

How to talk about COVID-19 vaccinations: a communication tip sheet



This tip sheet is based on The Workshop's guide, *How to talk about COVID-19 Vaccinations: Building trust in vaccinations*. To view the full guide visit theworkshop.org.nz/publications

People have hesitations about getting vaccinated for many different reasons. Despite their requests for more information, fact-led communications about the safety and science of vaccination do little to support hesitant people to feel reassured or get vaccinated.

By connecting with people instead of correcting them, understanding the underlying foundations of hesitancy and engaging in communications processes proven to be effective in overcoming hesitation, we can build trust in COVID-19 vaccinations.



Understand hesitancy

Effective communications about vaccination need to be based on the drivers of hesitancy to have the greatest chance of affecting people's willingness to get vaccinated. On the surface, people who are hesitant about vaccinations may say they are worried about the safety of vaccines or the speed of how the vaccine was developed. Underneath, there are three main drivers of hesitancy:

1. Individual and social group influences – beliefs, attitudes and understandings of the vaccines that emerge from culture, personal experience with institutions, information environments.
2. Contextual factors – historical and political experiences of neglect, discrimination, lack of citizen participation, politicisation of science and vaccination.
3. Vaccine and vaccination-specific issues – which include characteristics of the vaccine, vaccine development and process and the accessibility of vaccinations.



Use proven communications techniques and tools based on a deeper understanding of hesitancy to build trust.

In *How to talk about COVID-19 vaccinations*, we provide eight evidence-based communications techniques and tools. In this tip sheet, we show you how these techniques and tools can be applied when there are specific aspects of vaccination you want to talk about or address.

Tip #1: If you want to talk about the safety of COVID-19 vaccinations



AVOID these narrative strategies, words and phrases

- » Leading with safety data and facts,
- » Describing risks if even to note they are small
- » Mythbusting false arguments.



EMBRACE this strategy from the guide

- » **Communication tool #4 – Motivate it:**
Motivate it: build trust and reassurance in the vaccines and vaccination and the people who are involved by framing vaccination through people's values
- » **Communication tool #8 – Inoculate:**
Protect against false information



This sounds and looks like:

→ **Tell the stories of the vaccine safety monitoring system, the people in it and why they care:**

“To look after our people and our whakapapa means we need to ensure that those who need protecting in our communities – our kaumātua, our babies and our whānau with health conditions – are cared for and shielded against COVID-19.”

→ **Use inoculation strategies over fact checks and mythbusting:**

“When you see people spreading fear-inducing stories about getting vaccinated, cherry picking one or two studies to show vaccination is harmful, demanding that vaccinations need to be proven 100% safe or attacking vaccination advocates, be aware that these people could be spreading false information about vaccination and preventing you from accessing the good information you need.”

Tip #2: If you want to talk about the benefits of vaccination and the risks of COVID-19



AVOID these narrative strategies, words and phrases

- » Leading with the consequences of not vaccinating e.g. data on COVID-19 side effects, the symptoms of long COVID-19, economic impacts, negative consequences.
- » Mythbusting false information about vaccination.



EMBRACE this strategy from the guide

- » **Communication tool #3 – Envision it:**
Overcome fear and bias against vaccinations by describing the better world post-vaccination
- » **Communication tool #4 – Motivate it:**
Using values: care, responsibility, empowerment, self direction
- » **Communication tool #8 – Inoculate:**
Protect against false information



This sounds and looks like:

→ Envisioning it:

“Getting vaccinated builds our immunity to COVID-19. This protects you and your loved ones and lets you get back to the things you love doing. When everyone who can get vaccinated does get vaccinated and our community has good immunity, we can again enjoy travel and overseas family reunions.”

→ Motivating it with values:

To look after our people and our whakapapa means we need to ensure that those who need protecting in our communities – our kaumātua, our babies and our whānau with health conditions – are cared for and shielded against COVID-19.”

“When all of us who can get vaccinated do get vaccinated, the collective immunity we have will help us be free from the COVID-19 pandemic and all the challenges, separation and hard times it has brought.”


→ Frame false information as an issue of empowerment:

“Our people deserve to lead their own hauora journey. People spreading false information and concern undermines our oranga motuhake and access to the trusted information we need to make informed decisions for ourselves and our whānau.”

Tip #3: If you want to talk about the trustworthiness and reliability of people involved in vaccinations or of the vaccinations themselves)

 **AVOID these narrative strategies, words and phrases**

- » Highlighting people's qualifications, institutional position and scientific credentials to talk about vaccination.
- » Outlining the safety and risk profile of the vaccination

 **EMBRACE this strategy from the guide**

- » **Communication tool #2 – Co-develop it:**
Develop communications with communities to build trust
- » **Communication tool #4 – Motivate it:**
Highlight the shared intrinsic values of care and responsibility motivating the people who have developed the vaccine and who are giving and monitoring the safety of the vaccine, which also builds trust



This sounds and looks like:

→ **Co-developing it to build trust:**

For mainstream and government providers, giving resources directly to community leaders to create and deliver communications for their communities. This will require you to share critical scientific knowledge in ways that are useful to those leaders and health advocates and enable them to take the lead on communications within their communities.

