

## Open the Discussion

**APPROACH** Start the conversation as early as possible with the patient.  
**ASK** "Are you up to date on all recommended boosters? What questions do you have for me?"  
**INTERNAL REMINDERS**

- ✓ Do not assume vaccine acceptance from the patient.
- ✓ Encourage sharing what they have been hearing, positive and negative.
- ✓ People often remember the earliest information they hear, so it is important to have this discussion early.



**Unsure** *Patient is reluctant to make a firm decision*

**APPROACH** Acknowledge and address concerns; don't provide reassurance prematurely. (See page 2 for common concerns and FAQs.)  
**SAY** "Sounds like you're feeling unsure. Tell me more about what you've been hearing about receiving a booster."  
 "I also wondered/heard about that. Here's what I learned after looking into it."  
**INTERNAL REMINDERS**

- ✓ Be empathetic and thank patient for sharing concerns.
- ✓ Link vaccine acceptance to patient hopes and goals.
- ✓ Cite your trustworthy sources of information. To facilitate trust, acknowledge uncertainty where it exists.
- ✓ Allow the patient to bring family or other community members into the decision-making process, if requested.
- ✓ Reinforce your personal decision to stay up to date on boosters.

**Opposed** *Patient declines booster*

**APPROACH** Acknowledge and ask permission to learn more. (See page 2 for common concerns and FAQs.)  
**ASK** "OK, I'd like to learn more about what is most concerning to you. What concerns are keeping you from receiving a booster?"  
**Consider the patient's unique viewpoint.** They may have concerns due to personal experiences in the health care system or mistrust because of history of abuse in the medical system due to racism and other forms of discrimination. They could also be concerned about requirements at work or school, breakthrough infections, misinformation, and the many different vaccine brands available.  
**INTERNAL REMINDERS**

- ✓ Your influence as a messenger matters, you are viewed as a trusted source of information. Ask permission to share your recommendation.
- ✓ If you had similar questions or concerns, share your decision-making thought process.
- ✓ To facilitate trust, acknowledge uncertainty where it exists.
- ✓ Reinforce your personal decision to get vaccinated.
- ✓ Link vaccine acceptance to the patient's hopes and goals.

**FOLLOW-UP** Thank them for sharing their concerns with you and ask again about willingness to receive their booster.

**Yes**  
*Patient wants to receive a booster dose*

**Inclined** *Patient is interested in receiving a booster dose*

**APPROACH** Affirm and recommend next step.  
**SAY** "I'm glad we had this discussion and I appreciate that you shared your concerns with me today. Making an informed decision is important."

**ENCOURAGE AN ACTION STEP**

- ✓ Vaccinate same day, or schedule vaccine appointment.
- ✓ Ask them to read information you provide them.
- ✓ Ask them to share the information they learned to support family and friends in making the same decision, if they feel comfortable doing so.

**Refusing** *Patient is not interested in further discussion*

**APPROACH** Advise and educate (alternative resources); provide opportunity to revisit discussion and offer additional resources from trusted sources.  
**SAY** "This is definitely your decision. If you have any questions at all, I am here for you."  
**ASK** "Would it be helpful for me to provide more information?"  
**PROVIDE INFORMATION**

- ✓ One sheet handout (variety of separate topics) addressing any concerns that may have been stated.
- ✓ Websites with culturally-appropriate information.
- ✓ Phone number to call with any questions if they want to talk later.



## Concerns & Example Responses

### They shared that they believe there is no point in getting a booster dose if they can still get infected.

"I understand. Although there is still a chance of breakthrough COVID-19 infection after vaccination, the vaccines were designed to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 and are still successful at doing so. If you do get sick after being fully vaccinated, you will still have some benefit from the vaccine because you may only get a mild case instead of a serious case."

### They've shared that they have experienced racism or faced another form of discrimination.

"I'm sorry that happened to you. It was horrible and wrong. Your experience sounds frustrating and hurtful." After listening and further exploring their concerns, consider saying: "The booster dose will help prevent you from getting really sick from COVID-19. It is strongly recommended, but completely voluntary."

### They mention harmful medical practices or experiments on Black and Indigenous people in the past.

"You're absolutely right. The history of medical harm should not be ignored. Scientists have engaged in many harmful and racist practices in the name of medicine. The COVID-19 vaccine is being handled very differently. Can I tell you what I know about the vaccine and the vaccine trials? I want to make sure this feels like the right decision for you."

