

Faith in Vaccines

Toolkit

A Guide for Talking to Your Congregation



Faith in Vaccines Toolkit: Tips and Resources to Help Pastors Support COVID-19 Vaccination

Widespread vaccination is the key to ending the COVID-19 pandemic and enabling a return to normal life. The decision to be vaccinated is a personal one, influenced by many factors and complicated by the difficulty of discerning truth amid a flood of misinformation. Research shows that Americans trust their doctors and faith leaders for information about COVID-19 and vaccines. Pastors can help by sharing facts, inviting conversations, and setting examples.

People want unbiased facts about vaccine safety and effectiveness, and information to help them decide whether vaccination is the right choice for them. This toolkit includes things you can do to help improve vaccine acceptance, tips for talking with your congregation about vaccination, and examples of messaging that works.

15 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE VACCINE ACCEPTANCE IN YOUR CONGREGATION

1. Lead by example. Get vaccinated and encourage your staff to be vaccinated.
2. Share educational materials widely. Post information in common/high visibility areas in your church. Publish information on the church website, on social media platforms, in emails, and in your bulletins.
3. Consider sending a letter or email to your congregants. Start by expressing your concern for the health of your congregants and their families. Provide facts, refer to additional resources, and let them know you are available to answer questions and talk through concerns.
4. Add laments for the pain that COVID-19 has caused. Lament world-wide deaths and losses. Create opportunities to heal as a community.
5. Highlight the mission work the church has done to respond to COVID-19 so the congregation can remember the real impact it has had on the community.
6. Have congregation members give testimonies about their vaccinations.
7. Have congregation members that are doctors/nurses give testimony about the crisis.
8. Create an art wall where congregation members can add their reasons for deciding to get their vaccination.
9. Have pastoral leaders talk about their own vaccination experiences. Live stream or post pictures.
10. Avoid any sermons on how God will protect us from COVID. Instead focus on our acts and role in the world to combat sin and reconcile us to him.
11. Provide opportunities to thank physicians/nurses/front line workers for their efforts during the pandemic.
12. Support those dealing with response to COVID vaccination (back-up care for single parents, care packages).
13. Offer transportation options to enable those whom are homebound to get vaccinated.
14. Be available on a regular schedule to help people register and complete sign-up for COVID vaccination.
15. Work with your local Health Department, pharmacy, or other partners to host a vaccine clinic site.

TALKING TO YOUR CONGREGATION

Every interaction is an opportunity to share information, answer questions, and discuss concerns about COVID-19 vaccines. Here are research-based suggestions for productive conversations about COVID-19 vaccines:

Start from a place of empathy and understanding.

Acknowledge the disruption COVID-19 has caused in all of our lives. Remind congregants that getting vaccinated is the most important thing they can do to move back toward normal activities. Recognize that it's normal for someone to have concerns about a new vaccine for a new virus. Encourage them to ask questions, and answer in a way they can understand.

Acknowledge that getting vaccinated is a personal decision.

A pastor's role is to provide information, answer questions, and talk through concerns so everyone can make the decision that is right for them and for their loved ones.

State clearly what we do and don't know.

Don't overemphasize "potentials" (potential risks or potential benefits). Contrast the known long-term effects of COVID-19 with the unknown potential risks of the vaccines.

Focus on the benefits of getting a COVID vaccine.

Not just the consequences of not getting vaccinated. Emphasize that the benefits of getting the vaccine far exceed the risks.

Explain the health risks associated with declining to be vaccinated.

Tailor the conversation for the person you're talking with, from your perspective as their pastor.

After talking, let them know you are open to continuing the conversation, and encourage them to take at least one step.

That may include scheduling a vaccination appointment, reviewing vetted information you provide about the safety and importance of the vaccines, or learning what to expect.

Be direct.

- I strongly recommend that you get a COVID-19 vaccine.
- This vaccine is especially important for you because of your [job/high risk/high-risk relatives/health challenges/etc.]
- I believe in this vaccine so strongly that I got it as soon as I could, and I made sure everyone in my family did too.
- A vaccine has been reserved for you.

MESSAGING THAT WORKS

In recent research, people have said that these messages would make them more likely to get vaccinated for COVID-19. This can be used in social media, emails, or almost any other communication.

- The vaccines are highly effective in preventing illness – even more effective than the annual flu vaccine.
- The COVID vaccine will help protect you from getting sick.
- The quickest way for life to return to normal is for most people to get vaccinated.
- Nearly all doctors who have been offered the vaccine have taken it.
- Millions of people have been vaccinated safely. Tens of thousands of people participated in the phase 3 trials for the three authorized vaccines. After being fully vaccinated, no trial participants were hospitalized or died from COVID-19.
- A vaccine has been reserved for you.

Addressing Concerns About Side Effects

- Severe side effects are rare and treatable. Minor side effects usually go away within a few days.
- No one can say for sure, but there is no reason to think there will be any long-term side effects.
- The FDA and CDC will continue to monitor the vaccines for safety to make sure that even very rare side effects are identified.

Addressing Concerns About the Rapid Development of Vaccines:

- The COVID vaccines have been held to the same rigorous standards as other vaccines. The government didn't cut corners; it cut red tape to expedite the approval process.
- While the vaccines were created quickly, they weren't created from scratch. Researchers have been studying and working with mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) for decades, and scientists began using viral vectors (Johnson & Johnson) in the 1970s.
- Viral vector vaccines have been used successfully to treat cancer and prevent diseases like the flu, Zika, and HIV; mRNA vaccines have been studied for prevention of the flu, Zika, rabies, and other diseases.

Addressing Misinformation:

It would be impossible to counter all the misinformation being spread about COVID vaccines, but these are some of the most important facts:

- The vaccines cannot give you COVID-19.
- The vaccines do not affect or interact with your DNA in any way.
- The vaccine does not stay in your body.

Stay up-to-date on misinformation and how to address it by following the Misinformation Alerts provided by the Public Health Communications Collaborative: <https://publichealthcollaborative.org>

RESOURCES

- de Beaumont Foundation COVID-19 messaging resources: www.changingthecovidconversation.com
- Public Health Communications Collaborative <https://publichealthcollaborative.org>
- COVID-19 Vaccines Guide for Physicians; American Medical Association <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/covid-19-vaccines-guide-physicians>
- CDC communication toolkits <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/resource-center.html>
- “The Language of Vaccine Acceptance” cheat sheet https://debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/VaccineToolkit_1pger.pdf
- AAP COVID-19 Vaccine for Children <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/covid-19-vaccine-for-children>
- Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics COVID-19 Resources <http://www.kansasaap.org/wordpress/covid-19-coronavirus-resources/>
- Kansas Academy of Family Physicians COVID-19 Resources | <https://kafponline.org/covid-19>
- Immunize Kansas Coalition Resources | <https://www.immunizekansascoalition.org/>
- Kansas COVID-19 Vaccine Equity Resources | <https://www.immunizekansascoalition.org/vaccine-equity.asp>
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment Vaccine Information | <https://www.kansasvaccine.gov/>
- Kansas Office of Recovery COVID-19 Resources | <https://covid.ks.gov/>
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment COVID Response Site | <https://www.coronavirus.kdheks.gov/>
- Vaccines.gov COVID-19 Vaccine Finder | <https://www.vaccines.gov/search/>

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