Doses of Hope: Honest Conversations About the COVID-19 Vaccine

Community Toolkit

Thank you.

Your work in our community and the relationships you foster with community members is deeply appreciated. Efforts to communicate about the vaccines – to foster better access to reliable information and the vaccines themselves – are a crucial step toward fighting and ending the pandemic. Thank you for your support of this initiative and your partnership moving forward as we begin a stronger collaboration for the health and wellness of the community.

This toolkit provides templates to help you communicate with your team, the individuals you serve and the public. Of course, because you know your audiences best, all materials can be customized based on your unique situation. The enclosed materials are meant to be a starting point and a resource to ensure you feel both knowledgeable and confident conducting outreach and your organization's communications are based in the latest scientific evidence and medical facts.

Included in this packet are the following materials:

- Communications Best Practices
- Talking Points and FAQ
- Newsletter / Web Copy
- Social Media Posts, Video and Graphics
- Engaging on Social Media
- Supporting Materials, Resources and Partners

Communications Best Practices

We recommend these guidelines for communicating about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Don’t repeat the false or misleading information – focus on the benefits

Frame the topic around the value for the person’s family, friends and loved ones

Be honest and transparent

Focus on education and access

Don’t make up answers you do not know

Use empathetic language, rather than argumentative

Ask open ended questions to better understand their personal concerns

Avoid manipulation or framing the conversation for self-gain

Connect people to reliable resources to make their own decisions

Talking Points & Frequently Asked Questions

These conversation starters, talking points and FAQ can be used when sharing information about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Conversation Starters

As people respond to the conversation, use the FAQ below to help answer their questions.

- How are you feeling about the vaccine?
- Do you know anyone who has received the vaccine?
- Do you think you'll get the vaccine?
- What have you heard about the vaccine rollout so far?
- Do you think your grandparents/relatives will get the vaccine?
- What does the vaccine mean to you?

Talking Points

- We understand there are people in our community who don't have a lot of faith in healthcare institutions, medical researchers or the government.
- Together, mistrust and vaccine-related confusion can make it challenging to decide what's best for our families.
- Regardless of your ultimate decision on vaccination, it's important to make an informed choice.
- The vaccines are an important opportunity to keep your family safe and end the pandemic – to get back to precious activities more quickly, like birthdays, weddings and reunions with loved ones.
- The vaccine remains one of our most important, safe and effective options to fight the pandemic and protect our most vulnerable family members and neighbors.
- All of the vaccines are extremely effective at preventing the really bad outcomes we can see with COVID-19.
- The COVID-19 vaccine is available at no cost to everyone – you do not need to show proof of insurance or immigration status to make a vaccine appointment.
- Whether you decide to get vaccinated or not, please continue taking safety precautions like wearing a mask, physical distancing and washing your hands frequently. These are important habits to maintain in order to protect others who are still vulnerable to the virus.
- On April 12, 2021, out of an abundance of caution, the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended a pause on the use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. This recommendation was made after six people in the U.S. developed rare blood clots about two weeks after the vaccine was given. This pause

demonstrates the ongoing intense scrutiny and monitoring being applied to each of the vaccines. The pause was lifted on April 23, 2021 after concluding that the benefits of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine vastly outweigh the potential risks to individuals.

» In December of 2020 the U.S. FDA authorized the first vaccine to combat COVID-19. In August of 2021, the U.S. FDA fully approved the COVID-19 vaccine, ensuring it meets the highest standards for safety and effectiveness.

Frequently Asked Questions

The below represent frequently asked and anticipated questions on vaccine safety, vaccine efficacy and vaccine access.

Vaccine Safety

Q: Should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?
A: If your doctor recommends it, yes!

Q: Should pregnant people get the COVID-19 vaccine?
A: Yes! The COVID-19 vaccine is effective and safe for pregnant people to receive (source). Multiple studies have shown that the COVID-19 vaccine protects pregnant people from the virus just as it does non-pregnant people.

There is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 vaccines cause harm to the infant, and preliminary research indicates that vaccinated pregnant people pass on COVID-19 antibodies to their infants through the umbilical cord and breastmilk (source) which can help protect the infants from contracting COVID-19. If you are planning to become pregnant, there is also no evidence that any vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, cause fertility problems in women or men.

