



Ensuring equitable COVID-19 vaccine coverage is a Colorado and national priority

To protect us all from COVID-19, the majority of adults and kids needs to be vaccinated. While we are all aware of the need for vaccination, we also know the decision to vaccinate a child can be complex. Even for parents (and guardians) who accept the vaccine, the decision to vaccinate their child can feel like a very different decision from the one they made for themselves. There are distinct concerns and considerations when it comes to their growing child, especially the short- and long-term effects of the COVID-19 vaccine on their child’s developing body. To address these concerns, it is essential to have conversations with all parents whose children are not yet fully vaccinated.

Healthcare providers remain the most trusted source for information about vaccinations and there are low-burden strategies to effectively talk with parents about any uncertainty or concerns they may have. In this brief, we suggest specific strategies and language that you can use to address mistrust of and concerns regarding COVID-19 vaccines for kids.

There is a 3-step, evidence-based process to maximize vaccine acceptance:

**ASSESS
DISPOSITION**

**USE MI TO
TALK IT OUT**

**MAKE A
PLAN**

These steps, built upon Motivational Interviewing skills and strategies, will help you to increase a person’s motivation for change. Past research has found that even vaccine hesitant participants remain open to learning about vaccines. When treated in a respectful and affirming manner, the majority of people express a genuine desire to have an open and honest conversation. Many people who are vaccine hesitant will eventually decide to vaccinate themselves and their children, but this is often based on a decision-making process rather than a one-time conversation. Through effective conversations, you can support people to make the best decision for themselves, their families, and their communities.

COVID-19 PROTECT | ME YOU US COMMUNITY INITIATIVE



<https://www.coaccess.com>

Welcome to the COVID-19 Protect | Me You Us Community Initiative emphasizing personal responsibility to protect yourself, your family, and your community. This is a partnership between Colorado Access, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, and the Behavioral Health & Wellness Program at the University of Colorado—Anschutz Medical Campus, Department of Psychiatry.

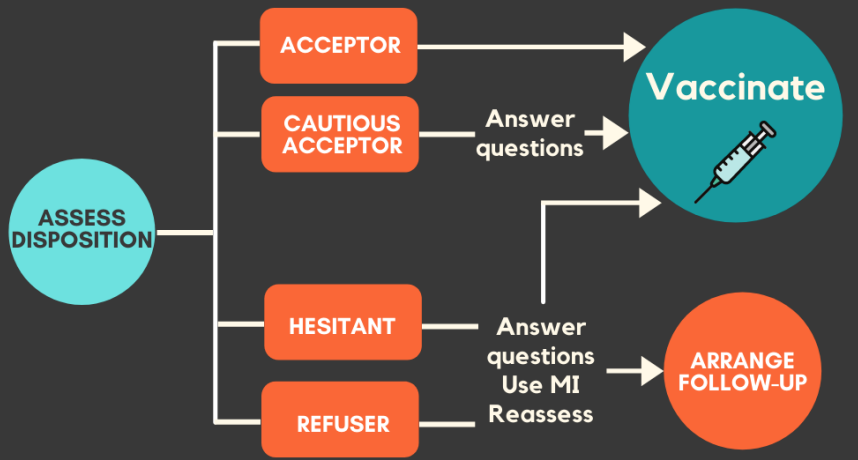


<https://www.bhwellness.org>



STEP 1 | Assess Disposition

PROTECT | ME YOU US



At the beginning of any COVID-19 vaccine conversation, you'll want to assess the person's disposition. There are 4 vaccine dispositions to consider:

Acceptor – If the parent wants the vaccine for their child, no additional conversation is needed.

Cautious acceptor – A parent may have questions about the vaccine or need more information to confirm they want to vaccinate their child.

Hesitant – With someone who is hesitant, you want to engage in a dialogue about their concerns, align their priorities and values with vaccination, and evoke motivation to accept a vaccination for their child.

Refuser – With a parent who is firm in their stance against the COVID-19 vaccine for their child, your priority is to invite an ongoing dialogue about vaccination.

FOCUS | KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Surveys have found several key considerations that are important to parents who are considering vaccination for their children. In this section, we provide the facts useful to address their primary concerns, including vaccine safety, effect of the vaccine on fertility, and the potential for the mRNA vaccines to change their child's DNA. Additionally, we review the risk for short- and long-term side effects of the vaccine as compared to a COVID-19 infection.

