



# COVID-19 Vaccines: A Discussion Guide for Long-Term Care Organizations

Responding to concerns and sharing information



 Let's  
Get  
Vaccinated

# How to Use This Discussion Guide

**This is a critical moment in our fight against COVID-19.** We have effective vaccines that have now been administered to millions of people nationwide. Once we have a fully vaccinated population — and with continued social distancing, mask wearing, and handwashing we can bring an end to this difficult pandemic.

Some people — perhaps some of your colleagues and staff — are hesitant to get a COVID-19 vaccine. Two things have proven to be most effective in addressing these concerns: **listening** and **sharing information from credible sources**.

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) has created this discussion guide to help you talk to your staff or colleagues who aren't vaccinated. You can use this information in one-on-one conversations or in larger group meetings. The NJDOH YouTube page also has free videos and town hall recordings that you can screen or share in combination with this discussion guide. This NJDOH YouTube page includes a recording of the town hall session addressing concerns of the Black and Caribbean communities, and a recording of the town hall that answers questions from New Jersey's Spanish-speaking and Latinx communities.

Links to these videos, as well as easy-to-use fact sheets and other helpful materials, are included at the end of this guide.

Having compassionate, respectful conversations with colleagues and staff is the most important thing you can do to help your organization reach its vaccination goal. The COVID-19 vaccines are an important step in helping us protect ourselves and our families. Let's get vaccinated.

Sincerely,



Marcela Ospina Maziarz, M.P.A.  
Deputy Commissioner



## Getting Started

Having a productive conversation with your staff or colleagues about the vaccines begins with creating an atmosphere of acceptance and respect.

### **Discuss the purpose of the conversation:**

I'd like to talk with you about the COVID vaccines. I know you may have some concerns about getting vaccinated and I'd like to hear more about what is on your mind.

### **Reinforce the open nature of the conversation:**

I'm here to answer any questions you have. There are no inappropriate questions; I want you to ask or share anything that's on your mind.



## Sharing Facts & Information

*It's important to address misinformation without reinforcing it. Remember that rumors are usually the result of fear. Let the participants in the discussion name what bothers them — don't prompt, or you may introduce a concern that they may not have. Remind participants that credible information comes from credible sources, like public health experts whose job it is to keep everyone safe.*

**You may have heard some of the rumors going around about how the vaccines were developed (and some were mentioned in the video we watched). Are any of these rumors keeping you from getting the vaccine?**

***“I’m afraid that the vaccines were rushed; vaccines are never made this quickly.”***

Research on viruses similar to COVID-19 provided useful information that contributed to the development of this vaccine. And because this is a worldwide event, there was an unprecedented cooperative global effort. For example, the researchers ran clinical trials simultaneously instead of one after another, which slows down development.

***“I don’t trust the government. I’ve heard the vaccines were designed to hurt people of color. Doctors don’t care about people of color.”***

It is true that people of color have not been treated well by the medical establishment for many decades, and that is an important problem that needs to be addressed. But in terms of the COVID-19 vaccines, the researchers made sure the clinical trials included people of many ages, genders, races, and ethnicities, including people who are Black and Hispanic or Latinx. It’s also important to remember that the vaccines weren’t developed by the government. They were developed by scientists and public health experts from around the world. An independent panel of experts studied the data from the clinical trials and authorized the FDA to make COVID vaccines available for emergency use to the entire U.S. population.



***“We don’t know the long-term effects of the vaccines.”***

At this point, we have more than a year’s worth of data going back to the beginning of the clinical trials in February 2020. With almost all vaccines, the side effects — if there are any — happen within the first few days. Millions of people have received COVID-19 vaccines and no long-term side effects have been detected.

**Some people also have concerns about the impact of the vaccines on their health (and some were mentioned in the video we watched). Are any of those things concerning you?**

***“I’m concerned about severe side effects.”***

***“I’ve heard that people have died from the vaccines or have been allergic to them.”***

If you have a medical condition or allergies, you should talk to your healthcare provider about your specific concerns. Many people with serious illnesses or those who take medicine for ongoing conditions have been approved for a vaccine and have safely received it. While it is correct that a small number of people who have anaphylactic allergies have had an allergic reaction, none of those people have died. For almost everyone, the main side effects are soreness or redness at the injection site, and sometimes fatigue, fever, and chills which go away in about two days. All of these are actually signs that the vaccine is working as it should. Scientists are continuing to monitor vaccine roll-out and report any adverse effects.

