

Addressing vaccine hesitancy with parents

Your guide to effective and persuasive communication



Actor Portrayal

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) named vaccine hesitancy as one of the ten leading threats to global health.¹ Yet, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a strong recommendation from a health care provider like you is still the single most important factor in determining whether or not someone gets vaccinated.²



Supporting you, your patients, and your practice

We invite you to explore sample communication scenarios rooted in evidence-based strategies for overcoming vaccine hesitancy.

Grouped into three topic areas, these sample dialogues may help you address common vaccine questions and concerns with clarity and compassion.

- Safety concerns/
general mistrust** [page 2](#)
- Lack of information** [page 3](#)
- Vaccine necessity** [page 4](#)



Vaccine safety is a very real concern for some parents^{3,4}

Be prepared to establish honest and respectful dialogue^{4,5,6}

What hesitancy may sound like:

“How do I know vaccines are safe?”

» **HCP:** “Vaccines go through a strict approval process. For instance, just to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), vaccines are rigorously researched and tested.⁷

Even after approval, vaccines continue to be monitored for additional safety and efficacy concerns.⁷

But there are still risks. That’s why a Vaccine Information Statement (VIS) is given to every person with each vaccine they receive to inform them of the risks and benefits of the vaccine.”⁸



“I’d like to delay my child’s vaccinations. Can we save this for her next appointment?”

» **HCP:** “I’m hearing that you’d like an alternative vaccination schedule. Could you help me understand why?”

Parent: “It just seems like a lot all at once, and I’m not sure if it’s safe.”

» **HCP:** “The CDC-recommended vaccination schedule is designed to help protect children before they are exposed to vaccine-preventable diseases.⁹

It’s based on many factors, including how your child’s immune system responds to vaccines at various ages, and how likely your child is to be exposed to a particular disease.⁹

Delaying vaccines could leave your child vulnerable to disease and may lead to serious complications.⁹

I feel confident in this schedule, which is recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and approved by the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), etc.”¹⁰

“I’m not sure I want my child to get those shots. I’m a little concerned about the side effects.”

» **HCP:** That’s understandable. Can you tell me what concerns you the most?”

Parent: “Well, I’ve heard they can be dangerous.”

» **HCP:** “Vaccines can cause side effects that are usually mild and go away within a few days on their own, such as a low-grade fever, headache and/or pain, swelling, or redness where the shot was given.¹¹

Serious side effects are extremely rare, but could include allergic reaction. Signs of a severe allergic reaction could be difficulty breathing, swelling of face and throat, and/or a bad rash on the body. Does that help address your concerns?”¹¹

Parent: “I’m still not sure.”

» **HCP:** “Okay. I’ll give you some information to read and we can reschedule a visit in 2-3 days to discuss any questions or concerns you might still have. Does that sound good?”

“I’ve heard a lot of conflicting information, and I don’t know what to believe.”

» **HCP:** “I understand that you just want to make the best decision for your child. It can be hard when you’re unsure which information is true and which isn’t. Is there anything specific that I can help clear up?”

Parent: “Well, my best friend read something on social media and now she doesn’t want to vaccinate her family.”

» **HCP:** “It’s good that you have someone you trust who can share their personal choices like that. I hope you can also trust me to help with your vaccination decision.

Vaccinations are an important part of your child’s health.¹² So important that I make sure my family and I are all vaccinated.”



Some parents may lack the information they need.^{2,6,13}

As their health care provider, you may be able to help them move forward^{2,6,13}

What hesitancy may sound like:

“How do I know which vaccines my child needs?”

» **HCP:** The pediatric vaccine schedule is recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and approved by the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Family Physicians.¹⁰ The CDC schedule is online. Just search ‘CDC vaccine schedules.’

You can also count on me to answer your questions. Today, it looks like your child needs [X].”

“What questions do you have about today’s scheduled vaccine?”

Parent: Where do you get your information? How do I know I can trust it?

» **HCP:** “Great question! I’m glad you asked. My goal is to ensure I have the best information to help keep your child healthy.

I always refer to the CDC immunization schedule for vaccine recommendations.¹⁰ However, I also consult the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians for information, as well.

[I also refer to x, y, z articles and sites.]

Would you like me to provide you with information you can take with you to review later?”

“I thought vaccines were only for children.”

» **HCP:** “Vaccinations are needed at different stages of life and through adulthood to help keep you and those around you safe from preventable infectious disease.^{10,14,15,16}

Adults will need some vaccines because immunity from childhood vaccines can wear off over time. Additionally, as an adult, you may be at risk for diseases.¹⁶

Vaccines are an important way to help take care of your health and the health of your children.”^{12,15}



“What happens if my child doesn’t get vaccinated?”

» **HCP:** “Vaccinations help your child’s immune system protect against certain diseases.¹⁷

Without vaccination, your child could be at risk for certain major illnesses and the consequences of those diseases.”¹⁵



Vaccine hesitancy can be linked to a lack of perceived necessity^{4,18,19}

Dealing with diminished prioritization

What hesitancy may sound like:

“Why does my child need this vaccine? It’s not required by our school.”

» **HCP:** “Vaccination laws for schools are established by individual states, so they may look different from what the CDC and the medical community recommend.^{10,20} Is there a particular concern I can help clarify?”

Parent: “I just don’t want to give my child something that isn’t necessary.”

» **HCP:** “I can understand why you feel that way. Even though our state isn’t requiring this vaccine for school, it can help protect your child from the risks of this disease.”



“The disease that vaccine deals with isn’t relevant to my child in this community.”

» **HCP:** “I am so grateful that many of the diseases we vaccinate against are no longer a major problem in the United States. But that’s largely because of our vaccination efforts.²¹ Unfortunately, we are starting to see an increase in vaccine-preventable diseases, such as [X], in children who are unvaccinated.^{22, 23, 24}

We want to make sure your child is vaccinated before they’re exposed.”

“I didn’t know he needed 3 shots today. That seems like a lot!”

» **HCP:** “I’m sorry we didn’t talk about this more during our last visit. What worries you about vaccinating today?”

Parent: “Well, they don’t all seem necessary to me. I didn’t get some of these vaccines and I was fine.”

» **HCP:** “I see why you would think that. But vaccines are an important part of helping to protect the health of our children.¹⁵ We’re lucky. Unlike our parents, we don’t have to stay up at night worrying about diseases like polio.^{15,21} That’s because the majority of kids are vaccinated.^{25,a}

Vaccines do often cause mild side effects that go away in a few days and yes, serious side effects can occur ... but they are rare.⁶

When a vaccine is delayed, children are vulnerable to certain diseases which they may encounter.⁶

There are no data to show that spacing out vaccines is safer or more effective than following the CDC recommendations.⁶

^aNote: Providing childhood vaccination data from your own practice or geographic area may make this statement more impactful.



Remember: *When it comes to vaccines, parents—including those who are hesitant—consider health care providers like you the most trusted source of information.¹³*



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