Q: How safe is the COVID-19 vaccine?
A: The COVID-19 vaccines were well tested for safety before being made available in the United States, and the technology behind these vaccines has been studied for more than a decade. California has its own Scientific Safety Review Workgroup comprised of experts in immunology, public health, academia and others making sure it is safe for residents.

The COVID-19 vaccines are going through the same safety testing and are required to meet the same standards as other vaccines – like those for the flu, chickenpox and polio that have been widely offered for many years.

Q: Are the vaccines likely to make me sick or cause dangerous side effects?
A: No. But similar to most vaccines, the Pfizer, Moderna and J&J vaccines can cause side effects like pain, swelling and redness at the injection site or headaches, chills, muscle pain and fatigue. In very rare cases, severe allergic reactions have occurred, but medical personnel are trained to monitor for these reactions. These mild-to-moderate side effects typically resolve in 1-2 days.

These vaccines have undergone the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history – using the

best of established strategies as well as new, innovative ones. They are helping protect millions of people and continue to be actively monitored – as highlighted by the temporary pause on the J&J vaccine distribution after only 6 reported rare events. The CDC and the FDA have since concluded that the benefits of the J&J vaccine still vastly outweigh the risk of rare, adverse side effects.

Q: What is in the COVID-19 vaccine?
A: The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine contains mRNA, lipids, salts and sugar. (Source)

- **mRNA** contains the instructions for our body on how to react, fight, and beat the coronavirus.
- **Lipids** are just fats that coat and protect the mRNA.
- **Salts** are added to help balance the acidity in your body.
- **Sugar** helps the ingredients keep their shape during freezing.

The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine has the same basic ingredients as the Pfizer vaccine: mRNA, lipids, salt and sugar, but it also has acids and acid stabilizers to help preserve the vaccine once it's produced. (Source)

The Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine contains similar ingredients – instructions for defense, and ingredients to protect and preserve the instructions. (Source)

- **Adenovirus** contains the instructions for your body's cells to learn how to react, fight and beat the coronavirus
- **Preservatives and stabilizers** like acids, salts, ethanol, lipids and emulsifiers.

In these three authorized vaccines, there are no ingredients or traces of animals (no gelatin, no egg white) and do not contain any blood products or thimerosal (mercury).

Q: How is a viral vector vaccine (Johnson & Johnson) different from the mRNA (Pfizer and Moderna) options?
A: Viral vector vaccines and mRNA vaccines take slightly different approaches to achieve the same goal – training your own body to fight off a potential infection. The main difference is the number of doses required. Both vaccines are an effective way to defend yourself and protect your loved ones against COVID-19.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine uses a different method to teach your immune system to recognize and fight the virus. The J&J vaccine uses a non-replicating virus to create a special spike protein, whereas the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use messenger RNA to deliver these instructions. (Read more)

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are each about 95% effective but require 2 doses – 21 and 28 days apart, respectively. Preliminary data demonstrate that these mRNA vaccines are effective at preventing asymptomatic infection. The J&J vaccine is 85% effective at preventing severe COVID-19 cases but requires only a single dose. (Read more)

Q: Should I get the vaccine if I have allergies?
A: You should talk to your doctor if you have concerns about the vaccine, especially related to your personal health history. Your physician can help you learn more about the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine and how being vaccinated can contribute your personal health and wellness.

Q: Should I be concerned that the J&J vaccine was put on hold earlier this year?
A: No. If anything, the temporary pause after only 6 reported cases of blood clots demonstrated that the FDA and CDC are taking extreme care to monitor and investigate all reported side effects for each of the vaccines. The pause provided the time necessary for scientists to fully evaluate how the J&J vaccine might or might not be associated with this rare adverse event. The CDC and FDA have since concluded that the benefits of the J&J vaccine still vastly outweigh the risk of rare, adverse side effects.

Q: If I've received the J&J vaccine, should I be worried about blood clots?
A: More than 6.8 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine have been administered in the U.S. The 6 reported adverse events under investigation occurred about 2 weeks following the vaccine. Those who have received the J&J vaccine in the last three weeks should watch for any symptoms of the rare blood clots, including severe headaches, abdominal or leg pain and shortness of breath. Anyone who develops these symptoms should contact their medical provider.

