

Guidelines for Dialogue

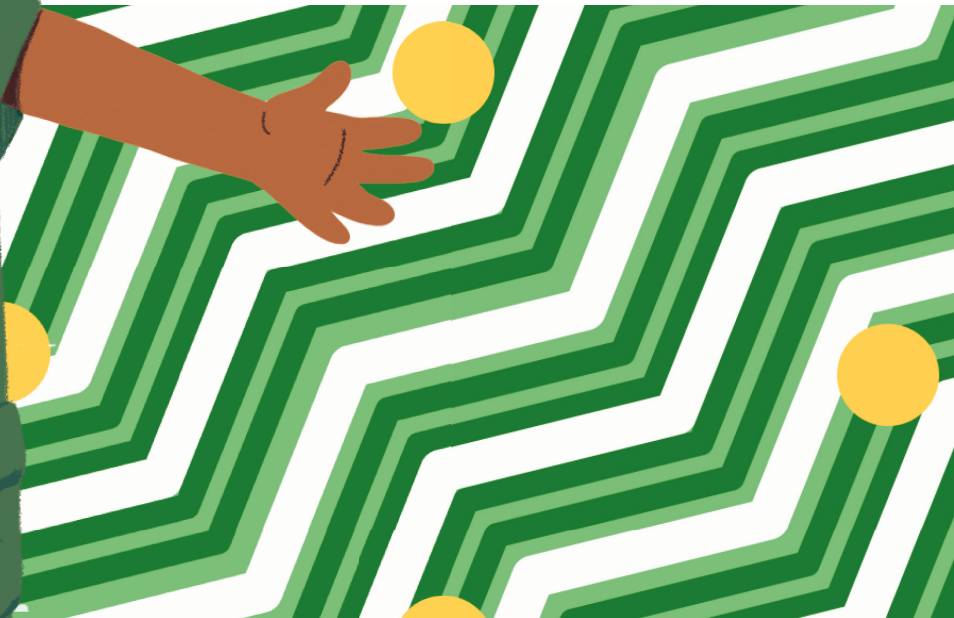
# TALKING TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC ABOUT COVID-19

Material for health workers

**PAHO**

Pan American  
Health  
Organization

World Health  
Organization  
Americas



This material outlines recommended steps for addressing different COVID-19 topics during vaccination campaigns 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.

# Preliminary steps

## Introduction

Good mornig,  
nice to meet you!



- **Dress neatly and wear an official credential or badge to identify yourself.** Wear an item of clothing from the institution you represent, whether it is a cap, shirt, T-shirt, or vest, and introduce yourself with your name and the name of the institution.
- **Wear a face mask when speaking to people,** unless the meeting is held outdoors where social distancing is possible.
- **Greet people cordially** and say something pleasant to connect with them. Try to begin the conversation by remarking on something you see, such as the decorations of the place, pets, or the weather.

## Starting the conversation

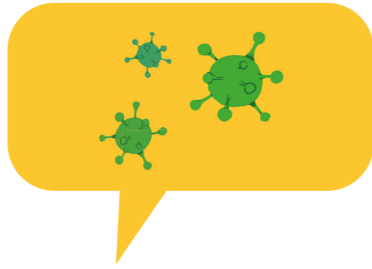


- **Ask for the head of the household,** or an adult, and ask permission to talk to everyone in the household. Bring hand sanitizing gel and try to use it while starting the conversation. Offer gel to those present.
- **If you have visited this family or the community before, mention it,** reminding them that you are a health care provider who has supported the community in the past. If necessary, and always keeping the recommended distance, uncover your face so you can be recognized.





