



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

These are not routine times, and the past year has further exposed health disparities and social injustice faced by our most vulnerable citizens. COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy is highest among the very populations most disproportionately affected by the pandemic. This includes communities of color as well as groups who are economically and socially disadvantaged. Providers’ perceptions and concerns regarding patients’ responses to getting vaccinated may discourage engagement in conversations essential to increasing vaccination rates. Outside of patients’ values, fears, and social norms, patients have valid concerns and real barriers to getting vaccinated.

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

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 assist healthcare providers to increase patients’ 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 patients express a genuine desire to have an open and honest conversation with medical experts. Many vaccine hesitant patients will eventually decide to be vaccinated, but this is often based on a decision-making process rather than a one-time conversation. Through effective conversations, healthcare providers can start patients on their personal path to health.

**COVID-19 PROTECT | ME YOU US COMMUNITY INITIATIVE**



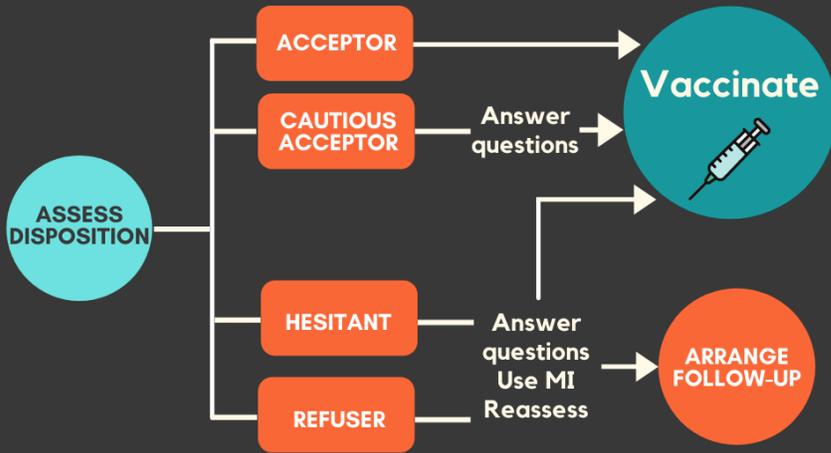
Welcome to the COVID-19 Protect | Me You Us Community Initiative emphasizing personal responsibility to protect yourself, your family, and your community. This is a partnership between Colorado Access, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, and the Behavioral Health & Wellness Program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





# 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 your patient wants the vaccine, no additional conversation is needed.

**Cautious acceptor** – A patient may have questions about the vaccine or need more information to confirm they want to take the vaccine.

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

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

## FOCUS | VACCINE HESITANT POPULATIONS

For the protection of us all, the majority of our population needs to be vaccinated. To achieve this goal, it is essential that we reach out to those groups that are vaccine hesitant. Patients who are often the most at-risk due to health disparities, common experiences of current and historical trauma, and social injustice deserve special attention. These groups include communities of color, particularly Black and Latinx, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with behavioral health conditions, disabilities, and low-income as well as people who live in rural communities.

**Trust.** For many reasons, trust can be difficult for people who have had negative interactions with providers, medical systems, or governmental agencies. Due to these negative experiences, whether intentional or unintentional, patients may doubt they are being told the truth. There may also be fear that they or their community are being used or harmed to benefit the majority. Or a person may avoid healthcare services altogether because they do not experience being seen, heard, or treated with respect.

**Respect.** There are many ways to communicate respect. Be mindful in your interactions—readily acknowledge cultural differences, navigate language barriers, answer questions using clear and simple language, use your body language to communicate safety and compassion. Look to the person across from you and seek to connect with them, not just as a provider to patient, but person to person.

**Safety.** Without safety, health and wellness cannot thrive. Whether it is through your physical presence, your words, or the environment create a welcoming space. Approach people with compassionate curiosity, taking the time you need to understand their concerns and needs. The time you invest in each person is never wasted.



- What questions do you have about the vaccine?
- What do you need from me to make the best decision for you and your family?
- I'll share with you what I know.



- I'm aware of the racial (ethnic/cultural) differences between us.
- Your biggest concern is safety.
- Where would you like to go from here?



- Would it be okay with you if we talk about the COVID-19 vaccine?
- What would you like to know about the vaccine's side effects?
- The decision is yours.

## RESOURCE |

COVID-19 & VACCINE HESITANCY

Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

<https://covid19.colorado.gov>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/talking-to-patients.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/talking-to-patients.html)



## 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 by vaccine hesitant patients, you'll want to engage in specific MI skills and strategies that support your conversations with vaccine hesitant patients. Remember, the goal of your conversation is to increase MOTIVATION to get the vaccine. The goal is NOT to persuade them to get the vaccine. Regardless of your patient's disposition, the most effective approach involves—partnership, acceptance & evoking motivation.

### 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 your patient'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, your patient is an expert on themselves. You each have something to contribute. To create a collaborative conversation, use open questions to inquire with curiosity about the person's stance on the vaccine. Gather the information you need to assess your patient's disposition.

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

What are your current thoughts about the vaccine?

What do you know about the vaccine?

What questions do you have for me about the vaccine?



## 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



### ACCEPTANCE

Throughout your conversation, maintain an approach of acceptance. No matter how close or far apart your viewpoints are, let patients know that you do not judge them for their opinions. Even if your patient takes a firm stance against vaccination, 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 people who have taken the vaccine, including yourself, to normalize getting vaccinated.

As you listen to your patient, 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. For example, you could reflect back what you hear about the importance of protecting their health and that of their loved ones. Then, highlight the person's strengths and resources that support vaccine acceptance, such as, "When you know what you want, you take action to achieve your goal."

Offer **REFLECTIONS** to make sure you understand patients' perspectives 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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Being free to make your own choice is key to you.  
To make a decision about whether you get the vaccine, you want to know more about it.  
You want to know the vaccine you get is one you can trust.  
Your top priority is to stay healthy so you can continue to support your family.

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

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Your commitment to your health is obvious.  
You are thoughtful in your decision-making.  
You want the best for your family's health.  
You're someone who makes up your own mind.

**SUMMARIZE** your conversation with an emphasis on the benefits the patient has identified for vaccination.

“ 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



### EVOKE MOTIVATION

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 the following key MI strategies—Elicit-Provide-Elicit (EPE) and autonomy support.

## ELICIT-PROVIDE-ELICIT (EPE)

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

The first **ELICIT** means you ask for permission before you share any unsolicited information. Use this opportunity to assess their knowledge about vaccination so you avoid repeating what they already know.

If your patient 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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Would you like to know about the development of the COVID-19 vaccine?

The reason we have such highly effective vaccines so quickly is because every available resource was put into the development of this vaccine. Money and regulatory approval were available. The vaccine technology already existed. No steps were skipped. Researchers from around the world worked tirelessly to develop a safe and effective vaccine.

What are your thoughts about this information?

## SUPPORT CHOICE & AUTONOMY

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It's your choice.

Only you can decide what's best for you.

What do you want to do now?

Freedom of choice is a crucial message you want to communicate throughout your conversation. You give power and control to your patients 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



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

You'll know what is right for you.

Let's continue to talk about the COVID-19 vaccine. Is it all right by you if I bring it up again the next time we meet?

By now, you have a good sense of your patient's stance on getting vaccinated. Ask the question, "Now that we have talked about the vaccine, what do you want to do?" If the person accepts the vaccine, support them to take steps to get the vaccine. For people who want to "think about it," offer an affirmation or an autonomy support statement, such as, "You'll know what is right for you."

Whether your patient accepts 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 COVID-19 vaccine. Is it all right by you if I bring it up again the next time we meet?"

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

