



# A Response Guide for Staff and Vaccine Ambassadors to Address Questions and Building Confidence About the COVID-19 Vaccine

## Introduction

This COVID-19 Commonly Asked Questions Response Guide was developed to help vaccine ambassadors and frontline staff initiate conversations and respond to individuals experiencing homelessness who may be hesitant about getting vaccinated. This guide was informed by conversations with people experiencing homelessness, the [National Healthcare for the Homeless Council](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the [Ad Council](#), and community tools such as the [Tucson/Pima Collaboration to End Homelessness Vaccine Toolkit](#).

## How to Use this Document

Many individuals have questions and concerns about the COVID-19 vaccines. It is normal to have questions about the vaccines, and people need answers to be informed and feel confident about their decision to get vaccinated. This guide provides a series of proactive messages and questions and responses related to various COVID-19 topics. The proactive messages can be used to introduce a conversation about COVID-19 vaccines, while the questions and responses can be used to guide discussions with people who have questions and concerns about the vaccines. Potential responses can and should be tailored to the specific situation; these are provided as a general guide and may be used in part or in their entirety. As always, strive to engage in conversations that are accessible, non-judgmental, and led with empathy. Items in italics indicate places where you should fill sentences in with your local parameters.

## Vaccine Information

<b>Proactive Message:</b> I'd like to explain why we want to vaccinate you against COVID-19. It is a virus that can cause severe illness and death. We want to make sure you are protected against COVID-19 and don't get sick. Here's an information sheet on why it's important for you to get a COVID-19 vaccine. [Use this <a href="#">flyer</a> or one that your community uses to inform people about the vaccines.]	
<b>Why Should I Get Vaccinated?</b>	We've lost friends and family to COVID. We don't want to lose anyone else and the vaccines available to us have been proven to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death. This is especially true in higher risk people, and people who are homeless are at higher risk for many illnesses, including COVID-19.
	Vaccines will help bring this pandemic to an end.
	The vaccines will help protect you from getting sick and prevent you from spreading the virus that causes COVID-19 to others.
	We all have a part to play in keeping our community healthy. Getting vaccinated will help keep you and your family and friends safe.
<b>How do the COVID-19 vaccines protect us?</b>	The vaccines teach our immune systems to fight off infections without the danger of getting an actual infection. Once you are fully vaccinated, your body will be ready to fight off the virus if you encounter it again and protect you from getting infected.
	People who are fully vaccinated slow the spread of the virus. When we get enough people vaccinated, we will stop spreading the virus.
<b>How quickly can vaccines help us get back to our lives?</b>	We don't know how long it will take us to get back to the freedoms we had before the pandemic, but we do know that when enough people get fully vaccinated, we can return to many of the activities we stopped when COVID-19 began. When you are fully vaccinated, you can safely return to most activities that you did prior to the start of the pandemic.
	After you've been fully vaccinated, you will be able to more safely gather with other people who are fully vaccinated without wearing a mask. However, masks continue to be a good practice in congregate places such as shelters.

<b>How do most people feel after receiving the COVID-19 vaccines?</b>	People's bodies respond to vaccines differently. Most people report mild side effects (like a headache or a sore arm), although a small number of people have reported more severe symptoms. Side effects typically go away within a few days. Even though you may have side effects, the benefits of being protected against severe illness and death from COVID-19 make it worth it.
	Some people feel sick after getting a vaccine. Common side effects include your arm feeling bruised or swollen, fever or chills, fatigue, headaches, or you might feel some muscle or joint pain. These side effects typically go away within a few days. Many people have no side effects at all.
	It is normal to have side effects. This shows your body is working to create a protective immune response without the danger of getting COVID-19. If you have side effects, they should go away within a few days.
	If you do have side effects, we have support for you if you feel sick <i>[insert "we can let you stay in your bed, we have a hotel room set up for you to recover in for XX hours, we'll keep an eye on you and make sure you have plenty of rest until you feel better"]</i> .
<b>I'm pregnant/breastfeeding/trying to get pregnant. Should I get vaccinated?</b>	Yes, <a href="#">it is actually recommended</a> . Even if you are pregnant/breastfeeding/trying to get pregnant, you can get vaccinated. There is evidence that vaccinated mothers can pass COVID-19 antibodies to their babies through breastmilk and the placenta. These antibodies protect your baby against COVID-19. If you have any concerns, let's call your doctor/health care provider and get their opinion so you can make an informed decision.
<b>Who can tell me more about the vaccines?</b>	A lot of people have said that talking to a trusted person has helped them learn more and feel confident to make a decision about getting vaccinated. I can answer many of your questions. If there are questions I cannot answer, I'm happy to set up a conversation with <i>[insert: your medical provider, someone from Health Care for the Homeless, a nurse]</i> .
	We have a lot of ways you can get more information about the vaccines. I can answer many of your questions. If there are questions I cannot answer, I can put you in touch with <i>[insert: agency/community-specific or CDC information here]</i> .

