



# **COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Toolkit for Healthcare Professionals**

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# Talking to Patients about COVID-19 Vaccines

As patients' most-trusted source of information on vaccines, you play a critical role in helping patients understand the importance of COVID-19 vaccination, as well as if and when it is likely to be recommended for them. While much is still unknown, you can start laying the groundwork now for when COVID-19 vaccines are available to every group of patients.

## Starting COVID-19 Vaccine Conversations Early

Even before you are able to offer COVID-19 vaccination, consider including the topic in your conversations with patients. This will give you the opportunity to set expectations about vaccine availability, including when you might recommend vaccination for them. You can also assess whether they have any contraindications or precautions to vaccination and learn about any concerns they have.

*This toolkit was created on December 2, 2020 and updated on January 8, 2021. For the latest information, please visit [chicago.gov/COVIDvax](https://chicago.gov/COVIDvax).*



# Engaging in Effective COVID-19 Vaccine Conversations

## 1. Start from a Place of Empathy and Understanding

The pandemic has been stressful for many people. The first step is to acknowledge the disruption COVID-19 has caused in all our lives, providing an opportunity to recognize common concerns that can be addressed by a vaccine.

### Example:

*"I strongly recommend you get a COVID-19 vaccine once it is widely available..."*

*"...this shot is especially important for you because of your [job/underlying health condition]."*

*"...I believe in this vaccine so strongly that i plan to get it as soon as it is available."*

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## 2. Assume Patients Will Want to Be Vaccinated but May Not Know When to Expect It

Consider providing the following general information to patients about the timeline for COVID-19 vaccines:

- Limited COVID-19 vaccine doses are currently available in Chicago.
- It is anticipated that vaccine supply will increase substantially in the early months of 2021.
- The goal is for everyone to be able to easily get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as large quantities are available. However, not everyone will be able to get vaccinated right away.

## 3. Give Your Strong Recommendation

Share the importance of COVID-19 vaccines to protect patients' health, as well as the health of those around them, or talk about your personal experience with the COVID-19 vaccination.



## 4. Listen to and Respond to Patient Questions

Make it clear that you understand they have questions, and you want to answer them, so they feel confident in choosing to get vaccinated. Seek to understand your patients' concerns and provide information they need in a way they can understand it.

## 5. Wrapping Up the Conversation

Let your patients know that you are open to continuing the conversation. Because these vaccines are new, your patients' comfort level with when to get vaccinated will vary. Continue to remind them about the importance of getting a COVID-19 vaccine during future routine visits. In the meantime,

encourage them to continue taking steps to protect themselves from

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COVID-19 and let them know how you plan to share updates about vaccine availability.

## **Answering Patients' Questions**

Prepare for common patient questions and learn techniques to use during your vaccination conversations, including best practices for online communication.

## **Key Points to Share with Your Patients**

### **COVID-19 Vaccine Planning in Chicago**

A small amount of a COVID-19 vaccine is now available in Chicago following the Emergency Use Authorizations of the Pfizer-BioNtech and Moderna vaccines. Vaccination in Chicago has started with healthcare personnel and residents of long-term care.

While the supply is limited, certain groups (e.g. healthcare workers) will be prioritized to receive vaccine, based on national guidance. The vaccine will be available to all Chicagoans who want it as soon as large quantities are available.

### **Groups Considered for Early Vaccination if Supply is Limited**

Based on national level guidance, there are some groups that have been identified for early prioritization of vaccine. These include:

- Healthcare personnel
- Residents in long-term care settings
- Workers and residents in congregate living facilities
- Workers in essential and critical industries
- People at high risk for severe COVID-19 illness due to underlying medical conditions
- People 65 years and older

### **Vaccine Safety and the Speed of Vaccine Development**

No steps are skipped during the clinical trial process for COVID-19 vaccine. *This toolkit was created on December 2, 2020 and updated on January 8, 2021. For the latest information, please visit [chicago.gov/COVIDvax](https://chicago.gov/COVIDvax).*

- COVID-19 vaccines are tested in large clinical trials to make sure they meet safety standards.
- Many people were recruited to participate in these trials to see how the vaccines offers protection to people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as well as those with different medical conditions.
- The FDA authorizes vaccines after they pass three phases of clinical trials.
- These clinical trials require thousands of people and months of data.
- The vaccine development is faster than normal because some steps are being done at the same time instead of one after another.

Vaccine safety checks are in-progress and will continue as long as a vaccine is available.

- When a vaccine trial is paused or cancelled, it is normal and means the safety checks are working.
- Vaccine recalls are rare. If a recall is issued, the FDA and CDC will let health officials and the media know immediately.
- After the vaccine is authorized, FDA and CDC will continue to monitor it using three federal safety systems that are already in place.

### **mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines**

- 2 mRNA vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna) were the first COVID-19 vaccines to be released in the U.S. under Emergency Use Authorization by the FDA.
- Like all vaccines, COVID-19 mRNA vaccines have been rigorously tested for safety before being authorized for use in the United States.
- mRNA technology is new, but not unknown. These types of vaccines have been studied for more than a decade.
- mRNA vaccines do not contain a live virus and do not carry a risk of causing disease in the vaccinated person.
- mRNA from the vaccine never enters the nucleus of the cell and does not affect or interact with a person's DNA.

In addition to these key messages, you can refer your patients with questions to [CDC's COVID-19 mRNA vaccine webpage](#).

### **Natural Immunity Rather Vs. Immunity from Vaccines**

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COVID-19 vaccination is a safer choice and way to help build protection.

- COVID-19 can have serious, life-threatening complications, and there is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you. And if you get sick, you could spread the disease to friends, family, and others around you.
- Getting COVID-19 may offer some natural protection, known as immunity. But experts don't know how long this protection lasts.
- The risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 far outweighs any benefits of natural immunity. COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you by creating an antibody response without having to experience sickness.

### **Known Side Effects**

- Most people do not have serious problems after being vaccinated, however some side effects are common after receiving COVID-19 vaccines.
- These side effects may affect the ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days.
- Commonly reported symptoms are pain and swelling of the arm where the shot was given.
- Other reported symptoms were fever, chills, tiredness, and headache.
- These side effects are a sign that your immune system is doing exactly what it is supposed to do. It is working and building up protection to disease.
- Anyone with a history of allergies or allergic reactions should share their allergy information, including what allergic reactions they have experienced, with their medical team or vaccination team prior to receiving the vaccine.

### **Unknown, Serious, Long-term Side Effects**

Due to the relative speed with which these vaccines were developed, patients' concerns about long-term side effects are reasonable and to be expected.

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- COVID-19 vaccines are being tested in large clinical trials to assess their safety. However, it does take time, and more people getting vaccinated before we learn about very rare or long-term side effects.
- That is why safety monitoring will continue. CDC has an independent group of experts that reviews all the safety data as it comes in and provides regular safety updates.
- If a safety issue is detected, immediate action will take place to determine if the issue is related to the COVID-19 vaccine and determine the best course of action.

### **Number of Doses Needed**

Nearly all COVID-19 vaccines being studied in the United States require two shots. The first shot starts building protection, but everyone has to come back a few weeks later for the second one to get the most protection the vaccine can offer.

### **Other Questions Patients May Have about COVID-19 Vaccination**

If you have additional questions from patients, reference the Frequently Asked Questions section at [chicago.gov/COVIDvax](https://chicago.gov/COVIDvax) for regularly updated answers to common questions.