

# COVID-19 Vaccine Communication & Outreach Strategies in Primary Care

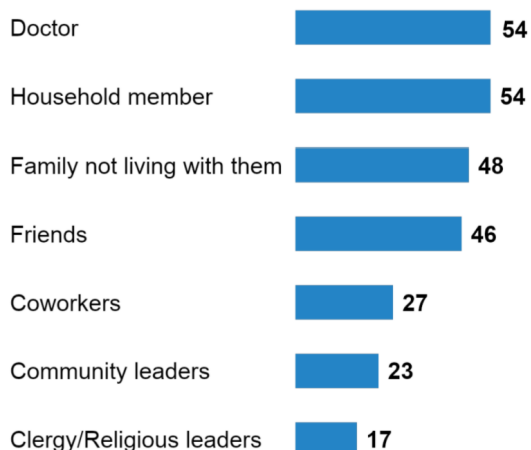
- As demand for COVID-19 vaccine decreases, primary care providers will have to meaningfully communicate the benefit of the COVID-19 vaccine to get patients in for an appointment
- Primary care practices have an opportunity to reach out to established patients that already have trusting relationships with a provider to get vaccinated against COVID-19
- One size does not fit all: multiple approaches are recommended to target a diverse population
  - This document contains best practices from other COVID-19 vaccinating practices
- Consider the existing resources you have and the resources you will need to implement a successful outreach campaign
- Meeting a patient where they are in readiness is the best way to ensure that their needs are also being met
- NOTE: Even if you are not vaccinating at your practice, you have an important role in outreaching to patients and messaging why the vaccine is beneficial. This document is for you, too.

## The Most Trusted Resource: YOU

### Public more influenced by those closer to them, with doctors on par with family

*If any of the following people get the vaccine first would that influence your decision about getting it?*

% influenced by their ...



Source: Q15. Maryland COVID-19 Vaccine Tracking Survey 1, Mar. 24 – Apr. 20, 2021; N=851. Note: Percentages are part of a scale and do not add to 100%.

According to the Maryland COVID-19 Vaccine Tracking Survey:

- 56% of respondents would prefer to the vaccine from a doctor's office [1]
- Across all of the surveyed sub-groups, there was an 80% net confidence in their doctor providing trusted information on the vaccine [2]

[1]: Source: Q51. Maryland COVID-19 Vaccine Tracking Survey 1, Mar. 24-Apr. 20, 2021; N=397. Note: Percentages are from a check all that apply list and do not add to 100%  
[2]: Source: Q46f. Maryland COVID-19 Vaccine Tracking Survey 1, Mar. 24-Apr. 20, 2021; N=1322. Note: Percentages are from a check all that apply list and do not add to 100%

# How to Communicate with Your Patients

## Some of the nation's leading practices for effective communication styles include:

- Appeal to emotions, such as the motivation to protect oneself and loved ones along with the desire to connect with others
- Direct, clear, and common-sense-driven messages are perceived as informative and believable
- Offer advertisements/communications in multiple languages
- Refer viewers to additional resources (*See materials for patients on Page 11*)

*These responses can be extra powerful coming from a trusted advisor like a primary care provider.*

## Top 3 most effective messages for patients who get the vaccine:

1. Protect myself
2. Protect family and friends
3. Help get life back to normal



Patients can use these affirmations as motivation



## Key things to know about the vaccine: (adapted from the CDC)

- COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective
- You may have side effects after vaccination, but these are normal
- People who have been fully vaccinated can start to do some things that they had stopped doing because of the pandemic



# Talking Points to Hot Topics (Vaccine Hesitancy)

For more detailed talking points, please refer to the resource titled "COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy: The Ultimate Guide of Talking Points to Address Patient Concerns" ([Link](#))



I'm worried about the cost of the vaccine.

- All COVID vaccines are free of charge for Marylanders



I am worried about the side-effects of the vaccines.

- Some patients experience mild side effects after receiving the vaccine
- Side-effects pale in comparison to the chance of you, or a loved one, contracting COVID-19 and falling seriously ill
- Side-effects do not include contracting COVID-19 or other serious health conditions
- All research indicates that getting the vaccine is the best way to protect yourself from COVID-19

# Vaccine Hesitancy Hot Topics & Talking Points



I am concerned about dangerous blood clots from the vaccines.

