

## Building vaccine confidence for the COVID-19 Vaccine

### What is vaccine hesitancy?

The World Health Organization defines vaccine hesitancy as “delay in acceptance or refusal of safe vaccines despite availability of vaccine services.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the best ways to address people’s concerns about getting vaccinated is for a trusted person to talk with them about their concerns and the facts.

Health workers can help to address vaccine hesitancy by talking to individuals when they attend health facilities, in their homes or communities. Group discussion could be held in places of worship. It is ideal for these discussions to take place before people attend for vaccination, but those who have joined to queue to be vaccinated may also need reassurance.

Their concerns about being vaccinated could be **emotional** and related to personal experiences and perceptions of **poor or unfair treatment in the past**. They may have **questions about the science** involved with the vaccine. It is important **not to overwhelm people with facts** and information. Instead, **acknowledge their views or experiences** and find out what would encourage them to get vaccinated<sup>2</sup>.

### Who is vaccine hesitant?

Some people are clear about their acceptance of vaccination and some people are clear about their refusal. Others sit along a spectrum in between these views and are unsure, or COVID-19 vaccine hesitant<sup>3</sup>. This group of people have most likely received other vaccines in the past and are not against vaccines in general, but rather, are worried about the current COVID-19 vaccine and its safety and efficacy. It is this group of people who need to be targeted when thinking about how to combat vaccine hesitancy and build trust in the general population in favour of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

Research from South African in 2021 showed that 67% said they would definitely or probably take a COVID-19 vaccine; 18% said they would definitely not or probably not take the vaccine and 15% were unsure if they would take the vaccine<sup>4</sup>. This percentage could change based on new information or COVID-19 statistics.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.who.int/immunization/sage/meetings/2014/october/1\\_Report\\_WORKING\\_GROUP\\_vaccine\\_hesitancy\\_final.pdf](https://www.who.int/immunization/sage/meetings/2014/october/1_Report_WORKING_GROUP_vaccine_hesitancy_final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-to-talk-about-vaccines>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.who.int/immunization/sage/meetings/2014/october/1\\_Report\\_WORKING\\_GROUP\\_vaccine\\_hesitancy\\_final.pdf](https://www.who.int/immunization/sage/meetings/2014/october/1_Report_WORKING_GROUP_vaccine_hesitancy_final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://sacoronavirus.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report\\_Covid-19-vaccine-hesitancy\\_SA-studies\\_1April2021.pdf](https://sacoronavirus.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report_Covid-19-vaccine-hesitancy_SA-studies_1April2021.pdf)

## Vaccine confidence along a spectrum



## What influences whether people decide to be vaccinated or not?

Many factors influence a person’s decision about whether to be vaccinated or not. The table below outlines some of the influences<sup>5</sup>.

Contextual influences	Individual and group influences	COVID-19 Vaccine specific influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication and media</li> <li>• Influential leaders</li> <li>• Historical influences</li> <li>• Religious / cultural / gender / socio-economic</li> <li>• Geographic barriers</li> <li>• Perceptions of the Pharmaceutical industry</li> <li>• Trust / mistrust of the healthcare system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal, family and/or community members’ experience with vaccination, including pain</li> <li>• Beliefs, attitudes about health and prevention</li> <li>• Knowledge/awareness</li> <li>• Personal experience and levels of trust with the health system and providers</li> <li>• Risk/benefit (perceived, experienced)</li> <li>• Immunisation as a social norm vs. not needed/harmful</li> </ul>	<p>The WHO and NDoH have developed resources that may answer some of the questions people have about the COVID-19 vaccine. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do vaccines work?</li> <li>• How are vaccines developed?</li> <li>• Manufacturing, safety and quality control of vaccines</li> <li>• Different types of COVID-19 vaccines</li> <li>• Safety of COVID-19 vaccines</li> <li>• Side effects of COVID-19 vaccines</li> <li>• Vaccine efficacy, effectiveness and protection</li> </ul> <p>See:  <a href="https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/covid-19-vaccines/explainers">https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/covid-19-vaccines/explainers</a>            And  <a href="https://messagesformothers.co.za/2021/02/16/covid-19-vaccination-mothers/">https://messagesformothers.co.za/2021/02/16/covid-19-vaccination-mothers/</a>            This website has information for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers about the COVID-19 vaccine            And  <a href="https://sacoronavirus.co.za/category/tool-kits/">https://sacoronavirus.co.za/category/tool-kits/</a></p>

