

Talking about COVID vaccines

A guide to discussing the COVID vaccine
with people who are unsure about it

Over 90% of people aged 12 and over in England have had at least one dose of a COVID vaccine, but many remain unvaccinated. Unvaccinated people are much more likely to become seriously ill and to die from COVID. Encouraging people to explore their own thoughts and feelings around vaccination can help to reduce any concerns they may have about getting vaccinated.

Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| You don't need to be an expert | 3 |
| How to approach the conversation | 3 |
| Tools to use | 4 |
| Examples of what to say | 5 |
| How to structure the conversation | 7 |
| More guidance | 8 |

You don't need to be an expert

You do not have to be an expert in everything vaccine-related, just be willing to ask open questions, listen and acknowledge any concerns raised, and empower people to make an informed choice or seek further support if necessary.

You are making a difference by having a conversation around vaccinations even if the person does not change their mind.

How to approach a conversation

- This guide draws on a technique called motivational interviewing.
- Motivational interviewing is way of talking to people about change. It can work well when people have mixed feelings about a topic.
- There is something in human nature that resists being told what to do.
- The goal is not to have a debate or an exchange of views. The goal is to help the person resolve mixed feelings and come up with their own motivation to examine their beliefs about the vaccines.

Things to remember

- How we speak to people can be just as important as what we say
- Being listened to and understood is an important part of the process of change
- It is the task of the person you are talking to to explore and resolve their mixed feelings – not yours.
- Direct persuasion is not an effective method for resolving mixed feelings.
- We need to meet people where they are, with compassion and respect.

Tools to use

There are four tools that can help you during the conversation:

Open-ended questions, Affirmations, Reflective listening, and Summarising.

Open-ended questions

Encourage the speaker to open up and describe their feelings / beliefs without influencing their reply.

Affirmations

Acknowledge the person's strengths and difficulties, demonstrate empathy, convey respect.

Reflective listening

Reflect answers to each question if possible, encouraging the person to **elaborate, confirm, or correct**.

You can connect earlier points and shift direction if needed. You can use different words but keep the same meaning, or make a guess about what the person means. This adds something that deepens understanding and encourages further exploration.

Summarise

You can summarise at several stages during the conversation.

Your summaries help to organise the discussion, clarify motivation and highlight any reasons the person may have given to consider getting the vaccine.

Examples of what to say

Starting the conversation

Explore goals and values

- “How have the last two years been for you?”
- “What are your hopes for the next year?”

Find out what the main issues are for the person

- “What....” “How....” “Tell me about....”

Establish importance / confidence

- “How important is it for you to ...?” (0-10 scale)
- “How confident are you that you can...?” (0-10 scale)

Clarify

- Explore person’s beliefs about pros and cons of being vaccinated (and pros/cons of not getting the vaccine)

Developing the conversation

Express empathy

Communicates acceptance which helps the person feel more motivated and open to change.

- “It sounds like you’re worried about the long term consequences of the vaccine.”

Draw out discrepancies

Help person notice discrepancies between their behaviour and goals/values by presenting their own arguments for change

- “What bothers you most about not being vaccinated?”

Support self-efficacy

- In order to change, a person must believe they can.
- Empower, respect their autonomy and freedom of choice
- Encourage person to reflect on their strengths/resources
- E.g. “How have you dealt with other difficult decisions?”

Affirm change talk

Use reinforcement and encouragement

- Ask them to say more or give details, “How do you think you might feel afterwards?” “Do you think there would be any upsides for you?”
- Ask for specific examples and reflect what the person is saying

Meeting resistance

Shift focus and give back control

- “Maybe that’s not such a problem for you right now. It’s up to you. It’s your decision”

Reflect (‘roll with’) resistance (in calm, non-judgmental manner)

- “So you’re not sure you want to have the vaccine just yet”.
- “You want to get the vaccine, but you are worried about things you have heard.”
- Avoid arguing for change, interrupting or challenging as leads to defensiveness and resistance

Offer double-sided reflections of ambivalence

- “On the one hand you feel worried about getting the vaccine because of things you have heard and on the other hand you would really like to live a normal life without feeling scared of getting COVID.”

Ask permission to give information

- “Is it okay if I show you some figures?”

When giving information, let person know it’s up to them whether it’s useful or not

- “What do you make of that?”

Ending the conversation

Ask the person what they would like to do next.

