



12 October 2021

How to talk to friends and family feeling unsure about COVID-19 vaccines

From an article originally published Mon 29 Mar 2021 at ABC Health & Wellbeing
By Olivia Willis with illustrations by Edwina Seselja

Research shows that Australia's COVID-19 vaccines are, overall, safe and effective. But it's normal for people to have questions about any new vaccine. Here's how to approach these conversations with empathy — and tackle misconceptions along the way.

Australia's COVID-19 vaccine rollout has begun, and most of us are now rolling up our sleeves.

Vaccination is an important public health measure and helps provide us with a path out of COVID-19.

The vast majority of Australians support immunisation, but research suggests some people are feeling hesitant about coronavirus vaccines.

While it's important to tackle misinformation and misplaced concerns, lecturing people - or putting them down - usually doesn't change their mind.

So what's the best way to approach these tricky conversations? We asked three experts: Dr Katie Attwell, Dr Jessica Kaufman, and Professor Julie Leask.

STEP 1: DON'T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS.

It's normal to feel frustrated when you think someone is misinformed.

But try not to make assumptions about their beliefs. Just because someone has questions about vaccines, doesn't necessarily mean they reject immunisation altogether.

Before jumping into your answers and trying to convince someone, take a deep breath and be prepared to listen.

STEP 2: ASK YOURSELF, IS IT WORTH ENGAGING? IS THIS PERSON OPEN TO DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS?

If a person feels strongly against vaccination, you probably won't get far. (These people represent a very small minority.)

It's better to focus your energy on conversations with people who might be unsure, have unanswered questions, or don't feel strongly either way.

STEP 3.

Acknowledge people's concerns (without necessarily validating them).

Establish some rapport and show empathy.



Kinship Care in the time of Coronavirus

It's important people feel respected, even when you disagree with them. Try to listen to what they're saying and be curious. Avoid judgemental language and patronising them.

Potential entry points for conversation.

"It can be hard to find the information we need."

"You are obviously being careful with your health."

"Where did you hear that?"

STEP 4: ADDRESS MISINFORMATION WHEN IT POPS UP.

Trying to argue every point can be counterproductive. But there are easy ways to address common misconceptions.

"The vaccines arrived so fast. How do we know they're safe?"

COVID-19 vaccines went through the same safety checks as other vaccines. Rather than the science being sped up, the administrative and funding processes have been fast-tracked.

"Most people don't even get that sick, so why do we need a vaccine?"

Getting vaccinated protects you against the serious side effects of COVID-19 and means you are less likely to pass it on to others. Vaccination isn't just about protecting ourselves.

For more information about COVID-19 vaccines, including Australia's rollout plan, safety and side effects, and what you need to know if you have a pre-existing health condition, check out ABC Health's comprehensive vaccine guide.

"I'm worried about the side effects..."

It's normal to experience mild side effects, but severe reactions to vaccines are very rare. Health experts are closely monitoring this, and so far, research shows COVID vaccines are safe.

STEP 5: ACT AS A ROLE MODEL.

Research shows we listen to our peers and people we trust.



STEP 6: YOU DON'T NEED TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS.

Open up a dialogue, but keep the conversation going. Encourage people to look for **trusted** sources of information.

- ▶ Department of Health
- ▶ World Health Organization
- ▶ Your local GP or health clinic