

TALKING TO YOUR PATIENTS ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE: HOW YOU CAN ENGAGE AND INFORM IN A MEANINGFUL WAY

As COVID-19 vaccines are approved and distributed, providers will be a key part in its adoption and administration to the American public. Patients look to their healthcare professionals for medical guidance and assurance, and while much is still unknown, you can start laying the groundwork now for when the vaccines are available. As your partners in healthcare, we want to share some tips for effectively setting expectations and addressing questions from your patients.

Start COVID-19 Vaccine Conversations Early

Even before you are able to offer COVID-19 vaccinations, consider including the topic in your conversations with patients. This will give you the opportunity to set expectations about vaccine availability, including if/when you might recommend vaccination for them, and learn about any concerns they have.

Engage in Effective COVID-19 Vaccine Conversations

Effective engagement can occur during an in-person office visit, through messages on your patient portal, or at a telemedicine appointment. Patients trust in their providers to help guide healthcare decisions, and your strong vaccine recommendation is the most important part of the conversation.

Start with empathy and understanding.

- ✓ Acknowledge the disruption COVID-19 has caused in all our lives.
- ✓ Provide an opportunity to recognize common concerns that can be addressed by a vaccine.

Assume patients will want to be vaccinated but may not know when to expect it.

- ✓ Consider providing the following general information to patients about the timeline for COVID-19 vaccines:
 - Limited COVID-19 vaccine doses may be available in 2020.
 - It is anticipated that vaccine supply will increase substantially in 2021.
 - The goal is for everyone to be able to easily get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as large quantities are available. However, not everyone will be able to get vaccinated right away.
- ✓ Encourage patients to continue taking steps to protect themselves from COVID-19 and let them know how you plan to share updates about vaccine availability.

Give your strong recommendation.

- ✓ Let your patients know if you plan to recommend COVID-19 vaccination for them.
- ✓ Share the importance of COVID-19 vaccines to protect patients' health as well as the health of those around them.
- ✓ Talk about your personal plans to get a COVID-19 vaccine.
- ✓ Reassure your patients that the vaccine is safe.

Listen to and respond to questions.

- ✓ If a patient has concerns or questions, this doesn't mean they won't accept a COVID-19 vaccine. Sometimes patients want *your* answers to their questions.
- ✓ Your willingness to listen to their concerns will play a major role in building trust in you and your recommendation. Make it clear that you understand they have questions, and that you want to answer them, so they feel confident in choosing to get vaccinated.
- ✓ Seek to understand patient/caregiver concerns and provide information they need in a way they can understand it (see Q&A below).

Keep the conversation open.

- ✓ After answering their questions, let your patients know that you are open to continuing the conversation and answering any additional questions they may have.
- ✓ Encourage patients to take at least one action like:
 - Scheduling another appointment.
 - Reading any additional information you provide them about COVID-19 vaccination.
 - Encourage others to get their COVID-19 vaccine when available.
- ✓ Continue to remind patients about the importance of getting a COVID-19 vaccine during future routine visits.