Safety. The primary concern about the pediatric COVID-19 vaccine is its short- and long-term safety. Based on the findings of the COVID-19 vaccine studies, we can say with confidence that the COVID-19 vaccine provides strong protection in children with no reported severe adverse reactions. When we look to other childhood vaccines for comparison, we have evidence that long-term side effects are very rare. And if they do occur, they usually occur within six weeks of vaccination. We have no reason to believe this would be any different for the COVID-19 vaccine. Since millions of adults and kids have safely received the vaccine with few short- or long-term side effects, we can be assured of the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Fertility. Parents want to protect their child's future reproductive health. We know that there is absolutely no evidence that any vaccine, including the COVID-19 vaccine, causes any form of infertility or affects any part of the reproductive system.

DNA. It is important for families to know that the COVID-19 vaccine does not affect or change a child's development. COVID-19 vaccines that use the mRNA technology do not interact with a child's DNA at all. DNA is stored in the nucleus of a cell and the mRNA vaccines never get into the nucleus. Once the immune cells use the instructions provided by the mRNA, the body breaks it down and discards it.

Vaccine vs. Infection. For people who are vaccine hesitant, their primary focus is often on the potential side effects of the vaccine while they overlook the risk of both short- and long-term side effects from a COVID-19 infection. While we know that some children, similar to adults, may have a few short-term side effects post-vaccination, these effects last only a few hours or a few days. When you compare this to the effects of a COVID-19 infection, even though typically milder for kids, it can create serious conditions. In particular, long-haul COVID can cause even more severe COVID symptoms, for months after the initial infection. Multisystem inflammatory syndrome, or MIS-C, from a COVID-19 infection can affect the heart, blood vessels, and other organs, which can make some children very ill and in need of urgent care.

RESOURCE | COVID-19 & VACCINE INFORMATION FOR KIDS

Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment
<https://covid19.colorado.gov/kids-vaccines>

American Academy of Pediatrics
<https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/covid-19-vaccine-for-children/about-the-covid-19-vaccine-frequently-asked-questions/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/children-teens.html>

HealthyChildren.org
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/The-Science-Behind-the-COVID-19-Vaccine-Parent-FAQs.aspx>

STEP 2 | USE MI TO TALK IT OUT



Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a collaborative conversation style that enhances motivation and commitment to change

To increase uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine, you'll want to engage in specific MI skills and strategies that support your conversations with parents who are vaccine hesitant. Remember, the goal of your conversation is to increase MOTIVATION to get the vaccine for their child. The goal is NOT to persuade them to get their child vaccinated. Regardless of the parent's disposition, the most effective approach involves—partnership, acceptance & evocation of motivation.

CREATE A PARTNERSHIP

From your opening statement, the message you communicate about your role as a health partner will go a long way to foster trust in your relationship. You'll want to maintain a stance that leads with compassionate curiosity and follows with active listening. Demonstrate an interest in the parent's view of the COVID-19 vaccine. Explore the factors that contribute to their view. And communicate your understanding through reflective statements that highlight their unique perspective.

While you are an expert on health, the parent is an expert on their child. You each have something to contribute. To create a collaborative conversation, use open questions to inquire with curiosity about the parent's stance on the vaccine for their child. Gather the information you need to assess the person's disposition.

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What are your thoughts about the COVID-19 vaccine for kids?

How do you feel about your child getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

What questions do you have for me about the COVID-19 vaccine for kids?



DEFINE | Key MI Skills | OARS

OPEN QUESTION – Questions that elicit a broader response—cannot respond with a simple, “Yes or no,” or a single word

AFFIRMATION – Statements that recognize a person's strengths

REFLECTION – A restatement of something a person has said—either word for word or with added meaning or emphasis

SUMMARY – Statements linked together that summarize the specific aspects of the conversation

STEP 2 | USE MI TO TALK IT OUT



COMMUNICATE ACCEPTANCE

Throughout your conversation, maintain an approach of acceptance. No matter how close or far apart your viewpoints are, let parents know that you do not judge them for their opinions. Even if the parent takes a firm stance against vaccination for their child, avoid being reactive. Ease into a dialogue about their concerns and listen for values and priorities that could support vaccine acceptance. Share the information you have about children who have taken the vaccine, including children in your own family, to normalize taking the COVID-19 vaccine.