- The CDC and FDA are continually monitoring for potential adverse reactions in all vaccines
- This potential side effect from the J&J vaccine is extremely rare (far rarer than the chance of falling seriously ill from COVID-19)
- Our practice will be monitoring patients who receive the J&J vaccine - early detection is key
- There are two other available vaccines (Moderna and Pfizer) made with different technology than the J&J vaccine: blood clotting side effects have not been shown for these two vaccines
- If you received the J&J vaccine within the past three weeks and develop [symptoms listed on the CDC site](#), contact a healthcare provider



I am expecting or planning a family in the near future, or recently started a family, and am not sure about the vaccine.

- The [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#), “recommends vaccination for all eligible people who may consider future pregnancy” and notes that “unfounded claims linking COVID-19 vaccines to infertility have been scientifically disproven.”
- All three vaccines are safe for women considering starting a family in the future
- If you are not comfortable receiving the J&J vaccine due to the rare blood clotting side effects, the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are available and blood clotting side effects have not been identified for these vaccines



The vaccine was developed quickly, I want to wait and see if it is safe.

- The quick development of the vaccine was not due to any corner-cutting and followed the [standard FDA approval process](#) as every vaccine before
- Researchers had previously been studying coronaviruses for decades and were able to get a head start in the development based on that research
- No vaccination research campaign has received more money in such a short amount of time. Billions of dollars in funding was spent on accelerating the research efforts
- The government granted the ability to begin production of the leading vaccine candidates before approval. Meaning once authorized, the vaccines could be distributed immediately

# Vaccine Hesitancy Hot Topics & Talking Points



I don't think the vaccine works.

- The three approved vaccines are the most effective way to protection against COVID-19
- Tens of thousands individuals received each of the vaccines in robust trials
- Each of the vaccines has been taken by millions of Americans
- The results during this vaccination campaign have proven to be highly effective, cutting down on infection and hospitalization



I have a health condition and am concerned about my safety.

- If you have concerns about a specific health condition, you can always consult your doctor
- Individuals with underlying conditions including diabetes, lung conditions, and obesity, are even more at risk of falling seriously ill or death after contracting COVID-19
- Each of the clinical trials included individuals with a broad range of conditions in testing both the efficacy and safety of the vaccines



I don't think I need the COVID vaccine.

- This vaccination campaign is aimed to achieve population immunity and can only be achieved if enough people get vaccinated
- Even if a patient is not a high-risk individual, they can still continue the spread of the virus by not being vaccinated
- Individuals who already contracted COVID-19 do not enjoy the same levels of protection than if they are fully immunized. Re-infection has been documented in some instances and new variants of the disease continue to be uncovered



I don't trust the government.

- The vaccine is not a product of any public entities
- From development to administration, all three vaccines were done by private companies and individuals at the forefront of the scientific community and biotechnology

# Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy

(adapted from the [AMA](#))

## 1. Understand your patients' concerns

- There could be mistrust in the medical community due to historical injustices such as Tuskegee

## 2. Ask why a patient is hesitant

- Use open-ended questions
- Listen non-judgmentally

## 3. Counter any misinformation

- Patients may trust information through social media in the form of conspiracy theories
- Correct any misinformation a patient may give for not getting the vaccine

## 4. Know you are the most trusted information source

- Research has shown that a person's own physician or health care provider is the most trusted source for information on the COVID-19 vaccine, with **85%** of respondents holding this belief no matter their gender, sex, ethnicity or political belief (Kaiser Family Foundation)

## 5. Tell patients they need to get the vaccine

- The second biggest reason adult patients don't get an immunization is because a "doctor hasn't told me I need it"

## 6. Tailor your message

- No matter their political view, focus the discussion on how getting a vaccine can help protect a loved one such as a grandparent, a child or someone who is immunocompromised

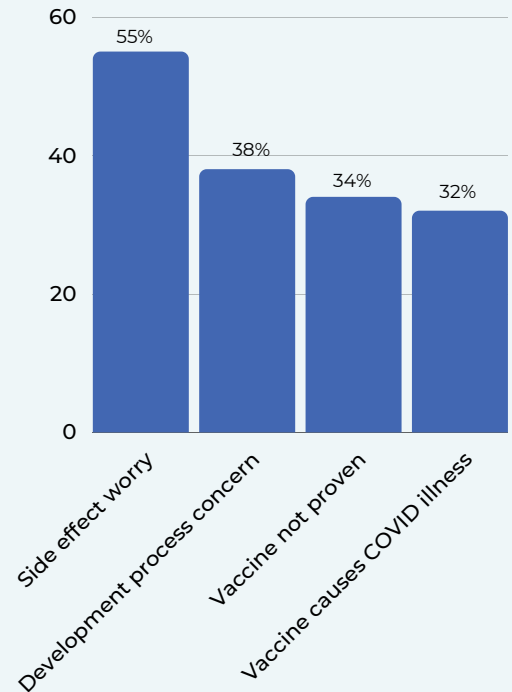
## 7. Address patients' fears about side effects