Vaccine Efficacy

Q: Which COVID-19 vaccine should I get?
A: Whichever one you can receive first. All COVID-19 vaccines are very effective at protecting you from getting a severe case of COVID-19, being hospitalized or dying from the disease.

Q: Will the vaccine keep me from getting COVID-19?
A: The vaccine seriously reduces your chances of getting COVID-19 by teaching your body how to protect itself against the virus. It's important to remember that efficacy rates are applied to your individual risk, which is based on things like age and underlying conditions. No vaccine will prevent all infections; however, the COVID-19 vaccine trials have shown that these vaccines dramatically reduce the risk of infections, and most importantly, reduce the risk of serious infections or COVID-related death to nearly zero. (Read more)

Q: How do the mRNA (Pfizer and Moderna) vaccines work to protect me?
A: Unlike some traditional vaccines that use a virus to spark your immune system, the mRNA vaccines use a critical protein to train your own body to defend against the virus. It does not contain a live virus and cannot cause you to get COVID-19.

Essentially, the vaccine gives your body instructions on how to make a special protein that helps you fight the virus. (Read more) Your cells read those instructions, set up barriers, begin making that protective protein and then discard the instructions.

As you produce these proteins, it encourages your body to make antibodies and activate your defensive cells. (Read more) Your body is smart and will remember how to quickly produce these defenses in the future. That way, if you are exposed to the virus, your body is ready to defend you.

Q: Were the vaccines tested on people of color?
A: Yes. While there is much work to be done on representing minorities in medical trials, many people of color participated in the Pfizer, Moderna (Source) and Johnson & Johnson vaccine trials (Source).Efficacy was consistent across age, gender, race and ethnicity demographics (Source).

Q: I've heard about some new strains and variants of COVID-19 emerging, what do we know about these?
A: Current research shows that the COVID-19 vaccine is effective against many of the new strains and variants. However, there is still more to be learned. Reaching herd immunity by having enough of the population vaccinated is our greatest defense against the virus and the increasing threat of virus variants. All viruses are constantly mutating, so, the more virus there is circulating, the more mutations will occur. Vaccination is really the only way to limit the mutations. People who are not vaccinated need to be responsible, disclose that to others, wear a mask, and get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Q: Will getting the vaccine get us back to normal?
A: Eventually, yes! While cases are still high and few people are vaccinated, it's best to continue to wear a mask and physically distance from people outside your home. But the sooner a community is vaccinated, the sooner we can return to normalcy.

Q: What is herd immunity and how can it impact my community?
A: Herd immunity is the point at which enough people are protected – either through vaccines or from contracting and surviving COVID-19 – against a disease that it cannot spread easily through a population. It does not mean the disease is gone.

COVID-19 herd immunity is a moving target. It is dependent on many changing factors, so we cannot be certain when our communities will reach and maintain this immunity level. You and your family can contribute to herd immunity by getting vaccinated. This is the most effective way to protect yourself against the virus and ensure you are not spreading it to others.

Q: If I still have to wear a mask at work or in public, why would I get the vaccine?
A: While vaccination significantly reduces your chances of developing symptoms, it is not 100% effective and it may still be possible to get infected. This might contribute to the continued spread of COVID-19 while others await vaccination. For now, it is important to continue to use all available methods to prevent COVID-19 spread.

Vaccine Access

Q: When can I get the vaccine?
A: All people age 12 and over are now eligible, though supplies of the vaccines change quickly. Visit the COVID-19 section of the Cedars-Sinai website for regular updates. The *LA Public Health Department* is another good resource for up-to-date information.

Q: How much will the vaccine cost?
A: Nothing. Anyone can receive the vaccine for free. Additional information can be found on the State of California's COVID-19 website (COVID19.CA.gov).

Q: Who should not get the vaccine?
A: The Pfizer vaccine can be given to those age 12 and older, while the Moderna and J&J vaccine can be given to those 18 and older. Immunocompromised patients can and should receive the vaccine, but it should be received as a result of shared decision making with their provider to

ensure optimal timing in relation to immunosuppression. Those who are allergic to any of the ingredients of the COVID-19 vaccine should check with their physician for vaccine guidance related to their personal health history.

Vaccine Verification

Q: What is a COVID-19 vaccination card?
A: The CDC issues a small card verifying each dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to record your vaccination. This card also serves as an appointment reminder to individuals needing to return for a second dose of an mRNA vaccine.

