I be able to get vaccinated?</strong></td>
<td>If vaccine is not available in your clinic, you can direct patients to the <a href="https://vaccinefinder.com">Vaccine Finder</a> tool, an easy-to-use online tool to help individuals find their spot to get a vaccination in NC, including vaccine provider locations and contact information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do I get a second dose?</strong></td>
<td>When you get your first shot, you will be asked to make an appointment for your second dose. You will also be given a card with information about which vaccine you got for your first dose and the date of that shot. Keep the card in a safe spot and take a picture of it just in case it gets misplaced. You may also receive an email notification with a reminder for the second shot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What kind of identification will be required to get vaccinated?</strong></td>
<td>North Carolina does not require a government-issued identification card, like a driver’s license, to be vaccinated. Vaccine providers may ask you to pre-register, to fill out a form on-site with your name, address and date of birth, or ask for a bill or other document with your name and address on it. For people with health insurance, vaccine providers may ask for photo-identification or health insurance care in order to bill correctly, but lack of government issued ID or lack of health insurance will not prevent you from receiving a vaccine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If they say | You might say
---|---
Why should I get vaccinated? | The COVID-19 vaccines are very good at protecting people from severe COVID-19 illness, hospitalization and death. Getting vaccinated is much safer than getting sick with COVID-19. It protects you, your family and others. The more people who are vaccinated, the more likely we can get back to the people and places we love.

What can I start doing differently after I have been fully vaccinated? | Fully vaccinated people can participate in many of the activities that they did before the pandemic; for some of these activities, they should wear a mask. Although infections happen in only a small proportion of people who are fully vaccinated, even with the Delta variant, preliminary evidence suggests that fully vaccinated people who do become infected with the Delta variant can spread the virus to others.

If everyone else is getting vaccinated, do I need to? | Yes. It is incredibly important that everyone in North Carolina do their part to help get as many people vaccinated as possible. The more people who are vaccinated, the faster we will end the pandemic and the more confident each one of us can be that we and our loved ones are protected as we get back to the people and places we love. To protect those who cannot be vaccinated due to age or medical conditions, we need everyone who can safely get vaccinated to do so.
Step 4. Make getting vaccinated easy

Follow this 4-step process to support patients in getting vaccinated and answer their questions about the vaccine journey:

**Alleviate concerns**

01
Inform patients that COVID-19 vaccination is provided at no cost and is available regardless of immigration status and health insurance.

**Become a vaccine provider**

02
If your practice is not already set up to administer COVID-19 vaccines, register to become a vaccine provider through the COVID-19 Vaccine Management System (CVMS) and learn more about North Carolina’s COVID-19 vaccine program.

**Make it simple to get an appointment**

03
If you offer a COVID-19 vaccine, have staff available to answer phones or have a clear message on voicemail. Be proactive in reaching out to patients so they know what to do.

- If you do not offer vaccination, you and your staff can help your patients get an appointment by going to vaccines.gov to find a nearby vaccine provider.

- Provide patients with the information they need to schedule their own appointment.

- Share information about the NC COVID-19 hotline (1-888-675-4567) to answer questions and provide assistance.

- Let patients know that they can call their local transit agency to get a free ride to their vaccine appointment. For homebound patients, connect them to the homebound vaccine provider in their county.