- Start a conversation by asking a patient how they felt and any side effects/reactions after their last vaccination, such as a flu shot
- Move the conversation to tell them the COVID-19 vaccine is not much different
- Prepare patients to hope for the best but prepare them for the worst

## 8. Prepare your staff to communicate

- Use this [script](#) developed by the AMA for telephone, patient portal, and website messaging
- Show that you and your staff are proud to be vaccinated with visual cues such as stickers or pins
- Share stories and provide testimonials to patients as to why the vaccine is important

## Top reasons reported by patients



Source: Q13. Maryland COVID-19 Vaccine Tracking Survey 1, Mar. 24-Apr. 20, 2021; N=397. Note: Percentages are from a check all that apply list and do not add to 100%

# Outreach & Engagement Examples

The best strategy is to use various approaches to target patients at different points of engagements. Choose the options that best fit your practice's and patients' needs.

## off-site/virtual



- Social media posts to register for a vaccine appointment
- Social media posts to notify last-minute vaccine appointments
- Social media post with Provider: call to action
- Online interest form on website
- Third-party websites for standby lists

- Patient Portal (EHR) message targeting high-risk patients
- Email blasts: Newsletter including provider and staff testimonials
- Phone call outreach
- Text message (including app) outreach



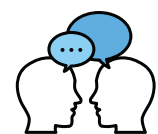
## indirect



- Waiting room signage to inform how to get a vaccine at the practice
- Waiting room television displays with videos by Providers
- Exam room signage - "talk to your Provider about the vaccine"

- Direct conversations in person during office visits and home visits
- Word of mouth - ask patients to tell their family and friends that you are available to vaccinate them
- Engage with the community: local organizations and faith-based communities

## direct



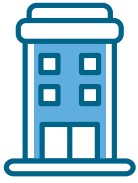
## in-person

*Tip: Consider expanding your access by offering early morning, late evening, and weekday appointment availability for patients who may not have the flexibility for a vaccine appointment during regular business hours.*



# Direct Outreach Best Practices

(In order based on the potential for most impact)



## IN-PERSON AT OFFICE VISIT OR HOME VISIT

- Have conversations with patients (*use talking points on Pages 2-4*)
- Encourage patients tell their family and friends to get vaccinated and that you are available to vaccinate them



## TELEPHONE (CALL AND TEXT)

- Reach out to homebound patients to administer at home visits
- Call all patients, especially those in care management, to get vaccinated by their Care Manager or Provider



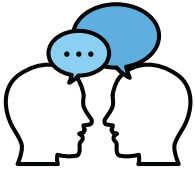
## EMAIL BLAST

- Messages authored by Providers
- Encourage patients to get themselves as well as their family and friends vaccinated
- Notify patients how they can get a vaccine (appointment and/or walk-in at the practice; community resources)
- Share social media channels (if available)
- Newsletter format could include provider and staff testimonials



## PATIENT PORTAL (EHR)

- Post notices to patients of your vaccine availability
- For patients who do not have a patient portal account, encourage them via phone call, email, or mailed letter to sign up for an account to get the most up-to-date announcements
- Send messages targeting all patients



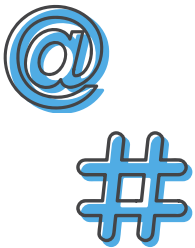
## WORD OF MOUTH (COMMUNITY OUTREACH)

- Connect with community-based organizations who can promote your practice's appointments
- Connect with faith-based organizations and houses of worship to coordinate vaccine clinics for their congregants

## Indirect Outreach Best Practices

(In order based on the potential for most impact)

### SOCIAL MEDIA



- Record videos by Providers with a personal message to patients to post on social media channels
- Post on social media for last-minute openings and extra doses at end of day for quick responses
- Create posts written by Providers as a call-to-action
- Example: Dr. Steven Geller of Centennial Medical Group video ([YouTube](#))
- Example: Menocal Family Medicine [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

### Facebook: vaccine clinic outreach (office and community)

**Menocal Family Practice** is at Menocal Family Practice.  
April 17 at 7:05 AM · Frederick, MD · 🌐

Busy Saturday with regular in-patient office visits and the Covid Vaccine Clinic on the 2nd floor in our Frederick office. Thanks to all of our friend volunteers that came to help us out.

