Talking About Vaccines

Communicating with your community about the COVID-19 vaccination

A Guide for Healthcare Workers
ABOUT THIS GUIDE

“We try to focus on getting our patients to accept the vaccine. There is a whole lot on us as healthcare workers over and above the pandemic. Can we get an acknowledgement of that, because it feels tiring?”
- PROFESSIONAL NURSE, RESEARCH FOCUS GROUP

COVID-19 has affected you, our healthcare workers, more than anyone. Now you carry the responsibility to educate and help people to understand why they should get the vaccine. You play a special role in your community.

- People come to you when they feel unsure and want answers.
- People trust the information and guidance you give them.
- You are the bridge between the community and the healthcare system.

This guide helps you stay informed and to communicate with and encourage your co-workers, patients, and the people in your community to get vaccinated.
WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN VACCINE COMMUNICATION?

“We were the first to receive the jab. I got the jab and so should you. This is a strong message for people to hear.” - HEALTHCARE WORKER

There are three key roles that you play in encouraging people to get a COVID-19 vaccine, while helping to build trust in health authorities and those delivering vaccines.

INFORM
Keep yourself informed and updated. And then give people the information they need to make a decision.

LISTEN
It is important to listen to people. Hear their questions and concerns. Listen with kindness and empathy.

FOLLOW UP
Tell your vaccination programme managers about the concerns and challenges you and your community are facing. Help improve the vaccination programme for all. No one knows your community better than you do!

Remember!
As a healthcare worker, you have taken an oath to put the health and wellbeing of your patient first.
WHY DO SOME PEOPLE NOT WANT THE VACCINE?

Most people accept and take vaccines. Some people are not sure and may have many reasonable questions. A small number of people may be against taking a vaccine.

Safe COVID-19 vaccines are available across South Africa, but some people – even some healthcare workers – are not taking the opportunity to get vaccinated.

Not taking a safe vaccine when it is available is called vaccine hesitancy. But we need everyone to get vaccinated if we are to overcome COVID-19.

Did you know?

Vaccine hesitancy is different from vaccine denial.

A vaccine denier or anti-vaxxer is someone who does not believe in vaccines at all. They don’t trust the scientific evidence that proves they work. They often don’t trust governments, or people promoting the vaccine.

We all have different beliefs, ideas and experiences that affect our lives and how we make decisions about the vaccine for COVID-19.

Put your personal beliefs aside and follow your professional guidelines.
THERE ARE MANY REASONS FOR VACCINE HESITANCY, INCLUDING:

SAFETY
“I am worried it is not safe. It was made too fast.”

EFFICACY
“I am not sure if it will really work.”

FEAR OF SIDE EFFECTS
“I’m scared I’ll get very sick from taking the vaccine.”

PRACTICAL
“I don’t have transport money to get to a vaccination site.”

NOT UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS
“I am young. I won’t get COVID-19.”
WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

STAY INFORMED

New information and answers to questions come out almost every day. **Make a habit** of using the trusted resources below to **keep up to date**.

- **Health Worker Connect**
  WhatsApp ‘hi’ to +27 60 060 1111

- **National Institute for Communicable Diseases**
  [https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/disease-index-covid-19/frequently-asked-questions/](https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/disease-index-covid-19/frequently-asked-questions/)

- **sacoronavirus.co.za**
  [sacoronavirus.co.za/vaccine-updates/](https://sacoronavirus.co.za/vaccine-updates/)

Free national COVID-19 hotline:

0800 029 999
**CHECK FACTS**
False information is being shared every day. There are a lot of fake messages that try and make us scared or angry. It’s often not easy to know which sources to trust.

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**Check the facts**
Ask yourself when reviewing information:

1. **Who wrote it?**
   Do a quick search of the qualifications of the person. Go to trusted websites to check the facts.

2. **Can I prove that this information is true?**
   Search online to see if this information has come from a trusted website.

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1  https://africacheck.org/
**BUILD TRUST – LISTEN, ASK, EDUCATE, RETURN**

Here’s how to communicate respectfully and build trust with someone worried about getting the COVID-19 vaccination.

