

COVID-19 VACCINES



Updated: May 2024

Talking about Vaccination with Youth Who Have Mental Health Concerns

A Clinical Conversation Guide

COVID-19 may no longer be a public health emergency, but the pandemic still causes illness and death worldwide. Low rates of vaccination among youth and the ongoing need for boosters make it important to continue having conversations about getting vaccinated. Clinicians who support youth with mental health concerns have a unique opportunity to promote vaccination against COVID-19 and other preventable diseases in this vulnerable population.

This guide helps you navigate discussions with youth about vaccine safety, effectiveness and reasons for vaccination. It focuses on COVID-19 vaccines, but you can also use it to talk with young people about other important vaccines.

This guide grew out of a [youth-led vaccine hesitancy study](#) that examined beliefs and attitudes regarding COVID-19 vaccines among youth with mental health concerns. The study also led to a resource by and for youth called [Vaccines: What YOUth Want to Know](#).

Establish a safe space

- Begin the conversation by expressing validation, empathy and understanding for the person's concerns.
- Reassure the person that their decision to get, or not get, the vaccine will not affect your relationship or the care they receive.

Assess the person's concerns

- Start by asking the person if they want more information about COVID-19 vaccines.
- Ask open-ended questions to understand the specific concerns or fears the person may have about COVID-19 vaccines.
- Acknowledge and validate the person's feelings, ensuring they feel heard, understood and respected.

Address common concerns and myths

SIDE EFFECTS

- Share information about common side effects, such as soreness at the injection site, fatigue or mild fever. Explain that they are typically mild and short-lived.
- Emphasize the rarity of severe side effects and provide evidence as needed.

FERTILITY

- Explain that there is no evidence linking COVID-19 vaccines to fertility issues. Share reliable information, such as [COVID-19 Vaccines for People Who Would Like to Have a Baby](#).

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

- Explain that there are rigorous monitoring systems in place to track long-term effects. Emphasize the extensive research and safety monitoring that are conducted on these types of vaccines before, during and after they are distributed.

MICROCHIPS AND TRACKING DEVICES

- Reassure the person that there are no tracking devices or microchips in the vaccines. Provide ingredient lists of the vaccines as evidence and explain what each ingredient is.

ALTERING DNA

- Explain that the vaccines do not alter DNA but work by training the immune system to recognize and fight the virus.
- Explain the difference between DNA and mRNA. You can say, “DNA stores all the genetic information in our bodies, and mRNA carries that information. mRNA vaccines don’t use the live virus to trigger an immune response. Instead, they teach your cells to make a protein that will trigger an immune response. Your body then makes antibodies, which fight the infection if the real virus enters your body.”

Highlight vaccine safety and effectiveness

SAFETY

- Explain that extensive safety and monitoring measures are involved in developing and approving vaccines.

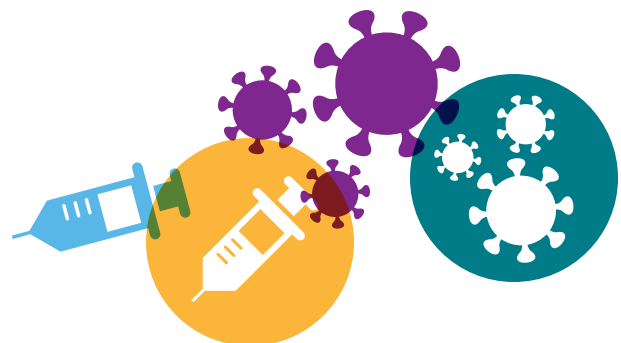
EFFECTIVENESS

- Share evidence-based information about how the vaccines help to prevent severe illness, hospitalization and death. Also explain that the vaccines do not offer 100% protection but that they significantly reduce risk.
- Use plain and accessible language when discussing statistics.

Emphasize reasons to get vaccinated

PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION

- Explain that vaccination protects not only the person getting vaccinated, but also the people they care about and the community.
- Reinforce the idea that getting vaccinated is a collective effort to protect vulnerable people and promote community well-being.
- Emphasize how routine vaccination will keep COVID-19 rates at manageable levels, which will relieve pressure on our health care system and reduce the need for pandemic-related restrictions in the future.

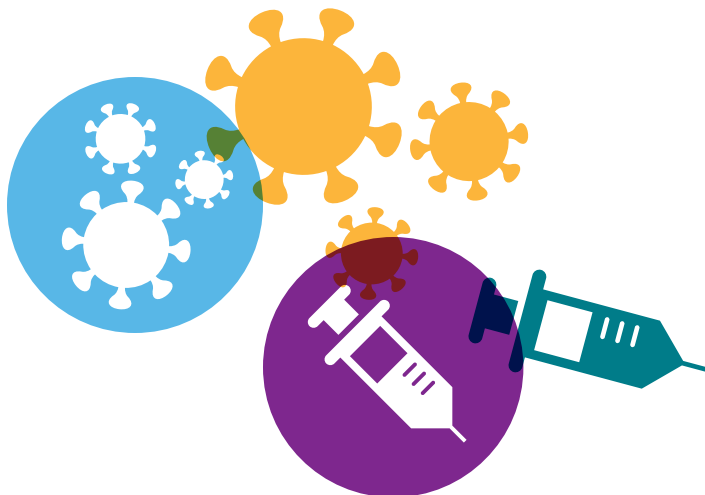


Provide credible resources

- Discuss how there is a lot of misinformation and disinformation circulating about COVID-19 vaccines. Highlight the importance of looking for information from reliable sources such as doctors, scientists and official health organizations, who base their advice on evidence and research. Encourage youth to always double-check before they believe something they see online or hear from someone who isn't an expert.
- Direct youth to credible, up-to-date, accessible sources of information, such as the Public Health Agency of Canada, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization and local health units. The "More vaccine information" section lists resources you can share.
- Share the youth-focused resource [Vaccines: What YOUth Want to Know](#). It includes evidence-based information, myth busters and links to credible sources.

Follow up

- Arrange a follow-up appointment to check in on the person's thoughts, answer more questions or provide support.
- Be prepared to revisit the discussion at subsequent appointments because sometimes more than one conversation is needed.



More vaccine information

YOUTH VACCINE HESITANCY STUDY

- [Youth COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy study \(BMJ Open\)](#)
- [Vaccines: What YOUth Want to Know \(CAMH\)](#)

VACCINE COMMUNICATION

- [Society for Health Communication](#)

VACCINE BASICS FOR YOUTH

- [A Teen's Guide to Vaccination \(Public Health Agency of Canada\)](#)
- [Vaccine Q&A \(Immunize Canada\)](#)
- [City of Toronto vaccination sites](#)

COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH

- [Mental health and well-being \(CAMH\)](#)
- [Youth coping during the pandemic \(CAMH\)](#)

COVID-19 VACCINES

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(U.S.\)](#)
- [Hospital for Sick Children](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
- [Public Health Ontario](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to our research participants and to Aloha Narajos, Claire Perry and Jamie Gibson, our youth engagement specialists with CAMH's McCain Youth Engagement Initiative, for informing the development of this resource. Thank you to the research team on the [youth vaccine hesitancy study](#), including Jejociny Consalas, for background research, and Alexxa Abi-Jaoude, who led the development of this resource. This study was supported by grants from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the University of Toronto.