How to talk with friends and family who have vaccine questions and concerns.

#TeamVaccines
What this guide is all about

Working in the biopharmaceutical industry, we have a good understanding of the science and research behind vaccines – but some people may not have the knowledge necessary to weigh the benefits and risks of vaccination. We can help others make decisions based on science rather than myths.

So how can we help?
To have productive conversations about the benefits of vaccines with our family and friends, first we need to figure out what’s causing their worries or decision not to be vaccinated. This could be due to things they have seen or read online, the views of the people around them, or the values of the culture they live in. Concerns could be based on real risks, incorrect or limited information, or their feelings, assumptions and past experiences. Studies tell us that giving people more information doesn’t always help.

Then, we need to understand how we can address their worries.
In this guide, we’ll share tips you can use as part of conversations about all kinds of vaccines, not just COVID-19 vaccines.

It’s important to remember that there are risks associated with taking all vaccines and medicines and also that not all vaccines are suitable for everyone. So while you can help your family and friends find credible sources of information, it’s still important they discuss their specific needs with their doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

We all have the right to make our own decisions about our health. We can help our friends make decisions based on science rather than myths.
Know who you’re talking to

Before you begin a conversation about vaccines, think about how that person makes decisions.

Most people fall into two categories:

- **Low-involvement decision-makers**
- **High-involvement decision-makers**

**Low-involvement decision-makers** are often guided by habit and routine. They don’t have strong feelings about vaccines, but getting vaccinated isn’t a priority because they don’t think their health is at risk.

**High-involvement decision-makers** have strong feelings and concerns. For them, getting vaccinated is a high-stakes decision with consequences linked to their identity and sense of social belonging.
Low-involvement decision makers

You may notice…

- They get their information about vaccines in a passive way – for example, coming across it while browsing social media – rather than actively researching.
- They feel impartial or neutral about vaccines.
- They don’t consider their vaccination status to be part of their identity.
- They don’t fear social or health-related consequences.
- Going out of their way to get vaccinated is a barrier for them.
- They don’t closely follow the news.
- They don’t consider themselves to be at risk of serious illness or health problems.
You may notice…

They are actively researching vaccines.

Vaccines are an emotionally-charged subject, so they could be defensive.

Their vaccination status is part of their identity.

They may fear their peers will reject them if they choose to be vaccinated or express pro-vaccine views.

Vaccines seem new, unique, and out of the ordinary to them.

They closely follow the news and share updates, but not always from trustworthy sources.

They’re worried that vaccination is a choice which brings high risks for their health.
Tailor your approach

Once you know how they make decisions, you can tailor your conversation to address their needs and concerns.

Tips for low-involvement decision-makers:

- Ask them to get vaccinated
- Keep your points short
- Be positive, brief, and upbeat
- Don’t transfer any frustrations on to them – stay open, upbeat and calm
- Don’t try to solve their worries in one conversation, feel free to point them to credible information or sources on vaccines or ask them if there is another time to continue your conversation.
Tips for high-involvement decision-makers:

- Take time to understand their concerns and what is motivating their decisions
- Acknowledge that using information to guide their decision is a good strategy
- Agree on what sources you both trust
- Ask what proof will be enough to change their mind
- Be positive, caring, and humble

I care about you and I’m ready to listen to your concerns about vaccines.
Conversation tips

Here are ways to keep your conversation on track.

**Start by showing you care**

It’s best to speak to the person face-to-face, somewhere without distractions.

Before you begin, remind them that you’re having this conversation because you care about them.

Show you’re willing to listen:

- Lean in
- Make eye contact
- Don’t judge, interrupt, or rush to give your point of view
- Remember, you may not agree with just one conversation and that’s okay.

You could say:

“Can we talk about vaccines? I care about you, and I’ve got to ask… are you vaccinated?”
Ask open-ended questions

Open-ended questions are questions that can’t be answered with a Yes or No, and usually invite longer answers, such as exploring someone’s concerns. There are often deeper issues behind vaccine concerns. For example, if someone had a bad healthcare experience, they might not trust the medical community.

You could say:

“Tell me what you think about vaccines.”

“What are some of your concerns?”