Q: What should I do with a vaccination card?
A: Be sure to bring it with you to any follow-up vaccination appointments. Otherwise, you should keep vaccination cards stored in a safe, dry place. It's also recommended to store a digital picture of your card in case you misplace it. Currently, there are no requirements tied to vaccination cards. However, in the future, your card might serve as helpful verification of vaccination for employment, travel opportunities or potential "booster" doses.

Q: Is this card the only proof of my vaccination?
A: No. Record of your vaccination will be saved electronically with the healthcare organization, clinic, pharmacy or county health department that provides your vaccine. (Read more) However, electronic systems and databases do not always share information with each other. For your own records, your CDC vaccine card will be important to document each vaccine administration – particularly if you received your doses at different locations.

Newsletter / Web Copy

The below text could be used as an email, phone script, newsletter copy or website copy when communicating about the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Acknowledge the challenges

- For many of our community members, the choice to get vaccinated is complex and personal.
- While vaccinations present an important opportunity to keep ourselves, our families and our community safe, the process can be very confusing.

Share your story

- I chose to get the vaccine because [describe personal reason and story]. The science behind the vaccines is strong and has undergone rigorous testing to ensure safety.
- In the end, I wanted to make sure I was not going to spread the virus to my loved ones.
- I found resources I trusted that ultimately made me feel more comfortable accepting the vaccine.

Updates on your organization's role

- We are doing our part to ensure you have access to helpful, trusted resources.
- We remain dedicated to distancing and masking protocol.
- We are opening up our building for vaccine testing/distribution.
- We are helping connect members to available doses.

Offer resources

- Below, you will find several reliable sources for information about the vaccine – from Cedars-Sinai, as well as other sources.
    - Cedars-Sinai.org
    - Blog post – COVID-19 Vaccine Efficacy: Clearing Up Confusion
    - Blog post – The COVID-19 Vaccine: 9 Tips for a Smooth Experience
    - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Should you decide to get the vaccine, Cedars-Sinai remains committed to sharing resources and tools to understand the vaccination process and help locate doses when it's your turn.
    - California Department of Public Health – COVID-19 Vaccination: My turn
    - LA County Department of Public Health – Appointments and vaccine distribution data
    - Blog post – 5 Mood-Lifting Tips to Boost Your Response to Vaccination
    - Blog post – Techniques to Help You Overcome a Fear of Needles

Call to action

- Please explore these resources as you consider your decision to be vaccinated.
- As appropriate, please share these resources with your social circles and encourage your friends and family to take a look.

Social Media Posts, Video and Graphics

The following copy is free for use on your organization's social media channels. You are also welcome to share branded vaccine graphics from Cedars-Sinai's channels and experts on your own channels.

- Vaccine Acceptance
  - Do you have questions about how the vaccines work and how to access them? Take a look at what Cedars-Sinai has shared with their patients. (Source)
  - Spring is a season of hope and renewal. It is an incredible blessing to have the opportunity to get vaccinated. Regardless of what you decide is best for you and your family, please take this decision seriously. Be diligent in your research and talk to people you trust.
  - We have been amazed at the resilience of our [Insert organization's name] community this past year, and we look forward to resumed time together at some point in the future. One of the most important things you can do to help us gather as a community once again is to consider getting vaccinated. Please approach this decision intentionally – thinking about what it could mean for you, for your family and for our community.

- Understanding the Vaccines
  - Did you know the three approved COVID-19 vaccines are vegetarian/vegan? They only contain very basic ingredients: the genetic instructions, salt, fat, sugar, and acids.
  - The vaccines do not contain a live virus and cannot cause you to get COVID-19.

- Eligibility
  - Are you wondering where you can get the vaccine? Each day, more people are receiving their vaccine. Visit myturn.ca.gov/ to schedule an appointment now.
  - Are you trying to get the vaccine? Take a look at the LA County Department of Public Health – Appointments and vaccine distribution data.
  - Are you ready for a vaccine? Find out where you can: California Department of Public Health – COVID-19 Vaccination: My turn

- Access to the Vaccine
  - Wondering where you can get a vaccine? Check out vaccinefinder.org/ to locate a vaccination site near you.