## Addressing the subject of COVID-19



- Begin by stating that **the reason for your visit is to offer general health information.**
- **Gauge people's knowledge** of COVID-19. This will help you recognize which points you should reinforce and what questions you should ask to clear up any concerns. Try to focus on answering every question you are asked.
  - What have you heard about COVID-19?
  - What have you heard about COVID-19 vaccines?
  - Where have you heard the most information about COVID-19?
  - What are your main concerns?
- Notice if people are showing interest in listening to you, and **don't interrupt if they start talking.**

## Here are a few tips that can help you connect:

**Be cordial and address everyone.**

**Talk about the weather, pets, or the decorations of the place to break the ice.**

**Pay attention to children.**

**Before you talk about COVID-19, you can talk about other topics, including routine vaccination.**

**Before sharing information, listen carefully and show interest in the conversation and in receiving information.**



# During the visit

## Keep in mind



- **It is essential to show interest in people.** Look them in the eye, listen carefully to what they say, don't interrupt, and respect their opinions. It is important that you keep your phone silent and not answer calls or messages.
- Also **pay attention to nonverbal language**, be mindful of your gestures and your posture, avoid staring, and do not appear to be rushed or bored.

## Find out



- **What messages they have received about** protection against COVID-19, such as the importance of face masks, hand hygiene, and household cleanliness. What do they know and what they think about the public health recommendations? This information will allow you to focus on specific topics to cover.
- **Encourage your audience to ask questions** and then provide information clearly and in plain language. If they express doubt or apprehension, don't interrupt; show understanding and acknowledge their concerns and opinions. Don't contradict people. Instead, look for points of understanding and go from there.

## Remember



- **The importance of using simple language, speaking slowly and without raising your voice**, not using examples out of context, and focusing on the person. You can share your experiences to make the conversation more enjoyable.
- **It is essential to show empathy and affirm that you understand the opinions of others.** Tell them it is normal to have concerns, as this is a new disease and a new vaccine. Also, show confidence and let them know that you are there to help resolve those concerns. Our task is to encourage dialogue.

## Just in case

You should be accompanied by an interpreter if other languages are spoken where you are visiting.

- Stay calm if someone becomes agitated or raises their voice; move slightly away from the person and avoid telling him or her to calm down. Listen carefully and take a deep breath because their anger is not directed at you.
- If they ask you a question, answer in a calm tone and if you feel it is necessary to leave the area, do so. Resume the conversation only if the other person calms down and asks you more questions about COVID-19.

# Talking about the vaccine

## When offering the vaccine, mention some of these points:



- The vaccine is safe and it will prevent severe forms of COVID-19 from developing. If you get the disease, **the vaccine reduces your risk of hospitalization or death.**
- Although infection with the COVID-19 virus does not always lead to severe symptoms, hospitalization, or death, **it is worth getting vaccinated** because, if you become infected after receiving the vaccine, **the disease will be much milder or you may even be asymptomatic.**
- Vaccines help us protect ourselves and the people who have not yet been vaccinated.
- The vaccine is an act of collective solidarity, an opportunity **to help those at greater risk of developing a serious condition or dying.**
- The more people who are vaccinated, **the more likely it is that the circulation of the virus will be reduced**, and the risk of mutations will be lower.

## If the person agrees to be vaccinated:

- Thank them.
- Remind them that they may experience **some minor, short-lived side effects with no long-term consequences.**
- **Emphasize that these effects are normal and that all vaccines cause them**, because they are signs that the body is building protection. All of them disappear in 24 to 48 hours. These effects may include fatigue, headache, chills, fever, or nausea.
- Also tell them that they **may experience pain, redness, or swelling** in the arm where the vaccine was given.
- Emphasize that the chances of serious effects are **extremely small.**
- Remind them that **the vast majority of people feel no discomfort** after the vaccine, which doesn't mean it won't work.
- Recommend increasing fluid intake to reduce discomfort.