As you listen to the parent, what do you hear about their priorities and values? Often, this information can be found in the subtext of their statements and questions. Use this information to shape your response.

Offer **REFLECTIONS** to make sure you understand the parent's perspective and communicate that you're listening. Express your stance of acceptance and compassion while highlighting their values and priorities that are aligned with vaccination.

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You want to know the vaccine is safe before you get your child vaccinated.

You're concerned about the impact of the pandemic on your child's mental health.

It's important for your family to be healthy so you can work.

AFFIRM their strengths and resources that support the decision to get vaccinated.

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You're a devoted parent, and your child's health and safety are a priority to you.

You're committed to using every resource to help your child to thrive.

You are very thoughtful and responsible in your decision-making.

Summarize your conversation with an emphasis on the benefits the parent has identified for vaccination.

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The pandemic has put a lot of pressure on you and your family. You want to see an end to it, and you want to do your part. While you know the vaccine can help with this, you want to know it is safe. You have had questions about the speed of the development of the vaccine and hearing the details about its development puts your mind at ease.

STEP 2 | USE MI TO TALK IT OUT



Now that you have set a foundation made up of partnership, acceptance, and compassion, and then built upon this foundation with Open questions, Affirmations, Reflections, and Summaries focused on highlighting values and priorities that support vaccination, you'll want to be sure to incorporate two other key MI strategies.

ELICIT-PROVIDE-ELICIT (EPE)

EVOKE MOTIVATION

This MI strategy is used whenever you want to share information.

The first ELICIT means you assess their knowledge about the topic. This helps to gather information, understand their perspective, and avoid repeating what they already know.

Then, if you have information you would like to share, ask for permission before you offer it. If the parent asks for information, feel free to PROVIDE the information you know without asking for permission.

The second ELICIT refers to asking for their understanding, interpretation, or response to the information you provide.

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Elicit. “Would you share what you know about the COVID-19 vaccine and fertility?” After you listen to what they have to say, ask for permission to share information, “Would you like me to share what I know?”

Provide. “We know that there is absolutely no evidence that any vaccine, including the COVID-19 vaccine, causes any form of infertility or affects any other parts of the reproductive system.”

Elicit. “What are your thoughts about the information I shared?”

SUPPORT CHOICE & AUTONOMY

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It's your decision whether you
vaccinate your child.
Only you can decide what's best for
your child.
What would you like to do now?

Freedom of choice is a crucial message you want to communicate throughout your conversation. You give power and control to parents through statements and questions that offer autonomy support. When the perception of having to push against someone goes away, there is an opening for dialogue.

STEP 3 | MAKE A PLAN



By now, you have a good sense of the parent's stance on getting their child vaccinated. Ask the question, "Now that we have talked about the vaccine for your child, what do you want to do?"

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Now that we have talked about the vaccine for your child, what do you want to do?

It's up to you whether you vaccinate your child.

Let's continue to talk about the pediatric COVID-19 vaccine for your child. Is it all right with you if I bring it up again during your child's next visit?

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If the parent accepts the vaccine for their child, support them to take steps to get their child vaccinated. For people who want to "think about it," offer an affirmation or an autonomy support statement, such as, "It's up to you whether you vaccinate your child."

Whether the parent agrees to the vaccination or not, let them know that you will continue to talk with them about it by saying, "Let's continue to talk about the pediatric COVID-19 vaccine for your child. Is it all right with you if I bring it up again during your child's next visit?"

Keep the conversational door open for anyone whose child is not yet vaccinated. Regardless, if the parent is hesitant or a refuser, you'll want to revisit this conversation in future visits.

FOCUS| Injection Phobia

Injection phobia can be a major barrier to vaccinations for children. Before the scheduled vaccine appointment, you'll want to share with parents some effective strategies to manage their child's fear of shots. Some ideas include:

- Prepare BEFORE the visit to reduce your child's stress
- Be in a calm emotional state when you talk about the vaccine with your child
- The day before the appointment, talk with your child about what to expect
- Before the visit, make a plan together for the actual vaccination. Offer your child choices to help them feel in control. "Do you want to sit in my lap or hold my hand? Do you want to cuddle a stuffed animal, take deep breaths, or watch a video on my phone?"
- Younger children may want to act it out with a toy syringe on a stuffed animal
- Plan to give a reward post-vaccination such as a playground visit, toy, or treat
- Preparation is key!