“Have you spoken to your doctor or pharmacist about your worries?”
Learn together
No one wants to be lectured. So ask the person where they get their vaccine information. See if you can find a source you both trust, like a pharmacist, doctor or other trustworthy source or website.

Stay upbeat
While acknowledging concerns, keep the conversation going by staying open, upbeat, and calm.

Be supportive
See if you can make getting vaccinated easier, such as offering childcare or a ride.

You could say:
“I’d love to find a source we both trust to look into this concern together.”

You could say:
“My arm was sore for a couple of days, but I was quickly back to normal.”

You could say:
“Is there anything I can do to make this easier? I want to help.”
End by showing you care

You might not ease their concerns right away, and that’s okay. No matter how the conversation goes, let them know how much they mean to you. Ending on a positive note, such as a smile, a hug, or a “Thank you” can help you to revisit the conversation later.
Talking about common vaccine concerns

Here are some examples of the concerns and beliefs someone may have, and advice for how you can respond to them, based on behavioural science.

Scenario 1: Addressing myths

Your friend may say…

I’ve heard vaccines can give you the disease they’re meant to protect you from.

This is because…

When people hear incorrect information repeated over and over, they can start to think it’s true.

Tips for responding…

• Recognize that sometimes after getting vaccinated we can feel a bit unwell. It’s because our immune system is learning how to defend itself.
• If the person still believes the myths, empathize with them, and show you understand they may be frightened. Some people fear being left out by their peers if they change their beliefs, so they need emotional support.
Scenario 2: Removing rose-tinted glasses

Your friend may say…

Back in my day, everyone got sick and we’re all OK. I think we weaken our children by not exposing them to diseases…

This is because…

When people reflect on the past, they sometimes distort it or don’t remember the real risks.

Tips for responding…

- Remind the person that before vaccines we lost hundreds of millions of moms, dads, babies, and grandparents to diseases that are now eliminated or preventable (smallpox, polio, measles etc.) because of vaccines
- Explain that many survivors of vaccine-preventable diseases suffer lasting consequences. For example, measles can cause blindness, deafness, and even brain damage
Scenario 3: The risks of “wait and see”

If your friend is a parent, they may say…

I’m confused and keep hearing things that worry me about vaccinating children. So maybe we’ll just wait and see…

This is because…

When parents worry, their own actions could lead to a bad outcome for their child, they may end up leaving it to fate. Unfortunately, if the child does contract a disease that could have been prevented through vaccination, they are likely to blame themselves.

Tips for responding…

• Remind the parent that taking no action is the riskiest choice of all
• Delaying vaccination could open the door to potentially serious diseases just waiting to get in.
• Remind them that millions of children have been vaccinated safely over decades
Scenario 4: Being too optimistic

This is because…
When people are asked to measure their own risk, they are too optimistic compared to the actual facts.

Tips for responding…
• Explain that while it’s normal for people to underestimate our own chance of something bad happening, this overconfidence can mean that sometimes we could put our family’s health at risk unnecessarily
• Remind them that while they may be doing all they can to keep their family safe from infectious disease through things like social distancing and washing their hands, other people may not be as careful. So, the best way to protect everyone from vaccine preventable diseases is to also get vaccinated

Your friend may say…
We’re a very healthy family and don’t get sick often.
Why has IFPMA created this guide?

This guide has been created as part of IFPMA’s #TeamVaccines initiative, which provides educational information on vaccines and the people who work to make them available across the world.

It’s no surprise that we believe vaccines can help to make a better life possible for everyone. This belief is grounded in science and a long history of safe and effective vaccine use around the world.

But don’t just take our word for it. We encourage you to seek out further information from global, national and local public health organizations (including those listed opposite) and your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.
Where to go for trustworthy information on vaccines

Here are a series of links to credible website sources of information that can support your conversations with friends and family.

- IFPMA – Vaccines for Life
- World Health Organization (WHO) Q&A
- World Health Organization (WHO) – Answers about vaccine safety
- GAVI, The Vaccines Alliance – VaccinesWork
- UNICEF – Vaccines for children: Your questions answered
- CDC (USA) – Vaccines and Immunizations: Basics and Common Questions
- Vaccines Europe
- Vaccines Today

Some content in this guide draws on the previously published The Costs of Waiting campaign. https://www.thecostofwaiting.com/