👍❤️ 17

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

**Menocal Family Practice**  
April 17 at 5:55 AM · 🌐

Covid 19 Vaccine Clinic behind the Home Depot parking lot in the old Frederick Town Mall.

We are here now from 6am -10am come by for your vaccine no appointment needed.

### Twitter: office early closure for vaccine appointments

**Menocal Fam Practice** @DrJMenocal · Mar 25

Today Thursday, March 25th our Office will CLOSE early at 3:00pm and the #Vaccine Clinic will remain open until 4:30pm for standing appointments.

See you again bright and early at 7:30am tomorrow. #familymedicine #primarycare #maryland #frederick #community #schedulechange





## ONLINE INTEREST FORM

- Create a online form for patients who are interested in signing up for a vaccine appointment
- Form can be housed on your website, social media page, patient portal, etc.
- Data collected can be filtered and narrowed down to target specific groups
- Example: Frederick Health Medical Group Online Interest Form

## Online Interest Form Sample Questions

- Are you a part of the [Medical Group/Practice]?
- Which location do you visit for care?
- Your Name
- Email Address
- Cell Phone Number
- Birth Date
- Do you have an underlying health condition that increases your risk for severe COVID-19 illness?
- Do you meet the eligibility requirements to receive a vaccine?
- Please provide us with the name of your Primary Care Provider (PCP):
- If called, can you be onsite within 30 minutes?



## WAITING ROOM & EXAM ROOM VISUALS

- Waiting room signage to inform how to get a vaccine at the practice
- Waiting room television displays with videos by Providers
- Exam room signage - "talk to your Provider about the vaccine"
- Example: Calvert Health Medical Group "Why did I get vaccinated" Employee Testimonials (sent as newsletter and posted in waiting room electronic signage)



CALVERT  
INTERNAL MEDICINE  
Group

### Why did I get vaccinated

Staff and providers share their thoughts



Tara Mendonca, M.D.

Why did I get Vaccinated? When I received a text on 12/23/2020 I was elated. " This is my Christmas present" I yelled happily to Patrick as I ran out of the door. The first COVID vaccine was a breeze mild arm soreness for a few days. Four weeks later I received the 2nd shot through the drive up at the Health Department. I had side effects to the second vaccine-chills, sweats and a headache. I took Advil every 8 hours with food and my symptoms resolved over the next 48 hours.



Andrew S.  
IT Department

I decided to get vaccinated because I planned to at some point, just not initially. I figured, if I was okay with getting it in 6 months, why not go ahead and get it now to be ahead rather than behind.

I experienced no side effects other than the typical pain at the injection spot, but that wore off after two days. It was never really "bad", more so an annoyance.

It's very easy to say to yourself - It's too new... it hasn't been tested enough... What about the horror stories of the first people to receive the shot... All of these things ran through my head when the vaccine became a reality and we were offered it. Speaking with supervisors and especially Dr. Pomilla, helped calm my nerves about the vaccine. Most of all, I did it to protect my family! Here's to shot 2/2 in February!



# Motivational Interviewing: Vaccine Hesitancy

Motivational interviewing (MI) focuses on exploring and resolving ambivalence and centers on motivational processes within the individual that facilitate change [1]. This can be a helpful method to address hesitancy.