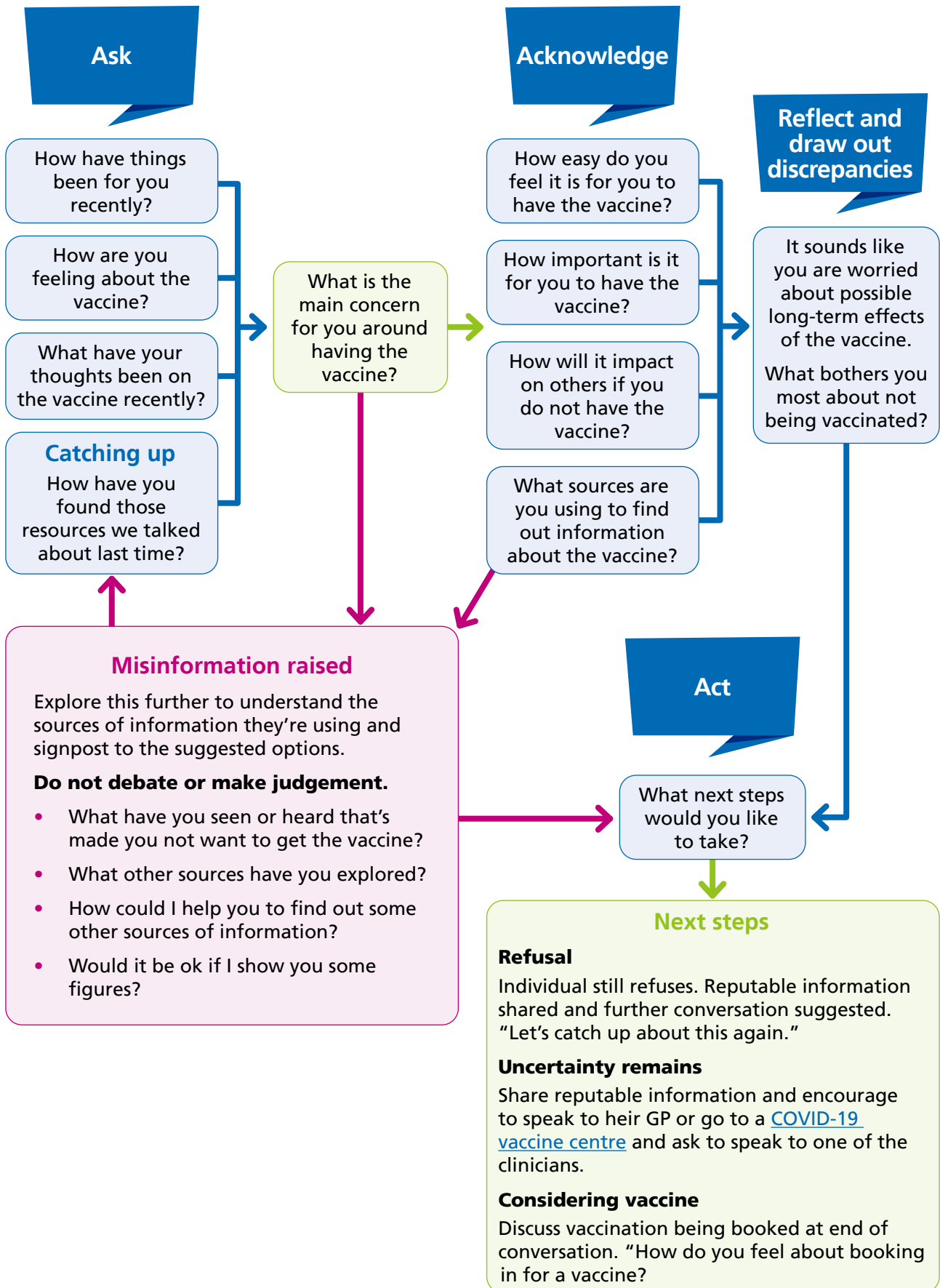
It may be appropriate to signpost to a reliable source of information. We recommend the below options:

- North Central London COVID vaccine information
www.northcentrallondonccg.nhs.uk/covid-19
- NHS vaccine facts
www.nhsvaccinefacts.com
- British society for immunology
www.immunology.org/public-information/guide-vaccinations-for-covid-19
- Vaccine Confidence Project
www.vaccineconfidence.org
- Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists - information on COVID vaccines and pregnancy
www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/coronavirus-covid-19-pregnancy-and-womens-health/covid-19-vaccines-and-pregnancy

Encourage them to speak to their GP if they still have concerns or go to a [COVID-19 vaccine centre](#) and ask to speak to one of the clinicians.

If possible, follow up on the conversation.

How to structure the conversation



More guidance

- Watch a short (11 minute) training video about conversations about the COVID vaccine
www.healthyconversationskills.co.uk/further-learning-to-help-with-yo
- Watch a short (17 minutes) introduction to motivational interviewing
www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3MCJZ7OGRk
- Read more about motivational interviewing from the Royal College of Nursing
www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/supporting-behaviour-change/motivational-interviewing

Final thoughts

- It may be a long process for people to become comfortable with the idea of getting the vaccine.
- The process needs to go at a pace the individual is comfortable with.
- The end goal is for the person to make a decision that is truly informed, but that, crucially, is their decision.