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<tr>
<th>Step 1: LISTEN</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Do listen</strong> and make sure that you try and answer their questions without judging. Use relaxed body language; establish eye contact.</td>
<td><strong>Don’t judge</strong> anyone’s beliefs or values.</td>
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<th>Step 2: ASK</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Do ask</strong> questions to understand better and correct the wrong information.</td>
<td><strong>Don’t try</strong> to scare people into vaccinating.</td>
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<th>Step 3: EDUCATE</th>
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<td><strong>Do educate</strong>: Tell people stories from your own life and about the benefits of vaccines to encourage them.</td>
<td><strong>Don’t overload</strong> people with difficult language.</td>
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<th>Step 4: RETURN</th>
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<td><strong>Do return</strong>: If you don’t have the answer immediately, that is okay. There will always be new information and questions. Find out and prepare for if you get asked the question again.</td>
<td><strong>Don’t argue.</strong> <strong>Excuse yourself.</strong></td>
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REMEMBER!

You may come across people who are angry and are against getting vaccinated for COVID-19, or who are still not sure after you’ve spoken with them.

Rather build a good relationship to encourage them to talk with you again.

Respect everyone’s beliefs.
TUMI THE MECHANIC
Meet Tumi. He is a 21-year-old mechanic, and he has come in to get some medication for his mother. He is the breadwinner of his family. When asked if he has been vaccinated, he responds:

Response

Step 1: Listen
Allow Tumi to finish.
Don’t interrupt him.

Step 2: Ask
“Why do you think only old people die from COVID?
Where did you hear that? Do you know how COVID-19 is spread? Can I explain to you?”

Step 3: Educate

“We can all get COVID-19, regardless of our age. If you get sick with COVID, even if it’s mild, you will be unable to go to work. Getting the vaccine will reduce the risk of you getting very sick.”
SANDY THE NURSING ASSISTANT
Meet Sandy. She is a 45-year-old nursing assistant who’s not sure whether to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Response

Step 1: Listen
Listen actively. Make eye contact. And put your phone away.

Step 2: Ask
“What health problems are you most concerned about?”

Step 3: Educate
Address Sandy’s concerns and refer her to Health Worker Connect. Think about sharing your experience with her:

“I received the COVID-19 vaccine and have not had any complications. The risks of health problems from COVID-19 are much higher than the risks of the vaccine.”

Remember to make sure that she understands that the COVID-19 vaccine will help protect her from getting very sick or dying from COVID-19.
GoGo Dlamini
Meet GoGo Dlamini. GoGo Dlamini is talking to her friends in the shop queue about the vaccine. You overhear her speaking.

Response

Step 1: Listen
Listen to what GoGo Dlamini tells you. Wait until she is finished speaking before you talk.

Step 2: Ask
“Why do you feel it was made too fast?
Where did you hear that from?”

Step 3: Educate
Explain:

“I am not getting the vaccine,” she says. “It was made too fast.”

“Because you are older, there is more of a chance that you will get very sick or die from COVID-19. The world was able to develop the vaccine fast because scientists had been working on vaccines for illnesses such as COVID for many years. They were able to quickly identify the virus that causes COVID-19 and start working on a vaccine. This is something to celebrate.”
Fear of side effects is common. Be open and honest. If asked about side effects, explain that side effects are better than getting very sick with COVID-19 and even dying.

Minor side effects can be:

- Arm is sore or red at the injection site
- Fever/chills
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Nausea

If these happen to your patient:
1. Listen and reassure them. These are normal and it just shows the vaccine is working.
2. You can use paracetamol (Panado) if necessary. Taking two tablets every 6 hours will help you feel better.
3. Seek medical assistance if you feel sick for more than 3 days after the vaccine.

Serious side effects are very rare and are being constantly checked and investigated by an independent ministerial advisory committee, the Department of Health, and the South African Health Regulatory Authority. Severe reactions are rare. These are known as adverse events following immunisation.
**Serious side effects to report:**

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Struggling to think clearly or feeling confused
- Struggling to talk or move

**Immediately report all severe side effects or reactions following the vaccine to:**

- A healthcare worker in any health facility
- The Med Safety App
  - [https://medsafety.sahpra.org.za/](https://medsafety.sahpra.org.za/)
- National COVID-19 hotline: 0800 029 999

**Do not seek advice from non-medical people. Refer questions to the National Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) coordinator who will have up-to-date information on what has happened and what needs to be done.**
Here are some things you can do in your community every day to encourage vaccination:

**CORRECT FALSE INFORMATION ABOUT THE VACCINE.**
Share only accurate information on WhatsApp and other groups you are part of.

**SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES AND POSITIVE STORIES OF GETTING VACCINATED.**
Share online with family and friends or at your place of worship.

**SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE OTHER PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO DO THE SAME.**
Getting a COVID-19 vaccination is part of leading a normal and healthy life. Everyone should do it.