### What should I do if I don't have an answer to the question I am being asked?

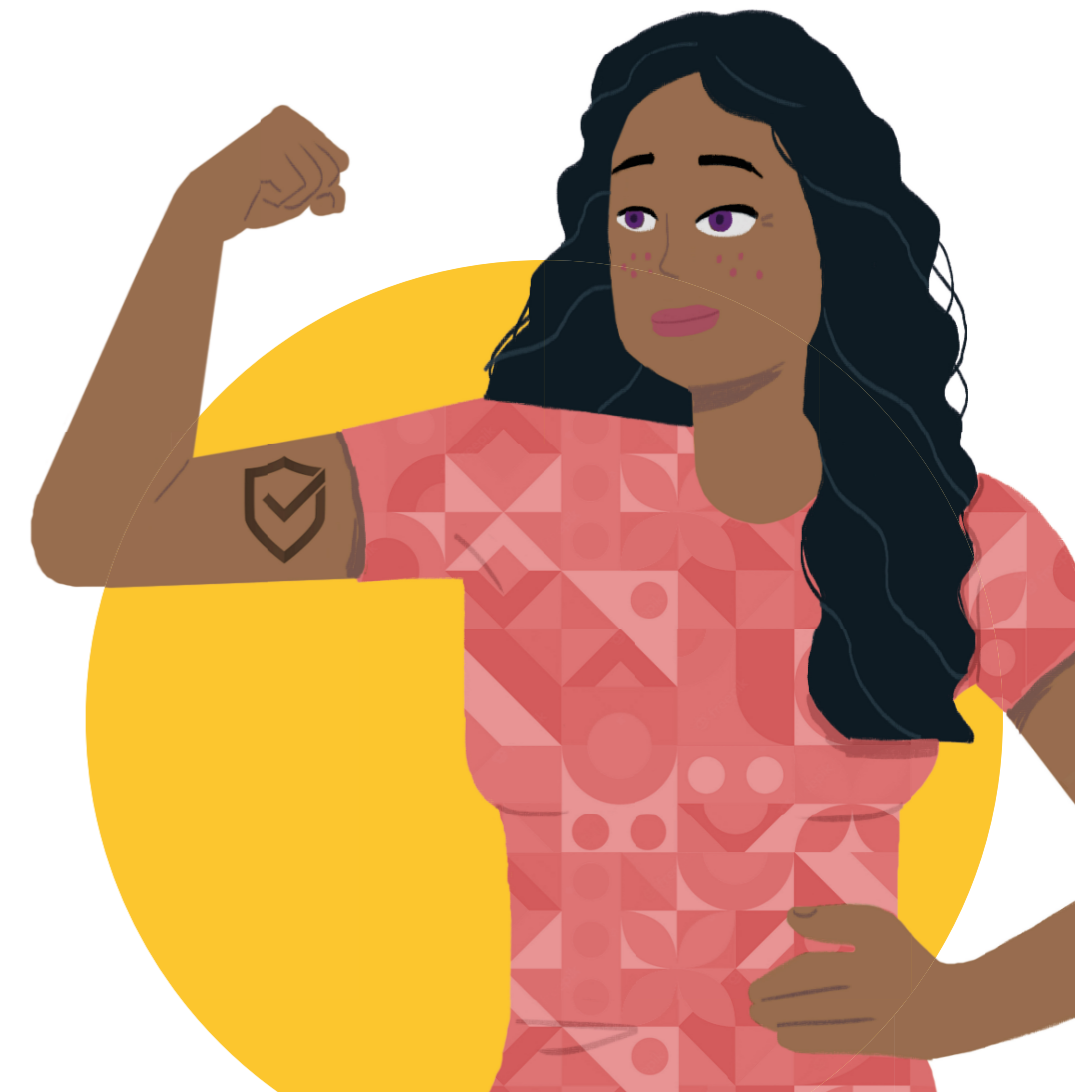
- Stay calm, it's OK not to have a specific answer.
- Don't search for answers online without verifying the sources of information.
- Visit and invite people to visit official sites like:
  - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/covid-19-vaccines>
  - <https://www.paho.org/en/topics/immunization>
  - <https://www.paho.org/en/covid-19-vaccines>
  - Your country's ministry of health website
- Consult medical staff, other health workers, or academic or scientific professionals.



### If the person does not agree to be vaccinated:

- Listen carefully to the reasons they give for not getting vaccinated. **Don't judge**, even if you don't agree with what you hear.
- Even if you feel frustrated, **try to show empathy and validate** the person. Tell them that their concerns about vaccines are understandable and that it is good to talk about these issues and seek answers.
- Explain that **vaccines have always been beneficial, that they have been around for 200 years** and that measles, rubella, and polio have disappeared thanks to them.
- Mention other vaccination campaigns that have worked well in the past. Remind them that **measles and polio are not circulating in communities because children have been vaccinated**.