The contextual issues could be addressed by public health campaigns and systems strengthening, rather than by individual vaccinators or service providers.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.who.int/immunization/sage/meetings/2014/october/1\\_Report\\_WORKING\\_GROUP\\_vaccine\\_hesitancy\\_final.pdf](https://www.who.int/immunization/sage/meetings/2014/october/1_Report_WORKING_GROUP_vaccine_hesitancy_final.pdf)

## How to have conversations about vaccination<sup>6</sup>

1. Listen with **empathy** – Say “It is okay to have questions and want to know more information before getting vaccinated”, then actively listen.
2. Ask **open-ended questions** – Questions like “What have you heard about the COVID vaccine?” allow the person to talk so that you can understand them better.
3. Share **trusted information** – the Department of Health has many resources available on their website: <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/category/tool-kits/> and see the [MessagesforMothers COVID-19 vaccine messages](#)
4. **Explore reasons** for wanting / not wanting to be vaccinated – you could tell them why you wanted to be vaccinated, to protect yourself, your family and your community, and bring back activities that we have not been able to enjoy during lockdown.

## How health care workers can help boost vaccine confidence

1. **Lead by example** - share your personal experience of getting vaccinated. This helps to promote vaccination acceptance as a social norm. Sharing your own concerns and hesitancy and how you overcame these could help hesitant people to relate to your story.
2. **Build trust** - If you're helping to give vaccines, be supportive of anyone coming in for vaccination who has questions or asks for your advice. Listen to any concerns and communicate in a way that is respectful and builds trust.
3. Help people feel **empowered**<sup>7</sup> – Many people are scared. The pandemic has completely changed our lives. You can help to remind people that they can do something about this virus. By getting vaccinated, they can help to protect themselves and their loved ones.
4. **Address misinformation** – if someone is arguing against vaccination because of false information, you need to give the correct information.
  - Start with the fact: e.g. “No vaccine is 100% safe and effective but COVID-19 vaccines have been shown, in many scientific studies, to be very safe and effective.”
  - Say that there is misinformation. Restate the myth the person has mentioned: e.g. “People say they were developed too quickly.” Or “I know people who got COVID-19 from the vaccine”.
  - End with the relevant facts: “All vaccines, including the COVID-19 ones, have to go through safety trials before they can be used. They have been approved by several international safety organisations.” Or, “The vaccination does not give people COVID-19. It is true that some people still get COVID-19 despite a vaccine, but the chance of them needing hospitalisation or dying is greatly reduced; and they are less likely to transmit to others.”

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-to-talk-about-vaccines>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-about-covid-19-vaccines>

5. **Share vaccine success stories** – vaccines have helped the world to get rid of Smallpox and Polio, and control measles and meningitis. Childhood vaccinations for many diseases are routine and help to save lives<sup>8</sup>. In South Africa, the TB vaccine, BCG, given to babies prevents TB infection in the brain.

6. **Emphasise positive outcomes** – “Vaccination will help protect you, your family and your community from COVID-19, and will bring us all closer to doing the things we love with the people we care about.”

By having thoughtful and kind conversations with people about vaccines and vaccination, you’re making a significant contribution to public health – thank you!

### Resources

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/covid-19-vaccines/explainers>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/>

<https://ehwoza.com/animations>

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-about-covid-19-vaccines>

<https://messagesformothers.co.za/2021/02/16/covid-19-vaccination-mothers/>

### Read more about vaccine hesitancy in South Africa

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14760584.2021.1949291>

<https://hsf.org.za/publications/hsf-briefs/combating-vaccine-hesitancy>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-02-10-south-africa-needs-a-massive-awareness-campaign-to-overcome-covid-vaccine-hesitancy/>

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.vacfa.uct.ac.za/major-vaccine-success-stories>