

Vaccine conversations can be messy; here's how to talk about the shots

Allyson Chiu, *The Washington Post*

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
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The coronavirus vaccine has been widely available in the United States since the spring. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) more than 172 million people in the United States are fully vaccinated.

On August 23 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave full approval for the Pfizer vaccine in the U.S. The FDA is a federal agency responsible for public health and safety. By giving full approval the government is saying the vaccine can protect against COVID-19.

Still, a large number of people remain uncertain about the vaccines. Many people are finding it difficult to navigate conversations with loved ones who have differing views about the vaccines.

Vaccination in general, experts say, is often a high-stakes topic. It is tied to personal beliefs about health and survival.

Gregory Zimet is a behavioral scientist. He studies vaccination at Indiana University's School of Medicine. Unfortunately, he said, coronavirus vaccines have become a political topic. That means conversations about vaccines end up being "highly charged" and lead to people feeling separated from their loved ones.

Still, experts say it is possible to have productive conversations about vaccines with family and friends who don't share your views. Here's what they recommend.

Manage Your Expectations And Set Boundaries

You shouldn't enter a conversation convinced that you will change another person's mind, said Paul White. He's a psychology professor at the University of Utah.

With that approach, "You may **fray** the relationship connections you have with your family, with your friends, with your close person," White said.

It's worth making an effort to talk to close friends and family members who appear to be fixed in their views, Zimet said. Still, you should set your expectations low and adjust them based on how strong you perceive the other person's beliefs to be.

Consider "a conversation about having a conversation," Boateng suggested. "Identify your boundaries around what you feel comfortable talking about and what you don't," she said, adding that you can agree to create a judgment-free space or figure out what to do if tempers start to explode. This discussion, she said, "sometimes helps people to sort out the conflicts that might arise."

Acknowledge Concerns

How you bring up the subject matters, Zimet said. Instead of asking pointed questions such as, "Why haven't you gotten your vaccine?" you can try sharing

your own experience with the vaccine. Give others the chance to ask you questions.

If you're talking to someone who isn't ready to get vaccinated, it's important to acknowledge their feelings. Let them know that they aren't alone, said Sunil Kripalani. He is a professor of medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. "That allows you to begin with a position of empathy and understanding."

Tamera Coyne-Beasley is a vaccine researcher who has also been engaged in national vaccine policy development. She said she often starts conversations with loved ones by pointing out how difficult the decision can be.

You also shouldn't jump to conclusions about why someone is **reluctant** to receive a vaccine, Kripalani said.

Don't Lecture, Shame Or Threaten

When talking to a relative or friend, avoid becoming "preachy," said Vish Viswanath, a professor of health communication at the Harvard University. "If they feel that they are being disrespected, they're not being listened to, that their concerns are not being validated, then they will pull away from you."

You can also ask people what would increase their interest in getting vaccinated, Kripalani said. "It gives you something that is more positive to talk about, which can help move the conversation forward." Be prepared to direct loved ones to sources they would trust, such as other family members, faith leaders, community groups, or prominent health officials and organizations.

A quick way to shut down a conversation is shaming the other person, White said. "If you're wanting people to be vaccinated and you start telling them, 'Well, this is selfish. You're being horrible for not doing this,' their almost natural response ... is to defend themselves," he said.

You should similarly try to show **restraint** when encountering a relative or friend who is sharing misinformation. Don't try to publicly go against or humiliate anyone, Zimet said. Try instead to address misinformation issues in private conversations.

Experts also discouraged using threats of excluding people to persuade them to get their shots. Telling someone they won't be invited to gatherings unless they're vaccinated is harmful to relationships.

Know When To Back Off

Though conversations about vaccines aren't likely to be resolved quickly, you should know when to stop. Sometimes a person will say they don't want to talk anymore, White said.

Pay attention to mood and body language. If the conversation becomes angry or defensive, it's time to back off. "The more you try to convince them, the more you're reinforcing their beliefs," Viswanath said. "At some point, you want to just let them be and wait for the right moment."

That doesn't mean giving up, Coyne-Beasley said. "You should always leave the door open."

Required Questions

1. Who is the intended audience of this piece? How do you know?
2. Write a summary of the article below.