- Personal Accounts
  - I got the COVID-19 vaccine to protect my family and friends/so I could hug my grandchildren/[other personal reasons and testimonies]. Learn more about how it works: https://www.cedars-sinai.org/blog/clearing-up-covid-19-vaccine-efficacy-confusion.html
  - Initially, I was worried about the vaccines. What helped encourage my acceptance of the vaccine was reviewing resources from trusted sources/knowing it was the best way to protect my children/hearing accounts from peers who had received the vaccine/[other personal reasons and testimonies].

- I was vaccinated. I experienced a low fever and some sniffles/no side effects/a moderate headache for 48 hours/other minor side effects and now I'm protected against COVID-19. Not only am I protected, but I finally have peace of mind that I won't make my loved ones sick.
- I did my research and chose to get the vaccine because [insert personal reason].

- Important Reminders
  - The best way to protect your family from COVID-19 is to get the vaccine and continue to mask-up and physically distance from people outside your home.
  - Still haven't received your vaccine? COVID-19 testing sites remain open and available if you or your household members suspect they might have COVID-19. Find a location near you here.

Engaging on Social Media

The tips below offer some suggested ways to engage on social media about the vaccine.

DO

- **Reiterate your continued adherence to state and local COVID-19 guidelines.**
    - We have been fighting this pandemic together for more than a year. [Insert organization name] remains committed to habits of physical distancing, masking and increased hand-washing. We are also still [conducting virtual sessions/limiting capacity in our building/offering extended hours/other personal adaptations]. Even as vaccine distribution increases, it's important that we continue to keep our communities and families safe by following these recommendations.

- **Connect people to reliable, recent information so that they can make an informed decision for themselves.**
    - It can be difficult to understand the vaccines – how they were made, what they do and where to get one. Here are some resources we trust:
        - Cedars-Sinai.org
        - MLK Community Hospital - COVID-19
        - State of CA - COVID-19 Vaccines

- **Share your own story.**
    - I decided to get the vaccine. To me, it means peace of mind and the assurance that I won't make my family members sick.
    - To make an informed decision for myself and my family, I am staying current on news and information being shared by local experts. I have been impressed by our community and the amount of resources available to help support me as I make this decision.
    - I am not considered high-risk for getting COVID-19, but I have decided to get vaccinated in order to protect other members of our community who do have increased risk of infection and additional medical considerations. Watch Elaine and Natalie share their stories, and do your research to understand your opportunities to protect yourself and others.
    - I have been vaccinated for several weeks now, and I feel so much relief knowing I am protected, but even more so knowing that my aging parents/children/high-risk family members are safer because of my choice.

DON'T

- **Use aggressive, argumentative language**
- **Make uninformed generalizations** about groups of people and their motivations or concerns
- **Assume you know the whole picture** – instead, respect people's privacy and recognize you might not know everything they are considering
- **Make statements for others**

Supporting Materials, Resources and Partners

There are some community members who remain wary of the vaccine. For a variety of reasons, it can be challenging to decide on the best path forward - for yourself and your loved ones. Cedars-Sinai is dedicated to improving the health status of our community through the pandemic and beyond, and our goal is to connect people with timely, reliable information to help them make an informed choice.

We are grateful to have partners like you who are willing to connect people with resources to stay safe and healthy during this pandemic. To help, we've put together a list of resources from several local and national organizations.

As you have conversations about vaccine safety and acceptance, please feel free to direct people to the following resources for additional, up-to-date information.

Vaccine Development Infographic

The attached infographic was created by Cedars-Sinai and visually depicts the vaccine development process at a high level. This is a way to spread awareness and understanding about the vaccine among your network. For example, this can easily accompany social posts, be uploaded to a website, posted to a bulletin board and more.

Local Resources and Partners

- LA County Department of Public Health – Appointments and vaccine distribution data
- California Department of Public Health – COVID-19 Vaccination: Find out if it's your turn
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital – Facts at your fingertips
- Cedars-Sinai.org
- Blog post – COVID-19 Vaccine Efficacy: Clearing Up Confusion
- Blog post – The COVID-19 Vaccine: 9 Tips for a Smooth Experience
- Blog post – 5 Mood-Lifting Tips to Boost Your Response to Vaccination
- Blog post – Techniques to Help You Overcome a Fear of Needles
- Blog post - COVID-19 Vaccine: Questions Answered

National Resources and Partners

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- U.S. Food & Drug Administration
- Blackdoctor.org