



Talking about vaccination with Spanish-speaking patients

Vaccines are one of the best preventive health tools available to us today. They help protect people against infection and potentially serious illness. However, many people still have questions or concerns that influence their vaccination decisions for themselves or their children.

In addition, patients in your local Hispanic communities may have unique vaccination-related questions and concerns, as well as challenges to seeking and accessing care. Barriers to getting vaccinated may include misinformation and disinformation, patients' distrust of institutions and the disproportionate impact of policy changes on these communities. Lack of equitable access to health care services can further complicate patients' ability to receive timely and appropriate care, including vaccination.

This guidance from the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) is designed to support conversations with your Spanish-speaking patients about vaccination. Research shows that a physician's recommendation is often the single most important factor in a patient's vaccination decisions. That is why it's important for family physicians to be ready to address questions

and concerns and provide relevant resources to help all their patients make informed health care choices.

Tips for providing culturally responsive care

Keep in mind the following tips for respecting your patients' diverse health beliefs and practices and responding to their cultural and language needs.

- Provide an interpreter, when appropriate.
- Take an empathetic, collaborative approach.
- Consider the cultural differences between you and your patient.
- Learn about the patient's cultural values and any misunderstandings or fears they may have.
- Seek to understand the patient's specific concerns instead of assuming you already know what they are.
- Allow time for questions.
- Be aware of body language.
- Communicate clearly and concisely.
- Recognize that your efforts may not be successful on the first attempt, and leave an open channel of communication.

Key takeaways for family physicians

- Build trust by respecting and responding to your patient's cultural and language needs.
- Ask permission to share information about vaccination with your patient.
- Be an active listener and address your patient's concerns clearly, focusing on vaccine safety and reliable resources.
- Strengthen the relationship with your patient by following up and maintaining open communication.

TALKING ABOUT VACCINATION WITH SPANISH-SPEAKING PATIENTS

1. Getting started

- Provide an interpreter, when appropriate.
- Listen to the patient with an open mind and a calm demeanor.
- Allow the patient to express their thoughts and concerns without interruption.
- Use behaviors such as maintaining eye contact and taking notes to help the patient feel heard.

2. Actively listening

- Ask open-ended questions about the patient's feelings and fears about vaccination.
- Don't argue with the patient, even if you disagree or what they're saying is inaccurate.

3. Responding with empathy

- After the patient has expressed their perspective, ask if it is OK for you to share information about vaccination with them.
 - **If they say yes**, give a strong recommendation and provide trustworthy information from credible sources (e.g., the AAFP's familydoctor.org, your local health department, academic research).
 - **If they say no**, don't push the information onto them. They may be open to talking about vaccination at a future visit, so leave an open channel of communication.
- Emphasize the benefits of vaccination and preventive care.
- Explain how protecting their family and community's well-being can guide their vaccination decisions.

4. Following up

- Follow up in ways that are relevant to the patient's needs. This helps build trust and allows you to address any additional questions.
- Use EHR messaging or an interpreter to facilitate communication, when appropriate.
- Get involved in efforts to promote community well-being.

Adapted from National Hispanic Medical Association. *Vaccinate for all: 2022 vaccine advocacy toolkit. Resources for healthcare professionals*. Accessed November 12, 2025. <https://vaccineresourcehub.org/resource/toolkit-vaccine-advocacy-resources-healthcare-professionals>

If your practice serves a large number of Spanish-speaking patients but you and your care team don't speak the language, you may want to invest in training on effective communication with people who have limited English proficiency. You might also consider hiring Spanish-speaking employees to enhance patient care.

Common questions about vaccination

Your Spanish-speaking patients will likely have the same questions that many other patients have, including the following:

- *Are vaccines safe for me and my child?*

Suggested response¹: "Yes, vaccines are safe and effective. They are carefully tested before they're made available to the public. Vaccines help prevent serious illness from certain diseases, and they have been developed specifically because these diseases are dangerous. Without vaccines, many diseases will return, as we have seen in recent outbreaks. While there are some vaccines for adults, most vaccines are given to children. That's because your child's immune system is still developing. Childhood vaccines help your child's body build up protection against diseases. It's important to vaccinate your child to help prevent serious health problems and keep you, your loved ones and your community safe and healthy."

- *There's a lot of different information out there. How do I know which vaccines my family and I really need?*

When you're counseling your patients about recommended vaccines, ask them to bring their vaccination records. You can direct them to familydoctor.org for [recommended immunization schedules](https://familydoctor.org/recommended-immunization-schedules) adopted by the AAFP and [Spanish-language resources](https://familydoctor.org/spanish-language-resources) about vaccines. Be sure to emphasize that recommended vaccination timing is designed for the safest, most effective protection. Also, let your patients know about catch-up schedules, when appropriate. Discuss any medical conditions or travel plans that may affect the recommendations.

Unique questions Spanish-speaking patients may have

- *What information about my visit will be shared?*
- *Will you report the vaccines I receive to a registry?*

Some patients may be concerned that information about their visit will be reported to other organizations or agencies. Explain to patients that their health information will be stored in their medical record, which is private and confidential. Based on your practice's policies, reassure them that their information will not be shared with anyone who doesn't have a medical reason to access it.

Be sure to tell your patients about any public health reporting you are required to do and describe what details about them will be disclosed.

Is coming into your practice a barrier to vaccination?

Some patients may have reasons they do not want to come in for an office visit, even though they do want to get vaccinated or keep their children on track with routine vaccinations. Brainstorm other options with them. For example, is a local pharmacy or walk-in clinic a better fit for their situation? If your state requires a prescription, could a telehealth visit allow them to get vaccinated at another location? By helping a patient who wants to get vaccinated explore ways to overcome location challenges, you can support their efforts to keep their family safe and healthy.

AAFP resources for physicians

- [Current AAFP vaccination recommendations](#) — Immunization schedules based on age groups and medical conditions
- [familydoctor.org](#) — Spanish-language patient education materials about vaccines
- [Neighborhood Navigator](#) — Online tool to find interpreter services and community health programs

References

1. American Academy of Family Physicians. Building confidence when talking to parents about children's vaccines. April 2022. Accessed December 23, 2025. https://www.aafp.org/dam/AAFP/documents/patient_care/immunizations/building-vaccine-confidence.pdf