For Māori, for Pacific peoples, for disabled people and all communities, it remains critical that we see our own people actively involved in the vaccination development and roll-out.

Use messengers who are seen to have similar values to those audiences – for example, a mother delivering a message to other mothers.

Ensure excluded communities have access to good information.

Amplify experts who can speak to people's personal experiences and concerns, including Māori, Pacific and disabled experts or people most trusted by these communities.

→ **Motivating it, by telling the stories of the vaccine safety monitoring system, the people in it and why they care:**

"What people working in health care about is everyone in our community staying well during COVID-19. That's why they're encouraging us to get vaccinated for COVID-19 and closely monitoring the vaccinations to make sure they are always giving us the best health advice."

Tip #4: If you want to talk about or show that other people are getting vaccinated



AVOID these narrative strategies, words and phrases

- » Images of people getting injected, images of needles
- » Words like 'jab' or 'shot'.



EMBRACE this strategy from the guide

- » **Communication tool #7 – Normalise it:**
Normalise the move from hesitation or ambivalence to action through trusted messengers who speak directly to the experience of people within those communities
- » **Communication tool #3 – Envision it:**
Overcome fear and bias against vaccinations by describing the post-vaccination positives



This sounds and looks like:

→ Normalising it:

“Despite all the noise, 79% of Pacific people will or have already got the COVID-19 vaccination.” (Adapt this to different communities of interest.)

Stories of hesitant people with good intentions getting vaccinated.

A post-vaccination thumbs up.

Use the words: vaccination, get vaccinated, getting immune.

→ Envisioning it:

“Getting vaccinated builds our immunity to COVID-19. This protects you and your loved ones and lets you get back to the things you love doing. When everyone who can get vaccinated does get vaccinated and our community has good immunity, we can again enjoy travel and overseas family reunions.”

Tip #5: If you want to talk about people who are hesitant about getting vaccinated



AVOID these narrative strategies, words and phrases

- » Talking about how safe the vaccines are and minimising risks.
- » Focusing on naming hesitancy and the problem of hesitancy.
- » Talking to and addressing the arguments of those who are vaccine deniers.
- » Using the terms 'vaccine hesitancy', 'vaccine-hesitant people'.



EMBRACE this strategy from the guide

- » **Communication tool #1 – Provide it:**
Easy access to vaccinations. Assume people are willing to vaccinate and communicate how and when people can access vaccines
- » **Communication tool #7 – Normalise it:**
Show others moving from hesitancy to action
- » **Communication tool #5 – Frame it:**
People who need help over the (vaccination) line. A frame that assumes willingness and leverages good intentions



This sounds and looks like:

→ **Assuming willingness and providing access information:**

"Getting your COVID-19 vaccination is straightforward. There are many places in your community to get it, including [location]. We have people here to answer your questions and to talk you through the process. They have all had the vaccination themselves."

"The vaccine is free, and my employer helped by providing a vaccine clinic at work."

Provide information on the trusted people who will deliver vaccines, how and what they will do to support people.

→ **Normalising it:**

Stories of hesitant people who had good intentions getting vaccinated.

→ **Framing willingness:**

"Most of us intend to get vaccinated for COVID-19 to ensure we stay well and keep others we care about well. Because vaccination is such a powerful tool to help keep us all well, more and more people are deciding to get vaccinated."

Tip #6: If you want to talk about vaccination as a key decision for people to protect their health and wellbeing



AVOID these narrative strategies, words and phrases

- » Framing individual health benefits and the individual 'choice' involved
- » E.g., Vaccination is your "choice", "Vaccination will protect you and your health".



EMBRACE this strategy from the guide

- » **Communication tool #5 – Frame it:**
Frame the collective benefits and gains



This sounds and looks like:

→ Frame it:

"When all of us who can get vaccinated do get vaccinated, we all get the benefits that immunity brings. We can travel more easily, see family and friends from overseas and focus on the other things that need our attention."

"With good information, you can make a decision about the best way we can help each other and move on from COVID-19."

"We all need good information in order to make an informed decision about getting vaccinated for ourselves and our whānau. If you have questions, come have a kōrero with one of the pharmacists at your local pharmacy."

Use the words: 'decision making', 'being informed', 'knowing the options and outcomes'.

Tip #7: If you want to talk about the immunity vaccinations give us, community level (herd) immunity



AVOID these narrative strategies, words and phrases

- » Using the term 'herd immunity' – it's been used incorrectly too often.
- » Talking about community level immunity without explaining how immunity or collective immunity works.
- » War, sport metaphors (fighting COVID-19).



EMBRACE this strategy from the guide

- » Use the terms **community or collective immunity** and explain how collective immunity/community immunity works
- » **Communication tool #4 – Motivate it:** Highlight the shared values of care and responsibility we have to others in our lives.
- » **Communication tool #6 – Explain it:** Deepen understanding in simple ways about immunity and community/collective immunity
Use machine, learning, factory, building and tool metaphors to explain how vaccination works.