## 1 Ask an open-ended question

*Start a conversation rather than ask for a "yes" or "no"*



## 2 Acknowledge their concerns

*Use reflective listening skills*

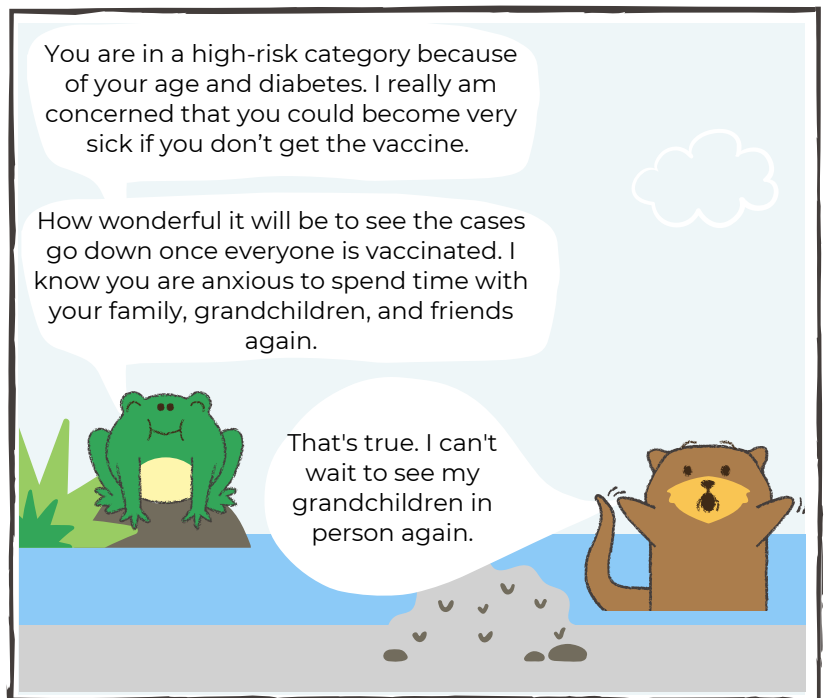


## 3 Provide information to change a patient's perspective



## 4 Present reasons to change

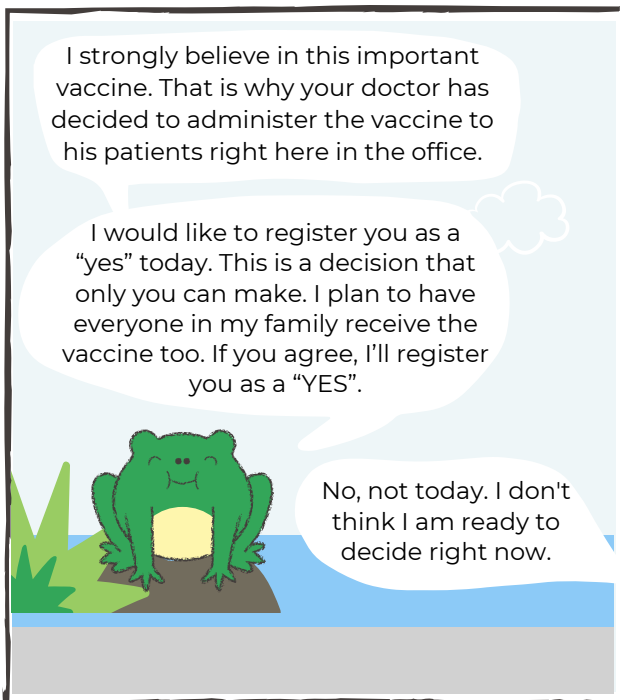
*Avoid arguing and focus on disease prevention; answer the patient's question(s)*



[1]: Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. Enhancing Motivation for Change in Substance Abuse Treatment. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 1999. (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 35.) Chapter 3—Motivational Interviewing as a Counseling Style. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64964/>

# Motivational Interviewing: Vaccine Hesitancy

## 5 Wrap up the conversation *Make a personal recommendation to vaccinate; evoke: patient has autonomy*



## 6 Follow up if necessary *Continue to build trust to evoke change*



## BEST PRACTICES for Conversations that Matter

- Cultivate a culture of partnership and empathy
- Avoid telling people what they must do
- Respond in a non-judgmental way: respect their beliefs
- Stay positive
- Promote evocation: let patient verbalize the change
- Express compassion: act in a caring way
- Build a safe place for patients to ask questions

## RESOURCES

### Providers and Staff

- Maryland Department of Health: covidLINK Vaccine Page ([Link](#))
- CDC
  - Building Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccines Among Your Patients: Tips for the Healthcare Team ([Link](#))
  - Vaccination Communication Toolkit ([Link](#))
  - Answering Questions ([Link](#))
  - What Healthcare Personnel Need to Know ([Link](#))
- de Beaumont Foundation: From Concern to Confidence - How Physicians Can Build Trust in COVID-19 Vaccines ([Link](#))
- NIH: Addressing COVID-19 Misinformation ([Link](#))

### Patients

- COVID Vaccine Education and Equity Project: Talking to Family and Friends about Covid-19 Vaccination ([Link](#))
- CDC: Vaccine Recipient Education ([Link](#))
- CDC: What do I need to know about the J&J Vaccine 1-Pager ([Link](#))
- CDC: What you can do once you have been fully vaccinated ([Link](#))
- MDH covidLINK FAQs ([Link](#))