***“People who are immunocompromised or already sick shouldn’t get vaccinated.”***

***“I’m afraid it will interfere with my medicine.”***

If you have a medical condition or allergies, you should talk to your healthcare provider about your specific concerns. Many people with serious illnesses or who take medicine for ongoing conditions have been approved for a vaccine and have safely received it.

***“The vaccines will make you infertile. If you’re pregnant, nursing, or plan to become pregnant you shouldn’t be vaccinated.”***

If you are pregnant, you should talk to your doctor first. Many people who are pregnant and nursing have been safely vaccinated.

***“The COVID vaccines will change your DNA.”***

***“You can get COVID from the vaccines.”***

Unlike other vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccines don’t contain any active or inactive virus. They just have the instructions that tell your immune system what to do if you get infected. Some people are confused by the “Messenger RNA” technology that allows the vaccine to talk to your immune system. But mRNA can’t biologically enter the DNA of your cells, so there’s no way it can change it.

***“If you had COVID-19, you don’t need to be vaccinated.”  
“The risks of COVID-19 are overstated.”***

All the public health experts agree that the risks of COVID — which include death, even in young and previously healthy people — are far worse than the risk of the vaccines, which have been proven to be safe and effective. This is based on the hundreds of millions of vaccines that have been given across the country. Because reinfection is possible and COVID-19 can cause severe medical complications, it’s recommended that even people who already had COVID-19 should get a vaccine. If you’ve had COVID-19 and received monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma, you should wait 90 days before you get your first vaccine dose.

***“I don’t trust vaccines in general. You don’t know what’s in them.”***

Due to the success of vaccines over many decades, a lot of vaccine-preventable diseases are becoming less visible or are even completely eradicated. In all these cases, the vaccines have always been safer than the disease they prevented. In the case of the COVID-19 vaccines, there has been complete transparency about the clinical trials, the ingredients in the vaccine, and any adverse side effects. Scientists are continuing to monitor vaccine roll-out and report any adverse effects.



**It's hard when there's a lot of misinformation out there. How do you decide what you believe? Where do you get health-related information? Healthcare providers?**

It helps me to remember that the vaccines are the work of scientists from around the world. Science has helped us with other vaccines and drugs that have saved lives, and so many other advances in healthcare. If you're seeing vaccine information, make sure it quotes a real public health expert. These doctors and scientists around the globe all agree that the data show COVID vaccines are safe and effective — and they are continuing to watch the results as we vaccinate millions and millions of people. The National Institutes of Health has a guide that tells you how to know if medical information you see online or in social media is accurate. I have the web link to that guide.

## **Building Trust & Increasing Motivation**

*It can help motivate people to get vaccinated if the urgency is made very clear, and if people know what to expect. It's also helpful to remind people that full vaccination is our road back to normal!*

**What would you need to know in order for you to become more comfortable with being vaccinated now?**

*[Refer to the concerns above if they come up in response to this question]*

***"I'll just wait and see how it goes for others."***

Unfortunately, when any of us waits to be vaccinated it means that the COVID virus has time to spread and mutate. This will make it harder to return to normal and to protect our friends and family. Stopping the pandemic requires all the tools available, and we all have a personal responsibility to eliminate the virus as quickly as possible. The science gives us the road back.



**Some people have questions about what happens at the vaccination appointment. Here are some important things to know:**

- A vaccine is free, even if you don't have health insurance. While you may be asked for a health insurance card, you will not be charged; and if you don't have one, you will still get a vaccine.
- Most sites do not ask for documentation or proof of citizenship. You do not need to be a documented U.S. citizen to be vaccinated.
- The vaccination sites, including the large "megasites," are staffed by medical personnel and volunteers. Representatives of law enforcement may be present just to help things move smoothly.
- For non-English speakers, there is support in multiple languages available at vaccination sites.
- Vaccination sites are arranged so that people remain 6 feet apart.
- You will be asked to wait for 15 minutes after your shot to make sure you've reacted well to your vaccine. If you have a history of food or medication allergies, you will be watched for 30 minutes.
- If you receive the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, you will get an appointment for your second dose before you leave. The second dose is very important to ensure your maximum immunity and will be given 21–28 days after the first one, depending on which vaccine you receive.

