

ADDRESSING COVID-19 MISINFORMATION



ADDRESSING COVID-19 MISINFORMATION

A Tip Sheet for Health Professionals Working with Community Members

Identify Key Misinformation in Your Community

- Listen to misinformation circulating as community concerns—for example, from trusted messengers, in town halls, as rumors, and on social media.
- Stay up on the most current and widespread misinformation circulating, for example, in questions to physicians and community health workers, and call-ins to local talk radio.
- Create a priority list of misinformation and develop fact-based responses.

Choose Which Misinformation to Address

- While all misinformation could be problematic and may need to be addressed, prioritize the most urgent.
 - Select misinformation commonly circulating in the community.
 - Select misinformation shared by sources such as physicians, faith leaders, public figures, community stakeholders (e.g., teachers) and social media influencers.
 - Select misinformation that presents a barrier to action or promotes risky behaviors.
- Distinguish between general disagreement (for example, the vaccine isn't completely safe) and specific falsehoods (for example, the vaccine will alter DNA because of the mRNA approach¹).
- Prioritize specific misinformation for fact-based correction.

Acknowledge and Empathize

- Sometimes even the most knowledgeable people may believe, and transmit, misinformation.
- Acknowledge prior institutional wrongs and historical facts that reduce credibility and trust, while also advocating for the acceptance and uptake of approved vaccines.
- Do not make assumptions; inquire to understand values, concerns and past experiences.
- In responding to misinformation, consider acknowledging, empathizing with and affirming the person's (or audience's) perspective first, then offer fact-based correction. Here's an example:
"I understand what you are saying and why you might have concerns. Because of things that have happened in the past, many people have shared similar thoughts. We want to make decisions that we are comfortable with, while avoiding the blind trust of the past. So, when

¹mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein—or even just a piece of a protein—that triggers an immune response inside our bodies. That immune response, which produces antibodies, is what protects us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [2020, December]. Understanding mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines.) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mrna.html>.



physicians say everything is fine, we will still question and challenge it, but in the end make an informed decision for our loved ones, ourselves, and our community. Here are the facts from people we know and trust..."

Debunk and Explain

- Use plain language; be responsive to literacy levels and culturally acceptable language.
- When possible, proactively provide transparent and easily understandable information before misinformation is circulated widely.
- Debunk misinformation using fact-based information and persuasive strategies to support the facts. Here's an example:
"You care about your community and you want to make an informed decision for yourself, your loved ones, and your community. Here's what people we know and trust say about the facts behind this decision..."
- Avoid reinforcing the misinformation. Instead, state the accepted facts.
- Tap credible community members and trusted messengers willing to tell their stories but don't oversell their stories or sugarcoat real and common physical reactions.
"The vaccine went fine but I had a sore shoulder for a day or so. Overall, I felt relieved to get my first shot and be on the road to immunity."
- Accurate claims can be interpreted in misleading ways. The same facts have more than one explanation. Don't change the facts; challenge the story behind the facts. Here's an example of a response to a concern that politicians influenced quick approval of the vaccine for their own benefit:
"It is true that the vaccines were developed at a historically fast pace. Developers and independent review committees worked very carefully and fast to decide whether approval was warranted in order to stop the spread of COVID-19 and save lives."

Resources

Chou, W-Y.S., Gaysynsky, A., & Vanderpool, R. C. (2021). The COVID-19 Misinfodemic: Moving beyond fact-checking. *Health Education & Behavior*, 48(1), 9–13. doi: 10.1177/1090198120980675

Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J., Ecker, U. K. H., Albarracín, D., Amazeen, M. A., Kendeou, P. ... Zaragoza, M. S. (2020). The Debunking Handbook 2020. *DebunkingHandbook2020.pdf* (climatechangecommunication.org)

