COVID-19 Vaccine Talking Points for Communicating With Older Adults

Building Vaccine Awareness, Confidence, and Education Among Older Adults

All people age 65 and older in the United States are now eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine. But confusion persists about the different vaccines available and how to get a vaccine. A critical part of increasing COVID-19 vaccination rates is building vaccine confidence and education among older adults.

Organizations can use these talking points to increase vaccine education and confidence with their audiences.

Start from a place of empathy and understanding

- The pandemic has been stressful for everyone, especially older adults.
- The first step is to acknowledge the disruption COVID-19 has caused on all our lives and provide a space to recognize common concerns that can be addressed by getting vaccinated.

Empowering the older adult community

- Empower older adults by helping them feel confident in their decision to get vaccinated and to recommend getting vaccinated to their friends and family. This is the element that is most important for your discussions.
- Empowering tactics include:
  - Engaging national older adult–centric associations, health systems, health care personnel, local community organizations, and churches early and often to ensure a clear understanding of the vaccine development and approval process, new vaccine technologies, and the benefits of vaccination.
  - Using your platform to have empathetic vaccine conversations, address myths and common questions, and provide tailored vaccine information to the older adult community.
Older adults are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine

- All people age 65 and older in every state and territory are now eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine.
- The CDC recommends people age 65 and older get vaccinated as soon as possible, because they are at high risk of hospitalization, illness, and death from COVID-19.

Vaccine distribution

- The federal government supervises a centralized system to order, distribute, and track COVID-19 vaccines.
- Vaccine administrators order all vaccines through the CDC.
- Vaccination providers receive vaccines from the CDC’s centralized distributor or directly from a vaccine manufacturer.
- States and jurisdictions across the United States are using different online applications for vaccination clinic management.

Getting vaccinated

- Contact your state health department for more information on its plan for COVID-19 vaccination and to find out which vaccination management system they are using for vaccine enrollment and scheduling.
- Discuss with them their clinic’s or health system’s plan for vaccinations.

Side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines

- These FDA-authorized vaccines produce common side effects. Side effects are particularly common after the second shot of the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, which require two shots.
- Possible side effects include:
  - Soreness or swelling on the arm where they receive the shot
  - Fever
  - Chills
  - Feeling tired
  - Headache
- The FDA and CDC haven’t seen any trends of serious or long-term side effects. Side effects are usually mild and should last at most a few days.

Safety

- The CDC is holding the COVID-19 vaccines to the same safety and effectiveness standards as all other vaccines.
- Millions of Americans have already received authorized COVID-19 vaccines, which met the FDA’s rigorous, scientific standards for safety and effectiveness.
The FDA and CDC monitor vaccine safety and side effects once vaccines are in use.

Available COVID-19 vaccines

- The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines require two shots to get the most protection. The timing between your first and second shot depends on which vaccine you received:
  - You should get your second Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine shot no earlier than 21 days after your first shot.
  - You should get your second Moderna vaccine shot no earlier than 28 days after your first shot.
  - You should get your second shot as close to the recommended time interval as possible. For full protection, your two shots need to be from the same vaccine manufacturer. For example, if your first shot was the Moderna vaccine, your second shot should also be the Moderna vaccine.

- In medical studies, the FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines were highly effective at preventing COVID-19 and were nearly 100% (99.9%) effective at preventing COVID-related hospitalizations and death.

How COVID-19 mRNA vaccines work

- The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines teach your cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response inside your body. That immune response, which produces antibodies, provides protection against an infection should the real virus enter your body.
- mRNA vaccines don’t affect your DNA because mRNA doesn’t enter the cell nucleus where your DNA is kept.
- You can’t get the virus from the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines because they don’t contain the live virus that causes COVID-19.

Strategies for building COVID-19 vaccine confidence among older adults

- Encourage people who have been vaccinated to be vaccine champions by sharing testimonials about why they got vaccinated and promoting their stories.
- Host online discussions where your audience can provide input and ask questions.
- Don’t shy away from the tough questions and conversations. This makes you aware of the pulse of the community and how you should tailor your messaging.
- Share key messages through emails, newsletters, social media posts, and other channels.
• Provide information and resources to health care facilities with older adult–targeted messaging about COVID-19 vaccines, how they’re developed and monitored for safety, and how health care staff can speak specifically to older adults about the vaccines.

Use the tools available

• There are a number of materials like toolkits that include posters, fact sheets, infographics, and social media content on the CDC website that you can use to increase confidence in your clinic or facility.
• For more information and to view the toolkits, visit cdc.gov/coronavirus.