

Enabling Healthcare Providers to Use a Patient-Centered Approach to Educating Patients about the COVID-19 Vaccine in Medically Underserved and Rural Communities in South Carolina

Frequently Asked Questions and Response Guide

Healthcare providers are the most trusted source of information for patients about vaccinations. This guide provides a grouping of patient concerns along with suggested evidence-based responses to share with your patients to address their concerns regarding COVID-19 vaccines and vaccine hesitancy. References have been provided for further exploration and information has been provided by topic area and at the end of the guide.

Vaccine Trust

Why should I trust the vaccine? The Government and healthcare systems have not always treated everyone fairly.

Examples of Plain Language Responses: FINAL

- ✦ The medical system in the United States has not always treated everyone fairly in the past and has at times discriminated against minorities. The COVID-19 vaccine research has been handled differently. It has been tested in people of different backgrounds and it is proven to be safe for all.

Reference: [CAPC-Communication Skills for Talking About COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

- ✦ Your distrust is understandable. People and communities of color have been treated unfairly by the government and medical systems throughout history. Would it be ok if I shared what I know about how COVID-19 vaccines were developed?
- ✦ For the COVID-19 vaccine trials, there was diverse representation among participants to ensure the vaccine would be safe for people of all ethnic/racial groups. There are now people of color leading and working in vaccine research studies to make sure their communities are protected from harm.

References: [Vaccinate with Confidence Tips for the Healthcare Team \(cdc.gov\)](#)
<https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M21-0055>

- ✦ All the information about COVID-19 vaccines has been made public. I would be happy to help you access that information if you would like. [<https://scdhec.gov/covid19/covid-19-vaccine>]

Reference: Journal of the American Pharmacists Association- COVID 19 Vaccine Confidence Project - Table 4

I'm concerned that the vaccine was not tested on people like me.

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ During the vaccine clinical trials, tens of thousands of people of all ages, races, and ethnicities volunteered to receive the vaccine. Data has shown the vaccine to be effective in preventing the virus in all groups of people.

Reference: The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' Interim Recommendation for Use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine — United States, December 2020 | MMWR ([cdc.gov](#))

Vaccine Timeline

Can the vaccine give you COVID-19?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ No, vaccines do not contain any live virus and cannot cause the disease. The vaccines do cause the immune system to ramp up, which leads to potential side effects like fever and fatigue. These side effects are normal and reflect the vaccine is working. It takes about two weeks to build immunity to the virus, so if someone who has been vaccinated gets COVID-19 it is possible that they were infected before their immune system had time to build this immunity.

Reference: [Myths and Facts about COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC](#)

- ✦ No. You cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine. With all the information out there, it can be difficult to determine what is true and what is false. This is one of those false pieces of information.

Reference: [Addressing Mistrust About COVID-19 Vaccines Among Patients of Color | Annals of Internal Medicine \(acpijournals.org\)](#)

I think the vaccine was made too quickly. Why was it approved so fast?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ The COVID-19 Vaccines underwent the same testing and review requirements as all other vaccines. Due to the severity of this pandemic, the medical and scientific communities around the world made it their highest priority. The vaccine was developed faster because they were all focused on developing this vaccine at the same time.

Reference: [Debunking Common COVID-19 Vaccine Myths - familydoctor.org](#) , [Science & Tech Spotlight: COVID-19 Vaccine Development \(gao.gov\)](#)

Reference: Journal of the American Pharmacists Association- COVID 19 Vaccine Confidence Project – Table 4

- ✦ Funding from private companies and the Government helped to get the COVID-19 Vaccines approved faster. The FDA also inspected facilities sooner than normal so that once the vaccines were approved, they could be given out faster. Also, more people volunteered for trial and manufacturers were able to recruit much faster than normal.

Reference: [COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Project | Covid-19 Treatment Hub \(reaganudall.org\)](#)

- ✦ The COVID-19 vaccine is a mRNA vaccine. mRNA vaccines can be produced faster than other vaccines because they utilize the body to develop antibodies, instead of antibodies being developed artificially outside of the body.