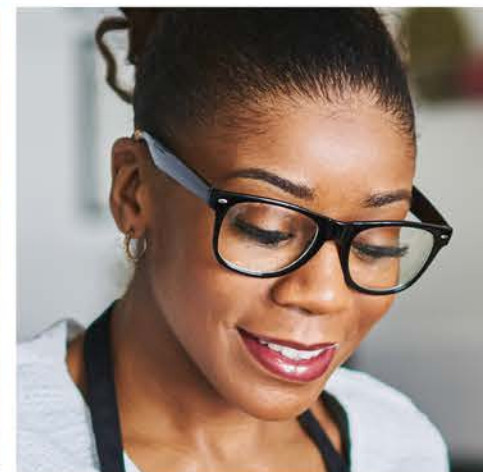
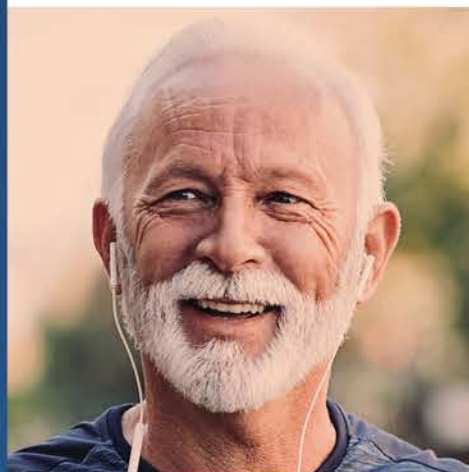
Southwell, B. G., Niederdeppe, J., Cappella, J. N., Gaysynsky, A., Kelley, D. E., Oh, A., ... Chou, W. Y. S. (2019). Misinformation as a misunderstood challenge to public health. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 57(2), 282–285. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2019.03.009

Acknowledgement: The Communication Work Group of the NIH Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL) Against COVID-19 Disparities developed this information tip sheet based on experiences and input from 11 CEAL Research Teams awarded in 2020.

Adapting Fact-Based Information to the Needs of Communities

A Guide for Health Care Professionals

NIH CEAL
Community Engagement Alliance



Adapting Fact-Based Information to the Needs of Communities

This tool provides fact-based responses to common questions received by CEAL teams. It provides examples of ways to address misinformation within communities. Responses were crafted by CEAL teams or by experts. Of note, the information available in this tool is the latest available at the time indicated. As more is learned about COVID-19 vaccines, information can change and/or become inaccurate with time.

This tool complements the NIH Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL) Against COVID-19 Disparities tip sheet, *Addressing COVID-19 Misinformation*, by providing example responses to questions received by CEAL teams.

Access the tip sheet on the [CEAL Website](#) at these links in [English](#) and in [Spanish](#).

The following COVID-19 vaccine questions and responses are included.

Click the links below to access responses for each question.

- [What are the ingredients in the vaccine\(s\)?](#)
- [Does the vaccine change my DNA?](#)
- [Can you get COVID-19 from the vaccine?](#)
- [Has the vaccine been tested in communities of color?](#)
- [Isn't it safer to just get COVID-19 than to take the vaccine?](#)
- [What are the long-term side effects of the vaccine\(s\)?](#)
- [Is it safe for me to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I would like to have a baby one day?](#)





Question

What are the ingredients in the vaccine(s)?

Facts

The three COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the United States do **not** contain eggs, preservatives, latex or fetal tissue and do not contain the live virus.

For a full list of ingredients, please see each vaccine's Fact Sheet for Recipients and Caregivers:

- [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [Moderna COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [J&J/Janssen COVID-19 vaccine](#)

Source

- CDC: [COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ](#)



Question

What are the ingredients in the vaccine(s)?

Communication Tips

- Empathize
- Acknowledge and affirm
- Use plain language
- Provide links to credible resources

Example Response #1

I can understand why you might be concerned about this. Many people have religious beliefs, medical conditions, or general concerns about what they put in their body. In fact, each company provides a clear list of ingredients, and no vaccine contains eggs, preservatives, latex, or fetal tissue. The vaccines do not trigger allergic reactions in most people, but health care professionals will observe you for about 15-30 minutes after the shot to make sure you are doing well.

For ingredient list(s)

- [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [Moderna COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [Janssen COVID-19 vaccine](#)

CEAL infographics

- [Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [Moderna COVID-19 vaccine](#)



Pregunta

¿Cuáles son los ingredientes de las vacunas?

