



Talking with adult patients who have questions



MORE INFO

For a brief summary, see the quick guide at skai.org.au/healthcare-professionals.

This guide aims to support you to have conversations with adult patients who have questions and concerns about vaccinations. There are two goals for these conversations: to increase your patient’s confidence in the vaccine, and to vaccinate.

THE IMMUNISATION ENCOUNTER

You have just discussed with your patient that they are due for their COVID-19 vaccination, and they have some questions and concerns (they are ‘hesitant’). What should you do?

Here are the recommended SKAI steps to help you to have a supportive vaccination conversation.

STEP

1. Elicit

Elicit your patient’s questions and concerns about immunisation. This involves asking open-ended questions, such as:

“Do you have some questions?”

Use active listening, which means giving the patient your undivided attention; using verbal and non-verbal (e.g. making eye contact, nodding your head) cues to show that you’re listening; and providing feedback to ensure you understand the patient’s message correctly.¹

STEP

2. Acknowledge

Acknowledge your patient’s concerns and validate your patient. This does not necessarily mean that you agree with your patient’s concerns. Instead, it shows that you are listening. In this process, your patient feels heard. You could validate your patient with a response such as:

“Thank you for sharing. It sounds like you’re worried that...”

Try to use a non-judgemental approach.

Be empathetic and thank the patient for sharing their concerns. Acknowledge uncertainty (where it exists) to build trust.

STEP

3. Set the agenda

Set the agenda for addressing concerns.

Summarise your patient’s questions and concerns by working them into a list. You may not be able to answer everything during this consultation, so prioritise key questions. For example:

“Let’s compile all your concerns into a list, and we’ll prioritise two of your most pressing concerns to address today, and work through them one by one – will that be okay?”

STEP

4. Share knowledge

Share knowledge about immunisation. Tell your patient you have some information that may be helpful in addressing their questions and concerns and ask them if they would like to see it, for example:

“I have some information here that goes into detail about some of your concerns. Would you like me to share it with you?”

Keep information short and to the point, and tailor the information to the concerns the patient has just shared with you (in other words, do not provide generic information).

Explore your patient’s motivations to *Continues* ►



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vaccinate. This involves looking for signs that your patient may have some motivation to vaccinate (for example, concerns about the disease that can be prevented with the vaccine) and reinforcing that motivation. For example, you could say:

"Thank you for sharing your concerns about COVID-19. I agree with you, it can be serious. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine can provide protection."

STEP

5. Recommend vaccination

Make a recommendation to your patient to get vaccinated. Studies have shown that your strong recommendation to vaccinate can really make a difference in whether your patient vaccinates or not.^{2,3} You could say:

"I recommend that you have the COVID-19 vaccine today. It will help protect you and your family."

Frame messages in terms of how the vaccine may benefit your patient and their family.^{4,5} Respect the patient's autonomy but be clear in your recommendation. Positively reinforce their decision to get vaccinated.

STEP

6. Close

Close the consultation but keep the conversation going. At this stage, it is important to re-check intentions and confirm that your patient wants to get the vaccination:

"Are you happy to get a COVID-19 vaccine today?"

If your patient is not ready to receive the vaccination, keep lines of communication open and offer to book the appointment on another day or time:

"Let's book another appointment to discuss this again."

If you are not able to answer all your patient's queries and concerns due to limited consultation

time, offer to schedule another appointment. If you are not able to answer complex queries, offer to refer your patients to a specialist or other healthcare professional who can. Acknowledging that you may not be able to answer all questions and concerns may enhance your patient's trust and confidence in your advice.⁶

Contact details for Specialist Immunisation Services can be found at skai.org.au/healthcare-professionals.

Thank your patient for sharing their vaccination concerns with you. ■

References

References used in the development of this resource can be seen at <https://skai.org.au/talking-adult-patients-who-have-questions>