



The Time is Now! Talking with People Experiencing Homelessness about the COVID-19 Vaccine

Public health partners and Continuum of Care (CoC) leaders are coordinating COVID-19 vaccine access for people experiencing homelessness (PEH). Wherever your community's vaccine planning process is, consider immediately including PEH in the discussion.

Why Should You Talk to PEH about the COVID-19 Vaccine Now?

- Trust, communication, and access to accurate information are critical to the success of the national vaccination effort.
- Initiating conversations now may raise important issues or concerns that you need to discuss with colleagues and then work to address.
- Early engagement with communities of color and tribal nations that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 reinforces local commitment to ensuring that Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) can have questions and specific concerns addressed fully.
- Culturally competent partners and trusted communicators increase vaccine confidence for BIPOC.
- Mobilize trusted community partners of color to provide support for vaccine events.

How Can You Structure Your Conversations with Clients about the COVID-19 Vaccine?

Start from a Place of Empathy and Understanding

PEH have concerns about many basic needs. The pandemic has made meeting basic needs more challenging and could even be the direct cause of a person's current experience of homelessness. It is important to demonstrate an understanding of the range of challenges they are experiencing and framing COVID-19 vaccination as an important strategy in remaining healthy and being able to manage other challenges. If others do not think you care, then they are unlikely to believe what you say.

Assume Your Clients Want to Be Vaccinated But May Have Questions

Acknowledge the things you do not know (e.g., when the vaccine will be available, where they can get it, etc.), and share with them what you do know. Welcome their questions and treat them respectfully. It is better to admit when you do not know an answer than to provide information that turns out to be wrong.

Frame the Conversation Around Clients' Needs and Concerns

Focus on how vaccination will benefit them and their families—not on what you or your organization/facility might gain from their getting vaccinated.

Allow Time to Listen to Concerns

There is considerable misinformation about vaccines online. Some people lack trust in the healthcare system and official sources of information. People of color—especially Black and Indigenous people—have a history of being discriminated against and manipulated by the healthcare system. You should acknowledge their concerns, discuss them with your colleagues to develop the best possible responses, and leverage endorsements of the COVID-19 vaccine made by people that your clients trust.

Keep Doors Open

Some PEH may object to being vaccinated or may not be ready to make a decision. Allowing time for them to think about the issue, consult other information sources, and talk with peers is respectful and strategic. Starting the dialogue now gives clients time to think about their decision to get vaccinated and provides you time to understand and address the concerns or questions being raised. Two-way communication demonstrates that community voices are valued.

What Communication Channels are Effective?

Having one-on-one conversations about the COVID-19 vaccine with those you serve should be reinforced using other communication channels you have found helpful for communicating with your clients, such as:

- Social media—Twitter and Facebook page postings
- SMS/Text messages—Many PEH have smartphones and use texting as a regular form of communication.
- Bulletin board postings—Print out graphics and other materials and post them in an easily accessible place in your facility.

The below flyers are available for you to print and post in your programs:

- [**Why Get Vaccinated?**](#)
- [**Vaccines Are Just One Piece of Controlling the Virus**](#)
- [**PEH: Three Reasons Why You Were Given Top Priority to Be Vaccinated Against COVID-19**](#)
- [**Front-Line Workers: Three Reasons Why You Were Given Top Priority to Be Vaccinated Against COVID-19**](#)