## Frequently Asked Questions & Example Responses

### Why are booster doses important?

"Booster doses will help provide continued protection against severe disease. Booster doses were previously recommended only for populations at high risk for severe COVID-19, but the recommendation expanded to include everyone 5 years and older to help increase protection against COVID-19 illness. This is especially important with the rise of more contagious variants and cases of COVID-19 increasing across the United States."

"The COVID-19 vaccines authorized or approved in the United States are still very effective at reducing the risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19, even against variants. Still, the current vaccines may be associated with a drop in protection over time. Booster doses will increase vaccine-induced protection against COVID-19 and help immunity last longer."

### If we need booster shots, does that mean the vaccines aren't working?

"The current COVID-19 vaccines we have in the U.S. are working well to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death, even against variants. However, recent studies have shown that protection may decrease over time. This reduction in protection over time is why the CDC recommends booster doses for everyone 5+."

### How do I show that I'm eligible for a booster dose?

"You can self-report that you are eligible for a booster dose. You do not need to show a recommendation from a health care provider."

"Please take your vaccination card to your booster dose appointment so the provider can first confirm that you've completed the entire primary vaccine series. If you don't have your card, the provider may be able to look up your record."

### Do I have to get the same vaccine brand for my booster dose?

"You can get a different vaccine for your booster dose than the vaccine you got for your primary series. The CDC made their decision following a careful review of the latest data (Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, mix and match boosters), and robust and deliberative discussion around booster shots."

"People 17 years and younger may only get the Pfizer vaccine. A booster is not authorized for those who received Novavax as their primary series at this time."

### How long does COVID-19 vaccination protection last and does it protect against infection of new variants?

"Scientists are continuing to monitor how long COVID-19 vaccine protection lasts. Recent studies show that protection against the

virus may decrease over time, but vaccines are still preventing against serious illness, hospitalizations, and death from COVID-19. This reduction in protection has led CDC to recommend that everyone ages 5 years and older get a booster shot after completing their primary vaccination series."

### Is it safe to get boosted while pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding?

"Yes, it is safe and recommended for people who are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding to stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines, including all recommended booster doses. There is no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccines cause any problems with fertility or complications during pregnancy. Staying up to date provides protection against severe COVID-19 illness and may pass antibodies during pregnancy and through breastmilk to provide protection to the newborn until they are eligible for COVID-19 vaccination at 6 months old."

### Can the booster be received with other vaccines, like for flu?

"Yes. You can get a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as other vaccines. You do not need to schedule required school vaccinations or other recommended vaccines separately from COVID-19 vaccination. A COVID-19 vaccine appointment is another opportunity to get you or your child caught up on all recommended vaccines."

### Should I get a booster even if I already had COVID-19?

"Yes, I strongly recommend you get a booster despite previously contracting COVID-19 but you should wait to receive the vaccine as soon as you recover from COVID-19. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine after recovering from COVID-19 infection provides added protection to your immune system. People who already had COVID-19 and did not receive a booster after their recovery are more likely to get COVID-19 again than those who receive their booster after their recovery."

For other frequently asked questions, visit: [doh.wa.gov/covidbooster](https://doh.wa.gov/covidbooster)

The best way for your patient to get up-to-date information about when and how to get vaccinated is by visiting the Washington State Department of Health website [CovidVaccineWA.org](https://CovidVaccineWA.org) or by calling the Department of Health phone line **1-800-525-0127**, then press #. (For interpretive services, say your language when the call is answered.)

Adapted from:

1. Communication skills for the COVID vaccine. VitalTalk. [vitaltalk.org/guides/communication-skills-for-the-covid-vaccine/](https://vitaltalk.org/guides/communication-skills-for-the-covid-vaccine/). Published January 8, 2021.
2. Gagneur A. Motivational interviewing: A powerful tool to address vaccine hesitancy. Can Commun Dis Rep. 2020;46(4):93-97. Published 2020 Apr 2. doi:10.14745/ccdr.v46i04a06
3. Opel DJ, Lo B, Peek ME. Addressing Mistrust About COVID-19 Vaccines Among Patients of Color. Ann Intern Med. Published online February 9, 2021 at [acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M21-0055](https://doi.org/10.7326/M21-0055). doi:10.7326/m21-0055