References: <https://www.vumc.org/viii/spotlight/how-does-mrna-vaccine-compare-traditional-vaccine>
[COVID-19 and mRNA Vaccines—First Large Test for a New Approach | Infectious Diseases | JAMA | JAMA Network](#)
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/vaccines/COVID-19-mRNA-infographic_G_508.pdf

Vaccine Timeline

I think the vaccine was made too quickly. Why was it approved so fast? (cont'd)

- ✦ COVID-19 Vaccines are new, but mRNA vaccines are not. They have been studied for years for other diseases like Zika, Rabies, and in cancer research.

Reference: [Debunking Common COVID-19 Vaccine Myths - familydoctor.org](https://familydoctor.org/2020/05/14/debunking-common-covid-19-vaccine-myths/)

The vaccine has not gone through enough testing and clinical trials. How do I know it's safe?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ COVID-19 Vaccines have gone through the same clinical testing prior to approval as other vaccines. Only safe and effective COVID-19 Vaccines that have been tested on tens of thousands of volunteers have been approved.

Reference: [COVID-19 Vaccine - familydoctor.org](https://familydoctor.org/2020/05/14/covid-19-vaccine/)

- ✦ COVID-19 Vaccines meet all the same safety requirements as all other vaccines. Tens of thousands of people volunteered to be in the trials, helping to make sure the vaccine side effects, and effectiveness could be identified faster. Scientists and public health officials, not politicians, decided when the COVID-19 vaccine was safe, effective, and ready for public use.

Reference: [COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Project | Covid-19 Treatment Hub \(reaganudall.org\)](https://reaganudall.org/covid-19-vaccine-confidence-project/)

Vaccine Timeline

What are the differences between the different vaccines that are manufactured? (Pfizer, Moderna, J&J)

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ Think of your DNA like the ‘blueprint’ for a house. mRNA (or messenger RNA) is like a ‘contractor’ that gives instructions to the cells in your body on what to do to build the house (prevent infection), using the ‘blueprint’ (or DNA). In other words, the mRNA instructs your cells to create ‘spike proteins’ against COVID-19, which your body reacts to by making antibodies that will attack and destroy the actual coronavirus if you become infected. Then the mRNA contractor disappears completely without interacting with your DNA.

Reference: [Dr. Kimberly Manning, Emory University SOM](#)

- ✦ Moderna & Pfizer manufacture mRNA vaccines. mRNA vaccines contain messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) to instruct cells how to make the spike protein against COVID-19. Your body then makes antibodies against this spike protein, the same way it does with other vaccines. mRNA does not interact with your DNA, and it is quickly broken down after the spike protein is developed. The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are administered in two doses.

References: [COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions - familydoctor.org](#)
[NEJM — Covid-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#)

- ✦ J&J uses modified adenovirus to introduce DNA for the spike protein into the cells. Adenovirus is what causes the common cold, but the virus in the vaccine is weakened so that it cannot cause the disease. The virus DNA does not interact with your DNA. The adenovirus used in the J&J vaccine cannot reproduce in humans, so there is no risk of viral spread. The J&J vaccine is administered in one dose.

References: [NEJM — Covid-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#)
[COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions - familydoctor.org](#)

Vaccine Side Effects

Are there any side effects associated with the COVID-19 vaccine?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ You could experience mild symptoms after receiving the vaccine. These are similar to side effects of other vaccines and include pain at the injection site, fever, fatigue, headache, and muscle aches. These are all signs that the vaccine is working,
- ✦ Severe reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine are rare. Similar to other vaccines, you will be asked if you have a history of allergic reactions to vaccines before receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. Your healthcare provider will monitor you for 15 minutes after receiving the vaccine to ensure there are no adverse reactions.

Reference: [COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions - familydoctor.org](https://familydoctor.org/ask-the-experts/2020/08/covid-19-vaccine-frequently-asked-questions/)

- ✦ There have been reports of blood clots associated with the J&J vaccine. These cases are rare and the incidence of blood clots from the vaccine are much lower than the risk of blood clots with the actual virus. (Seven events per 1 million vaccinations among women 18 - 49 years old and 0.9 events per million vaccinations among women 50 years and older.)