This sounds and looks like:

→ Motivate it:

"Many of us are responsible for taking care of other people in our lives. Taking care of people who may be more vulnerable to COVID-19, like our parents, means getting vaccinated. When everyone gets vaccinated, we help everyone stay well."

→ Explain collective/collective immunity:

"When we all get vaccinated, we make it very hard for the virus to move between people. As more of us get vaccinated, we stop the virus moving through our communities, keeping it away from our whānau, our colleagues, our kaumātua, our Nanas. Acting together like this keeps the virus away and we all stay well. That's how vaccination and collective immunity protect us all."

"Vaccines produce natural immunity because they power up the immune system to produce its own natural protection."

Tip #8: If you want to talk about the importance of vaccination, the need to get vaccinated soon



AVOID these narrative strategies, words and phrases

- » Vaccination as urgent/extreme urgency, requiring speed: “Vaccination is our one shot”, “We will deliver a vaccination every minute”.



EMBRACE this strategy from the guide

- » **Communication tool #4 – Motivate it:**
Highlight the shared values of care and responsibility we have to others in our lives.
- » **Communication tool #5 – Frame it:**
Vaccination is the next best step we take, leveraging people’s good intentions.
Vaccination as the solution: increasing people’s sense of agency to solve the problem of COVID-19 by getting vaccinated
Vaccination as one powerful tool



This sounds and looks like:

→ **Care and responsibility:**

“In New Zealand, acting in everyone’s best interests has really helped us during the pandemic. By getting vaccinated, we can all help to care for the people in our community who need more protection.”

→ **Vaccination as the solution:**

“The COVID-19 pandemic has led to some hard things for us all – lockdowns, closed borders and families being separated. Many people have lost loved ones, and people in our health system are tied up managing it and keeping it out. Vaccination is available and free, and it is something we can do to help all of us leave COVID-19 behind.”

→ **Vaccination as one powerful tool:**

“Getting a vaccination is one more powerful tool you can use to take care of your loved ones, whānau, communities and yourself during COVID-19.”

Tip #9: If you want to talk about how vaccination works to stop COVID-19 and protect people



AVOID these narrative strategies, words and phrases

- » Provision of facts about safety and risk.
- » Absolute messages: “Vaccination stops the virus”, “Vaccination means you won’t get COVID-19”.



EMBRACE this strategy from the guide

- » **Communication tool #6 – Explain it:**
Deepen understanding in simple ways.
Explain immunity using simple metaphors.
Explain side effects in the context of how vaccinations work, not simply that they are rare.
Explain the ongoing monitoring of safety by putting people in the picture.



This sounds and looks like:

→ Explain it using metaphors:

“The vaccine trains our immune system to recognise the virus before we encounter it in our community, then when we are exposed, we will be OK because our immune system has already been trained to see it off.”

“Because of the way vaccines work – quickly training the body’s immune system to fight off a virus – any issues arise within a month and usually much sooner. Most side effects are typically mild (for example, a sore arm, feeling tired, or headache) and last a day or so. These side effects are a sign the vaccine is working to train your immune system to fend off the worst of COVID-19.”

→ Explain monitoring by putting people in the picture:

“What our health workers want is for everyone in our community to be healthy and well. That’s why people across the health system here and all over the world are closely monitoring the vaccinations that are administered, analysing all the reported side effects, to make sure we always have the best health advice.”

Tip #10: If you want to talk about false information and people who spread it



AVOID these narrative strategies, words and phrases

- » Repeating, sharing or mythbusting false information in order to debunk it.
- » Naming vaccine denial as part of someone's identity: "vaccine deniers, anti vaxxers".



EMBRACE this strategy from the guide

- » **Communication tool #8 – Inoculate:**
Protect against false information
Use inoculation strategies over fact checks and mythbusting.
Frame false information as an issue of empowerment.
- » **Communication tool #8 – Carefully counter false information using a proven formula:**
Value > Fact > Warning about myth > Explanation > Fact
Name vaccine denial as a behaviour
- » **Communication tool #7 – Normalise it:**
Normalise the move from hesitation or ambivalence to action through trusted messengers who speak directly to the experience of people within those communities.



This sounds and looks like:

→ **Inoculate: protect against false information:**

"When you see people spreading fear-inducing stories about getting vaccinated, cherry picking one or two studies to show vaccination is harmful, demanding that vaccinations need to be proven 100% safe or attacking vaccination advocates, be aware that these people could be spreading false information about vaccination and preventing you from accessing the good information you need."

"Our people deserve to lead their own hauora journey. People spreading false information and concern undermines our oranga motuhake and access to the trusted information we need to make informed decisions for ourselves and our whānau."

Use the words: "people who deny the effectiveness of vaccines, vaccine denial, vaccine denialism."

→ **Normalising it:**

Stories of hesitant people getting vaccinated.

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