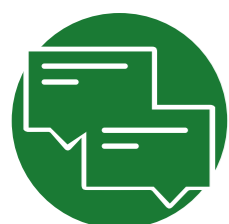
- Reinforce this by making the point that vaccines help not only the recipient **but also their community, and that they help us all to resume our activities**.
- Reiterate that **COVID-19 vaccines are safe** and have undergone the same evaluation and approval processes as all other vaccines.
- **Make the person feel empowered:** "You can help beat this disease."
- Try to **connect with the person's values**, ask them what they would like to change about COVID-19, and insist that the more people who get vaccinated, the closer we are to defeating COVID-19.
- Try to **replace false information** presented to you with accurate information: provide information, dispel myths, and explain the truth behind the myths.
- **Don't be discouraged:** not everyone will be quick to concede.
- Remind them that **they can think about their decision**, that you will be available to talk. Offer to return another day, or later, and invite them to visit the vaccination centers.



# After



Thank the participants for their interest in the information session.



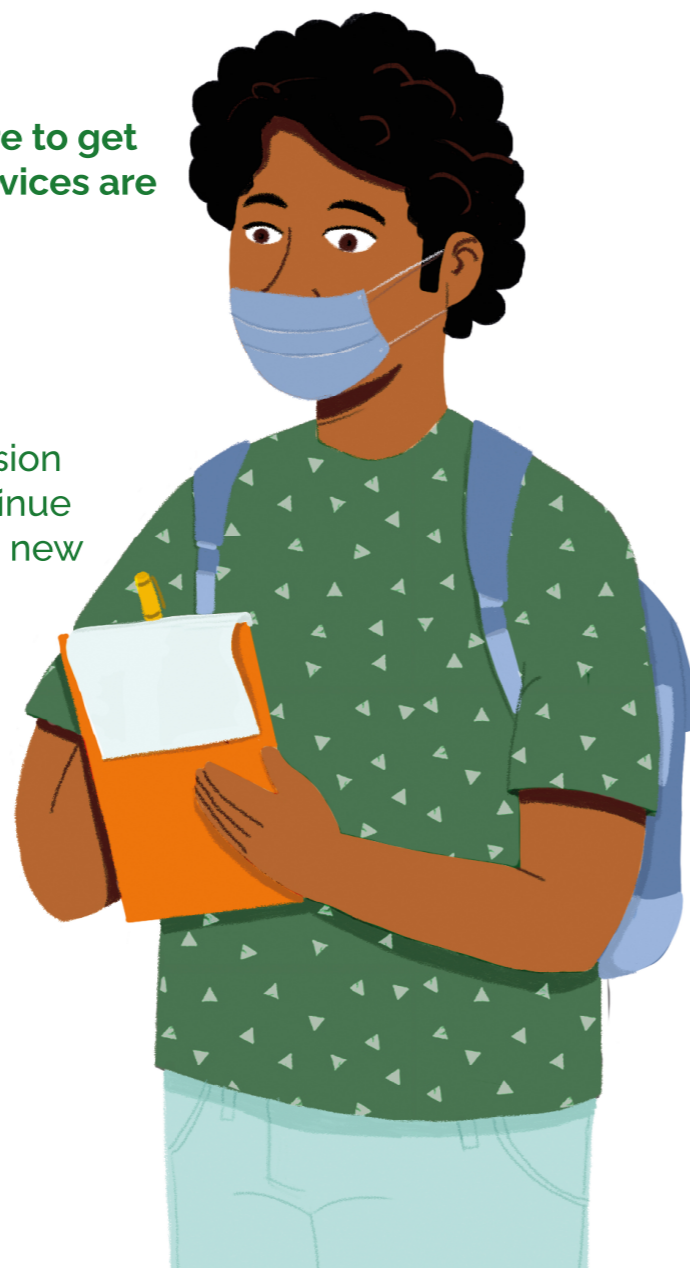
Share the **contact information of trusted health workers** or public health officials who can answer additional questions.



Make sure people **know where to get vaccines and when those services are available.**



Offer another information session in the coming months to continue the conversation and address new questions or concerns.



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.