References: [COVID-19 Vaccine - familydoctor.org](https://familydoctor.org/ask-the-experts/2020/08/covid-19-vaccine-frequently-asked-questions/)
[CDC Recommends Use of Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine Resume | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s1103-covid-19-vaccine-janssen.html)

I've already had COVID-19, don't I have natural immunity to getting the virus again?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ There is natural immunity after having COVID-19. However, there have been reports of reinfection. It is unclear how long previously having the virus will provide immunity, although re-infection within 90 days is rare.

Reference: [Debunking Common COVID-19 Vaccine Myths - familydoctor.org](https://familydoctor.org/ask-the-experts/2020/08/covid-19-vaccine-frequently-asked-questions/)

- ✦ People who have already been infected with COVID-19 have some natural immunity, but there are also documented reports of unvaccinated people becoming reinfected at a later date. The COVID-19 vaccine provides a boost in protection for people that have already/previously had the virus.

Reference: [Debunking Common COVID-19 Vaccine Myths - familydoctor.org](https://familydoctor.org/ask-the-experts/2020/08/covid-19-vaccine-frequently-asked-questions/)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>

Vaccine Side Effects

I've heard that getting the vaccine will put a microchip in my body.

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ There are no microchips or tracking devices in the vaccine. Vaccines only contain mRNA, lipids, salts, and other agents that are normally found in vaccines.

Reference: [Debunking Common COVID-19 Vaccine Myths - familydoctor.org](https://familydoctor.org/2020/07/20/debunking-common-covid-19-vaccine-myths/)

Will the vaccine alter my DNA?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ The mRNA from the COVID-19 vaccine does not enter cell nucleus where DNA is found. mRNA is broken down once the vaccine is delivered to the cell. This process does not alter DNA.

Reference: [Debunking Common COVID-19 Vaccine Myths - familydoctor.org](https://familydoctor.org/2020/07/20/debunking-common-covid-19-vaccine-myths/)

I'm concerned about the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine in my child.

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ The CDC has had reports of two types of heart inflammation (myocarditis and pericarditis) in adolescents and young adults. These reports are rare considering the millions of people that have been vaccinated.
- ✦ COVID-19 Vaccines are safe and have been well-studied in adolescents. The side effects involving heart inflammation typically occurred within days after receiving the 2nd dose of the vaccine. Most patients responded to treatment for this and recovered quickly.
- ✦ If your child experiences a rare symptom of chest pain, shortness of breath, feeling of heart fluttering or pounding you should seek immediate medical care.

Reference: [Myocarditis and Pericarditis Following mRNA COVID-19 Vaccination | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s0601-covid-19-vaccine-heart-disease.html)

General Vaccine Concerns

What are some benefits if I decide to get the vaccine?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ By getting a COVID-19 vaccine, you will protect yourself as well as others (family, friends, and loved ones) from getting the virus. This is especially important for those who have loved ones with pre-existing conditions. You will also be able to resume some normal activities and some without masks.

Reference: [COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Project | Covid-19 Treatment Hub \(reaganudall.org\)](#)

- ✦ In most places, fully vaccinated people can resume activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing. If you've been around someone who has COVID-19, you do not need to stay away from others or get tested unless you have symptoms.
- ✦ If you are fully vaccinated, you can travel within the United States without having to be tested or self-quarantining before or after travel. You may be able to travel to certain countries outside the US.

Reference: [When You've Been Fully Vaccinated | CDC](#)

- ✦ If you are fully vaccinated and still get COVID-19 your symptoms are likely to be less severe and you will have a lesser chance of needing to be hospitalized or experiencing a more critical health crisis.

Reference: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/effectiveness/work.html>

** Refer to current CDC guidelines for updates on mask mandates and physical distancing guidelines.*

Why do children need to take the vaccine?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ Children may be less likely to get severely ill from COVID-19, but they can still spread the disease, even with no symptoms. The CDC recommends that everyone aged 12 and older get the vaccine to avoid becoming sick and spreading the virus.