Consejos de Comunicación

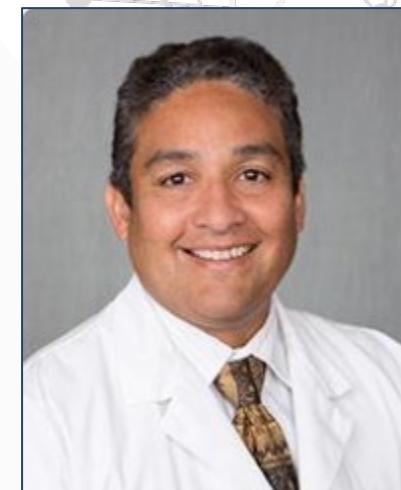
- Empatice
- Reconozca miembros creíbles de la comunidad y personas de confianza

Respuesta de Ejemplo #2

“Yo he revisado en detalle la lista de ingredientes de cada vacuna. El ingrediente activo es material genético que utilizan nuestras células para producir una proteína de modo que el cuerpo pueda producir anticuerpos contra el virus. Los demás componentes son similares a los que se utilizan en algunas otras vacunas. Yo les aseguro a mis pacientes que ninguna de las vacunas aprobadas contiene el coronavirus ni vivo ni muerto. Las vacunas no contienen huevos, conservantes ni látex. Tampoco contienen material fetal ni células madres. Las vacunas son muy seguras y son nuestra mejor defensa para vencer el virus.”

CEAL Infografías

- [Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [Moderna COVID-19 vaccine](#)



Dr. Olveen Carrasquillo
University of Miami

Esta cotización se proporcionó directamente a NIH CEAL



Question

Does the vaccine change my DNA?

Facts

Vaccines do not affect our DNA, or the genetics that make us who we are, in any way. The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are based on mRNA. mRNA stands for messenger ribonucleic acid, which is a molecule that teaches your body to recognize and respond to the virus by teaching your cells to attack it. mRNA never enters the nucleus of the cell, which is where our DNA, or genetic material, is kept. The cell breaks down and gets rid of the mRNA soon after it is finished using the instructions.

Source

- CDC: [mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

For more information

- NIH CEAL: [5 Questions \(and Answers\) About mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines](#)



Question

Does the vaccine change my DNA?

Communication Tips

- Empathize
- Acknowledge and affirm
- Use plain language
- Provide links to credible resources

Example Response #1

It's frustrating when scientists use technical language that most of us can't understand. There is nothing in the COVID-19 vaccines that affects DNA or any part of your genetic make-up. Some of the vaccines are based on mRNA, which is very different from DNA. mRNA, or messenger ribonucleic acid, teaches your body to recognize and respond to the virus by teaching your cells to attack it.

For more information

- CDC: [mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

Response crafted by



Question

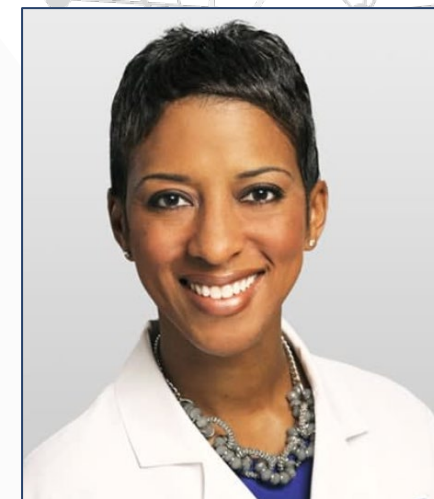
Does the vaccine change my DNA?

Communication Tips

- Tap a credible community member or trusted messenger
- Don't change the facts; challenge the story behind the facts

Example Response #2

“The COVID vaccine is not a DNA vaccine. You aren’t getting something that is going to interrupt your blueprint, change who you are, encode into you, track you wherever you are going...”



Dr. Kimberly Manning
Grady Health Systems

Source: [The COVID Vaccine in My Own Words](#) (11:16-11:44)



Pregunta

¿Las vacunas para COVID-19 alteraran o mutaran mi ADN?

Consejos de Comunicación

- Reconozca miembros creíbles de la comunidad y personas de confianza
- No cambie los hechos; cuestione la historia detrás de los hechos

Respuesta de Ejemplo #3

“La vacuna no nos va a hacer cambios a nivel mental o a nivel de conducta, los cambios son más bien a nivel de síntomas fisiológicos (fiebre, dolor en el cuerpo); la vacuna no tiene capacidad de cambiar nuestro ADN, la vacuna no es tan poderosa para hacer algo así.”

