

The Covid-19 vaccine

Top tips to support health and care staff to have confident conversations with local people and patients

We know that for people to make informed choices about the Covid-19 vaccine, they want to hear from trusted health and care professionals. You play a vital role in speaking to local people and communities, listening to their perspectives and sharing unbiased information about the vaccine.

We would like to share some tips that we have learned along the way. We hope they help you feel confident to have these essential, and sometimes difficult, conversations.



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Listen, without prejudice

Adopt the mindset of counsellor rather than sales-person. Seek to understand and support rather than aiming for a "win".

Make plenty of time

Sensitively explore perspectives and allow for questions and answers.

Be person-centred

Let the session be led by the concerns and interests of the group.

Respect language and cultural diversity

People may be engaging in their second or third language. Explain scientific or medical terms. Avoid abbreviations (CCG, JCVI etc) or explain them if they are helpful. Be clear, but not condescending, and give people the opportunity to seek clarity. Find out ahead of the session whether interpreters would be helpful for the audience.

Explore why people are hesitant (don't assume)

Listen to their specific concerns and aim to present a balance.



Acknowledge past experiences

Acknowledge that people have not been treated fairly in the past. For example, experiences of racism; other forms of prejudice; not being taken seriously; not feeling heard.

Be familiar with common questions

Get to know frequently asked questions and answers, and other sources of information to signpost to – for example, www.NHS.uk.

Share your first-hand experience

Describe your own experience of having the vaccine.

Be transparent and honest

Point to trusted or verified sources of accessible information and let people know what to expect in terms of side effects. If you do not know the answer to a question – be honest, and find out the answer (if you can) or signpost to other credible sources of information.

Refer to clinicians people know

For example: “I have heard Dr Agnelo advising people that they should speak to their own doctor if they are worried about having the vaccine.”

Harness trust in the NHS

A strong NHS identity and association has proven important – some people associate vaccines with government, or authoritarian control, but are more trusting of the NHS.

There is an agreed NHS position on the safety and efficacy of the approved Covid-19 vaccines. It is important to refer to the NHS fact sheet or presentation containing the latest information about the Covid-19 vaccine to ensure clarity and consistency of messages across all clinician representatives.

Create safe space

Pay attention to the dynamics of the group. Support quieter voices to feel comfortable to speak out so their perspectives and ideas can be explored. You can do this by inviting them directly, or reiterating that there is no pressure. People need to be supported and given time to consider the facts and make the best possible decision for their own health and their loved ones. You can also highlight it is their right to decide, the NHS will not force anyone.

Share information about the vaccine development

Explain the process, trials and total number of people vaccinated in the UK so far – for example, ethnicities, age, and long-term conditions. Discuss how the vaccine was developed and the emergency use license:

- The approval process regarding mRNA is said to be new, but actually lots of medications have been using it for many years.
- Be open and honest in letting people know what to expect in terms of side effects.
- Tell people about who was involved in the trials – people of all races and ages.

Recap the main points you gave to answer any questions

Summarise and address concerns at the end of the session to promote further understanding. Provide opportunities to check understanding or ask further questions.