References: [Get Vaccine Answers | Who should get the COVID-19... | The Ad Council](#)
[NEJM — Covid-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#)

- ✦ In most places, fully vaccinated children and teens can resume activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing.

Reference: [When You've Been Fully Vaccinated | CDC](#)

** Refer to current CDC guidelines for updates on mask mandates and physical distancing guidelines.*

General Vaccine Concerns

I have a chronic condition. Will the vaccine make my condition(s) worse?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ People with chronic health conditions are at higher risk of complications from the actual virus not the vaccine. These complications include severe COVID-19, hospitalization for COVID-19, and death from COVID-19.
- ✦ 90% of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 and 76% of those who died from COVID had an underlying condition(s).

References: [EtR for Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine under EUA | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>

I have an immunosuppressed disease (HIV, etc). Will taking the vaccine make my condition worse?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ There is limited data reported for these groups. However, non-live vaccines are generally recommended for people with immunosuppressed diseases and none of the COVID-19 Vaccines are live.

Reference: [Interim Clinical Considerations for Use of COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC](#)

How will the vaccine affect elderly people?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ If unvaccinated, the elderly population is at higher risk of complications of COVID-19 including severe COVID-19, hospitalization for COVID-19, and death from COVID-19. 43% of hospitalized patients were >65 and 80% of those who died were > 65.

Reference: [EtR for Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine under EUA | CDC](#)

Does the COVID-19 vaccine cause infertility?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ There is currently no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccine affects fertility in females or males.

Reference: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html>

General Vaccine Concerns

I am pregnant. How will the vaccine affect me and my baby?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ All pregnant people are encouraged to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Results of multiple trials have demonstrated the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine on mothers and infants. Data has recently shown antibodies in infant cord blood and breast milk, thereby providing passive immunity to the baby from the vaccinated mother.

Reference: [Studies Confirm COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines Safe, Effective for Pregnant Women – NIH Director's Blog](#)

- ✦ Pregnant people are encouraged to get vaccinated since they are at an increased risk of experiencing more severe complications from the actual virus than non-pregnant people.

Reference: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/pregnancy.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html>

Will I need to get the vaccine or a booster every year?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ Per the FDA and CDC boosters are not needed at this time. There are ongoing studies to ensure patients do not need boosters.

Reference: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s-07082021.html>

** Refer to current CDC guidelines for updates and recommendations on COVID-19 vaccine boosters.*

What if I have an upcoming medical procedure scheduled, can I still get the vaccine?

Examples of Plain Language Responses:

- ✦ Speak with your healthcare provider if you have an upcoming procedure. There may be a wait time between receiving the COVID-19 vaccine and having the procedure. The procedures listed by the CDC include, but are not limited to:
 - Routine blood work
 - Mammograms
 - Dental procedures
 - CT scans
 - EKGs (also known as ECGs or electrocardiograms)
 - Cardiac stress tests
 - Colonoscopies
 - Ultrasounds

Reference: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/expect/other-procedures.html>

Additional References

Vaccine Trust

<https://www.nmanet.org/news/news.asp?id=544970&terms=%22covid+and+task+and+force%22>

What Contributes to COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitance in Black Communities, and How can it Be Addressed – RAND

Vaccine Safety

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/safety-of-vaccines.html>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/coronavirus-covid-19/vaccine/comparing-vaccines>

<https://www.ynhhs.org/patient-care/covid-19/vaccine/differences-between-the-vaccines.aspx>

<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/heres-how-it-was-possible-to-develop-covid-19-vaccines-so-quickly#The-bottom-line>

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/vaccines/COVID-19-mRNA-infographic_G_508.pdf

Vaccine Efficacy

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/effectiveness.html>

Vaccine Side Effects

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/expect/after.html>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/coronavirus-vaccine/art-20484859#side-effects>

Vaccine Benefits

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/coronavirus-vaccine/art-20484859#vaccine-benefits>

<https://www.uab.edu/news/youcanuse/item/12025-five-benefits-of-getting-a-covid-19-vaccine>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html>