## Vaccine Safety

<b>Proactive Message:</b> All of the COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the U.S. have been shown to be safe and highly effective at preventing illness from COVID-19.	
<i>or</i>	
These vaccines are held to the same safety standards as other vaccines that many people receive like the chicken pox (Varicella) vaccine and the flu (Influenza) vaccine.	
<b>How are vaccines tested before I get them?</b>	The vaccines available to us were tested on over 100,000 volunteers from different ages, races, ethnicities, and people with various underlying health conditions. Millions of Americans have already been vaccinated and the CDC is continuing to monitor safety.
	The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) require all vaccines available to us to be tested and they have been held to the same standards as any other vaccines we use in our country.
	The vaccines had to be proven effective before they were given emergency use authorization. All COVID vaccines were proven 89% or more effective at preventing hospitalization, even if you do get the virus. These vaccines are extremely effective at protecting people from dying from COVID-19.
<b>I'm allergic to eggs. Are there eggs in any of the vaccines?</b>	There are no egg products in any of the COVID-19 vaccines on the market in the U.S. If you want to take a look at a vaccine's ingredients, we can look at them together online. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines.html>

<p><b>I have high blood pressure (or another underlying medical condition). Should I get a vaccine?</b></p>	<p>Many people with underlying chronic medical conditions have safely received the COVID-19 vaccine but it is important to talk with your health care team about your specific health history. Common conditions like high blood pressure and asthma can put you at high risk for getting severely ill from COVID-19, so I am glad you are asking about getting vaccinated.</p> <p>If you have a history of severe reactions to vaccines in the past including a COVID-19 vaccine, you should discuss this with your health care team. You may need to be monitored for a longer time after getting a vaccine or receive a different type of COVID-19 vaccine if you've had severe allergic reactions in the past.</p>
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## Vaccine Types/Options

<p><b>Proactive Message:</b> There are different vaccine options, but we do know the vaccines approved for use in the U.S. are all highly effective against serious illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19.</p>	
<p><b>Why do some vaccines require 2 shots and others only require 1?</b></p>	<p>There are different types of vaccines in the U.S.—some that require 2 doses and others that are one-dose. Different types of vaccines work in different ways to offer protection. But with all types of vaccines, the body is left with a supply of “memory” white blood cells (the cells that fight infections) that will remember how to fight that virus in the future.<sup>2</sup> [Use this <a href="#">consumer-focused guide</a> to explain the differences between the vaccines. For those considering the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine, use this <a href="#">consumer-focused explanation</a> of how mRNA vaccines work.]</p>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/how-they-work.html?CDC\\_A\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fvaccines%2Fabout-vaccines%2Fhow-they-work.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/how-they-work.html?CDC_A_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fvaccines%2Fabout-vaccines%2Fhow-they-work.html)

## Vaccine Misinformation

<p><b>Proactive Message:</b> There are a lot of untrue stories about the COVID-19 vaccines that are creating confusion and we want you to have accurate information. What we do know is that all the COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the U.S. have been shown to be highly effective at preventing illness from COVID-19.</p>	
<p><b>I've heard the vaccines give you COVID-19.</b></p>	<p>No, it is not possible to get COVID-19 from any of the vaccines available to us.</p>
	<p>No, the COVID-19 vaccines do not contain the live virus and therefore you cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccines.</p>
<p><b>I've heard the vaccines alter your DNA.</b></p>	<p>There are a lot of untrue stories about the COVID-19 vaccines out there. Some of the vaccines use mRNA to protect your body against COVID-19. mRNA is completely different than DNA and this vaccine in no way changes or alters your DNA. mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response. It does not interact with a body's DNA at all. [Use this <a href="#">fact sheet</a> to explain mRNA vaccines.]</p>
<p><b>I've heard the vaccines make you sterile.</b></p>	<p>There are a lot of untrue stories about the COVID-19 vaccines out there. There is no evidence that the rumor you heard is true. What I can tell you is that the vaccines went through rigorous testing and have proven to be effective at keeping people healthy and not getting sick from COVID-19.</p>
<p><b>I've heard the vaccines implant a microchip under my skin so the government can track me.</b></p>	<p>I've also heard that rumor, however, microchips are too big to fit into the very small needle that is used for vaccines. It just isn't possible. What else do you need to know to help you feel safe about the vaccines?</p>

<p><b>I've heard that vaccines cause autism in future children.</b></p>	<p>I've also heard that rumor, however, nothing in the vaccine can be passed on to children. What else do you need to know to help you feel safe about the vaccines?</p>
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## Vaccine Hesitancy

**Proactive Message:** I appreciate your concerns, and I'm here to answer any questions you have. What I can tell you is that the sooner you get vaccinated, the safer and more protected you will be—as well as those around you.

