Guidelines for dialogue

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINATION

Material for health workers
This material provides recommended responses for addressing different COVID-19 topics during vaccination drives and informational activities, whether at a health facility or during home visits.

The aim of establishing an informed dialogue is to improve COVID-19 vaccine acceptance and administration rates. Therefore, whenever possible, an information session should be coupled with a vaccination session so individuals can act on the health expert’s recommendations immediately.
What are the ingredients in COVID-19 vaccines?

**RESPONSE OPTIONS**

1. Vaccine ingredients vary by manufacturer. None of them contain eggs, latex, or preservatives.

2. COVID-19 vaccines do not contain metals such as iron, nickel, cobalt, lithium, or rare earth alloys. They also do not contain manufactured products such as microelectronics, electrodes, carbon nanotubes, or semiconductor nanowires or chips. Nor do they contain ingredients that can produce an electromagnetic field at the injection site.

3. The ingredients of all COVID-19 vaccines are publicly available at an [online database](https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-are-vaccines-developed) and listed on the World Health Organization (WHO) website. They can be accessed at any time at the following link: https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-are-vaccines-developed.

How do mRNA vaccines work? Are they new?

**RESPONSE OPTIONS**

1. mRNA vaccines instruct our cells to produce a protein that will cause our body to react and develop antibodies against the virus. These antibodies will then protect us from the disease when we are exposed to it.

2. mRNA vaccines are new but not unknown: researchers have been studying and working with them for decades to combat other diseases such as seasonal flu (influenza) and Zika.
Is it safe to mix-and-match different COVID-19 vaccines?

Yes. The protection you get from mixing and combining vaccines may even be better the protection offered by a single type of vaccine.

How long does protection from COVID-19 vaccines last?

1. We are still learning how long COVID-19 vaccine protection lasts. Several recent studies show that protection against the virus may decrease over time. This reduction in protection has led to the recommendation that certain groups of people receive a booster dose.

2. Available data also suggest that most people who recover from COVID-19 develop an immune response that provides at least six months of protection against reinfection, although the degree of protection is not yet known with certainty.

3. It is critical to continue with all the public health measures that work, such as physical distancing, ventilation of spaces, mask wearing, and hand washing.

Guidelines for Dialogue
General questions about COVID-19 vaccination
Is it better to get COVID-19 naturally than to get vaccinated against it?

RESPONSE OPTIONS

1. No. The vaccine produces immunity without the harmful effects associated with COVID-19, including long-term effects and death. Allowing the pandemic to spread could cause millions of deaths and an even greater number of people with long-term effects.

Are some COVID-19 formulas recommended more for certain people than for others, based on their medical history? Do they all offer the same protection?

RESPONSE OPTIONS

1. Vaccination should not be postponed for the purpose of choosing one vaccine or another.

2. All the vaccines are safe and effective. Any vaccine will reduce your risk of getting COVID-19 and, most importantly, prevent you from getting severe forms of the disease or dying from it. Every vaccine approved by WHO meets the requirements for safety and effectiveness.
Are vaccines effective against variants such as Omicron?

**RESPONSE OPTIONS**

1. Vaccines approved by WHO or local health authorities are highly effective in preventing severe forms of illness and hospitalization against all variants of concern, including Omicron.

What happens if I only get one dose? What happens if someone exceeds the interval between the first and second dose?

**RESPONSE OPTIONS**

1. If you receive a vaccine that requires two or more doses, subsequent doses should be administered as closely as possible to the recommended interval.

2. You should not receive the next dose before the recommended interval.
Can I get vaccinated if I recently got another vaccine, am taking antibiotics, or have any serious respiratory illness, or COVID-19?

1. If you have flu symptoms, suspect you’ve contracted COVID-19, or test positive, you should not get vaccinated. It is recommended that you wait until you have recovered and meet the criteria to leave isolation (10 to 14 days). This recommendation is intended to limit the possibility of transmission to others. If you receive the vaccine during the infection period, your body will still build immunity.

2. You can be vaccinated against COVID-19 if you are taking antibiotics for any other reason.

3. Under no circumstances should you miss vaccinations against other diseases. Any vaccine can be given alongside the COVID-19 vaccine.

4. You can get vaccinated at the nearest health center. Avoid delays. If you have received any other vaccine, you should still follow the recommended COVID-19 vaccination schedule.
Can vaccination centers or brigades charge me for getting the vaccine?

RESPONSE OPTIONS

1. No. The COVID-19 vaccine is free. No one should charge you for administering the vaccine or for giving you your vaccination card.

2. Equitable access to safe and effective vaccines is critical to ending the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCERNS ABOUT THE HOURS AFTER VACCINATION
What should I know about the possible onset of symptoms after COVID-19 vaccination?