**Let's imagine everyone is vaccinated! Wouldn't it be great to go out with family and friends, or not have to worry about your loved ones?**

- What else are you looking forward to? What have you missed during the pandemic?





## Making a Plan & Following Through

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Helpful information to ensure that staff make their plan to be vaccinated.

### Do you know how to get vaccinated?

- There will be more appointments opening up in the coming weeks.
- Here is how you make an appointment for a vaccine [Note: please substitute information
  - Visit **COVID19.nj.gov** to see a list of vaccination sites and contact information, and to pre-register for an appointment.
  - You can also call the NJ Vaccination Information Hotline at **855-568-0545** between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., 7 days a week, to speak with a live representative. The hotline has speakers of multiple languages, including Spanish.

- If you need public transportation to get to a vaccination site, go to **[njtransit.com/vaxride](https://njtransit.com/vaxride)** to locate vaccination sites that are conveniently served by NJ Transit bus, train, and light rail routes. This site is being updated regularly, so continue to check it.
- You can use your sick leave or personal time off (PTO) from work to get your COVID-19 vaccine.

**Remember: Even after we're vaccinated, it's very important to still wear masks, wash hands, and socially distance for a while longer. There is still a threat of spreading the virus until a large majority of people are vaccinated, and letting our guard down too soon could reverse all the progress we've made.**

### Thank you for having this conversation with me!

- I really appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts, and I hope you found this helpful.
- I'm available if you have any other concerns or questions.
- I have more information from the Department of Health if you'd like to read more. The NJ Department of Health YouTube page has the video we watched, along with many others.
- Can I ask you to share these videos and the information with people you know who may be hesitant to get vaccinated? Many people have found that when they have conversations like this, their friends, loved ones, or colleagues will listen to them.
- Last question: Who are you getting vaccinated for?

# Resources & Links to More Information

## Videos:

New Jersey Department of Health YouTube channel  
[bit.ly/NJDOH\\_YouTube](https://bit.ly/NJDOH_YouTube)

“Saving Lives w/ the COVID-19 Vaccine in NJ Latinx Communities”  
(a NJ Dept. of Health Virtual Town Hall)  
[bit.ly/NJDOH\\_LatinxTownHall](https://bit.ly/NJDOH_LatinxTownHall)

“Saving Lives w/ the COVID-19 Vaccine in NJ Black and Caribbean Communities”  
(a NJ Dept. of Health Virtual Town Hall)  
[bit.ly/NJDOH\\_BlackCaribbeanTownHall](https://bit.ly/NJDOH_BlackCaribbeanTownHall)

## Other Resources:

National Institutes of Health, “Online Health Information: Is it Reliable?”  
[bit.ly/NIH\\_OnlineHealthInfo](https://bit.ly/NIH_OnlineHealthInfo)

NJ Department of Health Resources Page  
[bit.ly/NJDOH-VaccineInfo](https://bit.ly/NJDOH-VaccineInfo)

NJ Department of Health Vaccination Hub  
[COVID19.nj.gov](https://COVID19.nj.gov)

New Jersey Long-Term Care and Home Healthcare Providers COVID-19  
Employee Communications Digital Resource Kit  
[bit.ly/NJDOH-LTCtoolkit](https://bit.ly/NJDOH-LTCtoolkit)

COVID-19 Vaccines: Know the Facts  
[English] [Spanish] [Arabic] [Chinese-Simplified] [Creole] [Gujarati] [Hindi] [Korean]  
[Polish] [Portuguese] [Tagalog]

See the steps taken to be as certain as possible that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe  
and effective: “Ensuring COVID-19 Vaccine Safety in the United States”  
[bit.ly/CDC\\_VaccineSafety](https://bit.ly/CDC_VaccineSafety)

Questions answered about the vaccine, getting vaccinated, vaccine distribution and  
vaccine safety: Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination  
[bit.ly/CDC\\_VaccineFAQ](https://bit.ly/CDC_VaccineFAQ)

All about the messenger RNA vaccines and how they work:  
“Understanding mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines”  
[bit.ly/CDC\\_mRNA](https://bit.ly/CDC_mRNA)