<p><b>I'm not sure I want to get a vaccine because I don't know enough about it.</b></p>	<p>I appreciate what you are saying and it's fine to have questions and concerns. I'm happy to answer any questions you have, and I can also connect you with a medical professional who can answer your questions. It is your choice whether you get a vaccine, and I want to make sure you have the information you need to make an informed choice.</p>
<p><b>I remember stories about Tuskegee, this is just more of that. How can I trust doctors/pharmacies that want to give me a COVID-19 vaccine?</b></p>	<p>The Tuskegee Syphilis Study is a very shameful part of our history. However, what is happening now is a contrast to what happened in the past. The men in the Tuskegee Study were not treated for Syphilis; the COVID-19 vaccines are prevention for the virus. Many family members of the Tuskegee men have come out in support of the COVID-19 vaccine. [If you can access YouTube, here is a <a href="#">5-minute video</a> about the difference between what happened in Tuskegee and current day.]</p>
<p><b>I'm concerned about side effects—I've heard they can be really rough.</b></p>	<p>Some people do experience side effects from the vaccines, while others do not. Vaccine side effects are normal and a sign your body is building protection against COVID-19. I understand that you may not want to have any side effects, but even if you do experience side effects, they should go away in a few days.</p>
<p><b>I don't need a vaccine because I don't get sick.</b></p>	<p>It's great that you are so healthy! I'm still recommending that you get vaccinated because COVID-19 has caused severe illness and even death in many healthy people already. With COVID-19, you never know if you will get a mild or severe illness, and I don't want you to take that chance.</p>
	<p>COVID-19 can affect anyone, including healthy people. Let's keep you healthy by giving you a vaccine.</p>
	<p>We also want to make sure you protect your family and your community. If you get sick, you could spread the virus to others. Getting a vaccine is a way to take care of your family and friends.</p>
<p><b>I don't need the vaccine because I'm too young to get sick from COVID-19.</b></p>	<p>I understand that at the beginning of the pandemic, it was a lot of older people who were getting sick. But there have been a lot of young people who have also gotten sick and died from COVID-19. Because you are young, we want you to stay healthy. That's why we're encouraging everyone get the vaccine.</p>
<p><b>I've already had COVID-19 so I don't need to get a vaccine. My body already has antibodies.</b></p>	<p>You should be vaccinated regardless of whether you already had COVID-19. That's because experts do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. Even if you've had COVID-19, you could get it again, especially now that there are stronger versions of the virus circulating. Also, your body will make more antibodies from the vaccine than it will through natural immunity.</p>
<p><b>I don't care if I get sick.</b></p>	<p>I care if you get sick, and I'm sure your family and friends care too. That's why I want you to get vaccinated.</p>

<p><b>I have a strong faith and therefore I don't think I should get a vaccine.</b></p>	<p>Faith is important to a lot of us, and I understand why that might influence your decision about getting a vaccine. Have you spoken to your pastor/imam/rabbi/spiritual advisor? I know a lot of religious groups are encouraging people to get a vaccine.</p>
<p><b>I don't trust you and I don't want to get vaccinated.</b></p>	<p>Let me explain who I am and why I am here. <i>[Fill in information as appropriate.]</i>  We are trying to vaccinate as many people as possible, and I came to help. But I do want to stress that getting vaccinated is your decision and yours alone.</p> <p>Can I answer any questions about the vaccines to make you feel more comfortable about getting vaccinated against COVID-19? Is there someone else you would like to talk to about this that I can connect you with?</p>
<p><b>I hate needles.</b></p>	<p>I understand your feeling, and I'm happy to come with you to distract you while you get a vaccine. Most people say they barely feel it and I can say from personal experience that is true <i>[if applicable]</i>.</p>
<p><b>How large is the needle?</b></p>	<p>The needle is likely 1 inch in length and very thin.<sup>3</sup> You will likely not even feel it.</p>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/admin/downloads/vaccine-administration-needle-length.pdf>