RESPONSE OPTIONS

1. We can all experience side effects from vaccines, regardless of our gender or age. Weight is also unrelated to the presence or absence of these effects.

2. Side effects are normal signs that your body is building protection. We should not be alarmed, as vaccine side effects are to be expected. Remember that vaccines are safe.

3. After getting vaccinated, you may have pain, redness, swelling, or mild discomfort when you move the arm where you received the injection. You may also experience fatigue, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever, or nausea and general malaise. The vast majority of these complaints are mild and disappear within two days.

4. The vaccine will not cause changes in smell, taste, or vision.

5. After receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, you will be observed for 15 to 30 minutes to see if you have any allergic reactions that need to be treated. These reactions are very rare and can be managed at the vaccination site.

6. Many people don’t feel any discomfort, which doesn’t mean the vaccine won’t work.

7. Seek medical advice if you have difficulty breathing, severe allergies (rash), severe headache, or if the side effects concern you, are worsening, or do not seem to be going away after a few days.
After getting vaccinated, can I take any drugs, natural medicines, or even antibiotics to relieve COVID-19 vaccine symptoms?

**RESPONSE OPTIONS**

1. Most reactions are mild and can be treated at home with common pain relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, if available. To reduce pain, you can apply ice or cold water to the arm where you were given the vaccine.

2. You do not need to take antibiotics to lessen the effects of the vaccine. Antibiotics do not treat the virus or the effects caused by the vaccine. If, after vaccination, you get an infection that requires antibiotics, you can take them as long as your health care provider approves their use.

3. Natural medicine has long been used in different communities. You can drink any kind of tea; it will not harm you.

4. Some people feel good when they drink cinnamon, mint, eucalyptus, ginger, garlic, or lemon tea. Chamomile may relieve some symptoms.

5. If you are prescribed any medication, adhere to the prescription and follow the doctor’s instructions.

In the vast majority of cases, these reactions disappear within 24 or 48 hours without the need for medical intervention.
How soon after getting the COVID-19 vaccine can I drink alcoholic beverages or smoke cigarettes?

**RESPONSE OPTIONS**

1. The medical recommendation is not to consume alcohol or smoke at any time. Both are toxic substances and should not be recommended, regardless of their relationship to the vaccine.

2. There is no evidence that the safety or efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines is affected by anything you eat or drink before or after getting vaccinated, including alcohol. However, drinking alcohol can add to the normal mild to moderate side effects you may experience after vaccination, such as a headache and tiredness. It is therefore advisable to avoid drinking until any post-vaccination side effects have passed.

3. Drinking alcohol can reduce our attention to practicing proper health measures, such as hand hygiene, mask wearing, and physical distancing. Therefore, it can put you and the people around you at risk of becoming infected.

4. Be aware that drinking alcohol and smoking may increase the risk of other health problems.

How long does it take for the COVID-19 vaccine to start protecting my body? Is it the same length of time for all formulas?

**RESPONSE OPTIONS**

1. Usually, once the vaccination schedule is completed, our body needs two weeks to build full protection (immunity) against the virus that causes COVID-19.

2. A vaccination series is considered complete two weeks after the last dose has been administered.
**Why have some vaccinated people contracted COVID-19?**

1. **COVID-19 vaccines work very well and are a critical tool for controlling the pandemic. However, no vaccine is 100% effective.**

2. A small percentage of fully vaccinated people will get sick. This is especially true in the presence of a highly transmissible variant such as Omicron. However, vaccinated people are likely to have no symptoms or only mild symptoms.

3. **Full protection from the vaccine begins 14 days after administration of the second dose.** If a person becomes infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus immediately before or after receiving the vaccine, they will not yet be protected and could therefore become ill.

4. The available scientific evidence shows that the symptoms and consequences of COVID-19 disease are much milder if the person completed their vaccination schedule before infection.

**What if, when I got vaccinated, I had COVID-19 without knowing it?**

1. If you got vaccinated without knowing you had COVID-19, there’s no reason to worry. The effectiveness of the vaccine does not depend on the status of SARS-CoV-2 virus infection at the time of vaccination. **If you received the vaccine during the infection period, your body is already generating immunity.**

2. However, as soon as you are confirmed to have COVID-19, you should follow local isolation recommendations to avoid infecting the people around you.

3. Once the acute symptoms of the disease have passed, you can complete your vaccination schedule.
Do COVID-19 vaccines have to be approved by WHO before being used in my place of residence?

RESPONSE OPTIONS

1. No. Local health authorities may approve the use of a COVID-19 vaccine not listed by WHO.

2. Each local government has an obligation to its residents and formulates its own health policies.
This material has been prepared based on documents from the Ministry of Health of Guatemala and with the support of the PAHO Country Office in Guatemala.