

CONVERSATION GUIDE



# Addressing vaccine misinformation



MORE INFO

For a brief summary, see the quick guide at [skai.org.au/healthcare-professionals](https://skai.org.au/healthcare-professionals).

THE IMMUNISATION ENCOUNTER

Your patient has brought up vaccine misinformation. What should you do? Here are the recommended steps for speaking with patients about vaccination misinformation.

STEP

## 1. Elicit

**Resist the righting reflex.** Try not to correct the misinformation straight away – this can shut down the conversation and undermine your patient’s trust. Listen by nodding and staying silent – this gives you space to gather your thoughts.

**Explore concerns.** Find out why the false idea is important to your patient. This means exploring their concerns more broadly. They might be worried about avoiding long-term side effects or believe that developing natural immunity is a better option than vaccination. Asking these questions signals your openness to your patient’s thoughts and feelings. Understanding helps you adapt your response to what’s important to your patient.<sup>2,3</sup> For example:

*“Can you share with me what’s important to you here?”*

*“I’m interested to hear from you what is most concerning you.”*

STEP

## 2. Acknowledge

**Acknowledge and affirm.** Show that you recognise and appreciate your patient’s values and motivations, like wanting to keep themselves healthy. This helps you show empathy and build trust.<sup>4</sup> For example:

*“I can see you’ve done a lot of thinking about this.; It’s understandable to be concerned about your health.; You’re right to want to keep yourself safe.”*

STEP

## 3. Set the agenda

**Summarise and set the agenda.** Summarising can clarify your patient’s questions or concerns and help you agree on what you will cover (your ‘agenda’). For example:

*“We have about eight minutes, so let’s focus on...”*

*“Let’s explore this together.”*

Offer to share your knowledge to signal a shift in the conversation, from listening to sharing:

*“Can I share my thoughts?”*

STEP

## 4. Share knowledge:

### 4.1 State the facts

Replace your patient’s misperception with new, correct information.<sup>1</sup> Just saying that something is wrong is not enough. Provide details, which helps your patient remember the correct information,<sup>1</sup> for example:

*“The vaccine is generally safe and prevents severe disease. There are some studies that show...”*

You could choose facts that resonate with what your patient has told you they are concerned about, like wanting to avoid long-term side effects.

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## 4.2 Warn

Stress that the information your patient has shared with you is a myth, a rumour or incorrect. For example:

*"This is a misperception that a couple of people have asked me about recently"*

*"This false idea is making the rounds at the moment."*

## 4.3 Affirm

Offer your patient your support by acknowledging that we are all sometimes susceptible to misinformation<sup>5</sup>:

*"We're all sometimes vulnerable to rumours that make us feel worried."*

## 4.5 Explain

Respectfully explain to your patient why the false idea is incorrect. Explain where or how the false idea originated. Point out any inconsistencies in the false idea or why it doesn't make sense logically.<sup>5</sup> For example:

*"This myth came from the false idea that..."*

*"This false idea misinterprets how vaccines work..."*

If your patient has experienced something that appears to reinforce the misinformation, help your patient understand their experience by offering an alternative explanation, for example:

*"What you've experienced could be because of..."*

*"There are a few reasons you might have noticed this..."*

## 4.6 Repeat the facts

Make sure the facts are the last thing your patient hears and digests.<sup>1</sup> You could call attention to scientific consensus on the issue<sup>5</sup>:

*"There is strong scientific evidence that this vaccine is generally safe and prevents you from becoming severely unwell."*

## STEP

## 5. Recommend vaccination

**Make a clear recommendation to vaccinate.**

This is very powerful in encouraging your patient to vaccinate.<sup>6,7</sup> For example:

*"I recommend that you have the vaccine today."*

## STEP

## 6. Close

**Re-check intentions.** After this conversation, check to see how your patient feels about vaccinating today:

*"Are you happy to go ahead with getting the vaccine today?"*

**Keep the conversation going.** Some people will take time to digest what you have told them. They may need to come back another time. Be patient and keep the conversation going by booking another appointment:

*"Let's book another appointment for next week and explore this together some more."*

**Share credible resources.** Share SKAI resources or other credible sources of information with your patient to read at home:

*"Here is a website that has good quality information that might help answer your questions". ■*

## References

References used in the development of this resource can be seen at <https://skai.org.au/addressing-vaccine-misinformation>