

# Proven Strategies Help Shorten Talks about the COVID-19 Vaccines

Dentists are an important part of a patient’s overall health care, and that includes talking to patients about recommended vaccines. The following strategies and tips will help make it easier for you to discuss vaccines – especially the COVID-19 vaccines – with your patients.

**4** Evidence-based strategies have been used with positive results when talking to patients about vaccines. **Once you learn how to use them, it takes four minutes or less of your time.**

The table below shows the order of strategies to use based on the level of acceptance or hesitancy.

## Accepting patients

- 1 Presumptive recommendations
- 2 Blanket recommendations



## Hesitant patients

- 3 Motivational interviewing
- 4 Debunking myths



### 1. Start with a presumptive recommendation.

Announce that a COVID-19 vaccine is recommended instead of asking how a patient feels about receiving it.



**Example:** “With COVID-19 continuing to be a big concern in our community, let’s get you vaccinated as soon as you are eligible.”

### 2. Follow with a strong blanket recommendation.

Sound matter-of-fact, confident. Recommend the COVID-19 vaccine the same way you would with any other form of dental treatment.



**Example:** “You need the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you are eligible.”  
Be prepared for questions and reply with brief facts about the vaccine. Keep it simple.


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### 3. Change tactics to motivational interviewing.

Switch to motivational interviewing (MI) when a patient is not sure about the COVID-19 vaccine to reconnect with them. Leverage their basic motivation for a behavior.

MI has four principles: empathy, collaboration, evocation and support for autonomy. To help manage concerns, these principles include micro skills:

- Ruler
- Elicit, provide, elicit (EPE)
- Reflection
- Open-ended questions
- Affirmation
- Summaries

**Example**  A patient comes in for an appointment. At the end of the visit, you offer a presumptive, strong blanket recommendation for the COVID-19 vaccine. Your patient is hesitant about the vaccine. You pivot to MI as follows:

Dentist asks...	Patient replies...
<p>“I see. So, on a scale of one to 10, with one never getting the vaccine and 10 definitely getting it today, where are you at?” <b>(Ruler)</b></p>	<p>“About a three.”</p>
<p>“Okay, can you tell me more about why you are a three and not a one?” <b>(Elicitation, Evocation)</b></p>	<p>“Well, I definitely don’t want to get COVID-19. I’m open to the idea of the vaccine, but I’m scared it’s not safe.”</p>
<p>“Would you mind telling me what safety issues you are worried about?” <b>(Open-ended question)</b></p>	<p>“I’ve heard that some people have had adverse reactions and it could make me really sick.”</p>
<p>“There are many rumors about the COVID-19 vaccines on the internet. Severe adverse events from the COVID-19 vaccines are rare and more treatable compared to the adverse events from full-blown infection of the novel coronavirus.”</p> <p>“The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and have been well studied. The vaccines are up to 95% effective at preventing COVID-19, and up to 100% effective at preventing hospitalization and death from COVID-19.”</p> <p>“I think it’s an important vaccine. I and my entire staff have received it.”</p> <p>“That said, this is a decision only you can make. What do you think?” <b>(Autonomy, EPE)</b></p>	

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#### 4. Debunk myths with brief facts.

Take the mystery out of it. Always state a myth is false before you talk about it. This removes the myth in a person's mind and creates a gap. It is vital you fill the gap with brief, simple facts.

##### Example



Your next patient is a man who comes in for a visit. He is in a category eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine.

##### Dentist asks...

You give your presumptive, blanket recommendation.

Summarize what you heard. Ask permission to make a recommendation.

*"So, you seem concerned about potential effects of the ingredients in the vaccines."*

##### **(MI – reflection)**

*"I get that – you want to make sure you only take things that are good for you. I've looked into this a great deal. Would it be okay to share what I've learned about the COVID-19 vaccines?"*

##### **(MI – ask permission)**

Briefly share what you learned, then pivot to the importance of the vaccines.

*"It's actually a myth about the COVID-19 vaccines containing toxins."*

##### **(Preceding explicit warning)**

*"The ingredients in vaccines are in tiny quantities. Vaccines are made to be safe."*

##### **(Alternative explanation)**

*"I feel better knowing my patients get the vaccines they need. COVID-19 is serious. It can lead to hospitalization and possibly death."*

##### **(Focus on core facts and positives of action)**

*"That said, this is your decision. What do you think?"* **(MI – autonomy)**

##### Patient replies...

*"My cousin told me I shouldn't get the COVID-19 vaccines because there are toxins in them."*



Residents can visit

[https://covid19.ca.gov/get-local-information/for-county- or city-specific COVID-19 vaccination locations and eligibility.](https://covid19.ca.gov/get-local-information/for-county-or-city-specific-covid-19-vaccination-locations-and-eligibility)