Para obtener más información

- NIH: [COVID-19 Los Institutos Nacionales de Salud](#)



Dra. Elimarie Caballero Quinones
Wake Forest Baptist Health

Fuente: [Hablemos de Vacuna Town Hall](#) (17:48-19:32)



Question

Can you get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

Facts

No. The vaccines being used to prevent COVID-19 in the United States can't make someone sick with the disease. None of the vaccines contain whole or live SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Source

- CDC: [Four Questions \(and Answers\) about COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

CEAL Resource

- NIH CEAL: [Five Questions \(and Answers\) About mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines](#)



Question

Can you get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

Communication Tips

- Acknowledge and affirm
- Be transparent
- Debunk and explain

Example Response #1

That is a great question, and one that a lot of people are asking. It can be hard to find good, accurate information. But here are the facts: none of the FDA-authorized vaccines contain the virus that causes COVID-19. It can take a few weeks after the vaccine for your body to build up antibodies, which help your body fight against the virus. During those few weeks, it is still possible to get infected or infect others. So, it is really important to wear a mask, social distance, and wash your hands, even after you get the vaccine. Again, the vaccines do not contain the virus that causes COVID-19.

Response crafted by



Question

Can you get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

Communication Tips

- Tap credible community members as messengers
- Debunk and explain

Example Response #2

“No, the currently available COVID-19 vaccines are not live vaccines. Since they are not live vaccines, you will not be infected by receiving them. These vaccines offer blueprints for the body to make the spike protein of the COVID-19 virus. When our bodies make the spike protein, our immune system steps up and develops antibodies. Then, if we are exposed to the virus, our body can mount an immune response to fight off COVID.”



Dr. Zanthia Wiley

Emory University School of Medicine

Source: [Ask a Black Doctor: Keeping it real... Should I get this vaccine?](#)

(32:01-33:11)



Pregunta

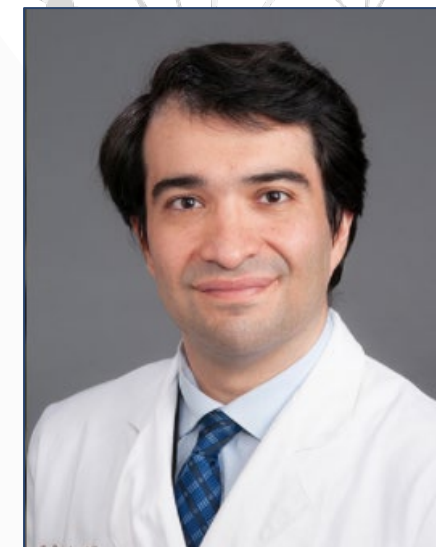
¿Se puede contraer COVID-19 con la vacuna?

Consejos de Comunicación

- Reconozca miembros creíbles de la comunidad y personas de confianza
- Sea claro y transparente

Respuesta de Ejemplo #3

“La vacuna no es el virus vivo, o sea no le puede dar COVID a la persona.”



Dr. Julio Nasim

Wake Forest Baptist Health

Fuente: [Hablemos de Vacuna Town Hall](#) (36:40-36:50)



Question

Has the vaccine been tested in communities of color?

Facts

Yes. Scientists and pharmaceutical companies worked hard to recruit members of communities of color. As many as 25% of participants were Black/African American or Hispanic in the Moderna and Pfizer trials, and 45% of participants were Hispanic in the Johnson & Johnson vaccine trials. Diverse racial/ethnic representation in vaccine trials is important because drugs and vaccines can affect groups in different ways, due to different experiences and environmental exposure.

Sources

- Kaiser Family Foundation: [Racial Diversity within COVID-19 Vaccine Clinical Trials: Key Questions and Answers | KFF](#)
- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/janssen.html>

CEAL Scientific Pathway

- NIH CEAL: [Scientific Pathway](#)



Question

Has the vaccine been tested in communities of color?

Communication Tips

- Acknowledge past missteps
- Use plain language
- Provide links to credible resources

Example Response #1

Yes. Too many treatments have been tested without the permission or participation of people of color, and that needs to change. Fortunately, things are changing, and many of the scientists who developed the vaccine(s) were members of communities of color. When the vaccine was tested in clinical trials up to 25% of the participants were Black/African American or Hispanic.

For more information

- CDC: [Moderna Breakdowns](#)
- CDC: [Pfizer Breakdowns](#)
- CDC: [J&J/Janssen Breakdowns](#)

CEAL Scientific Pathway

- NIH CEAL: [Scientific Pathway](#)

Response crafted by



Question

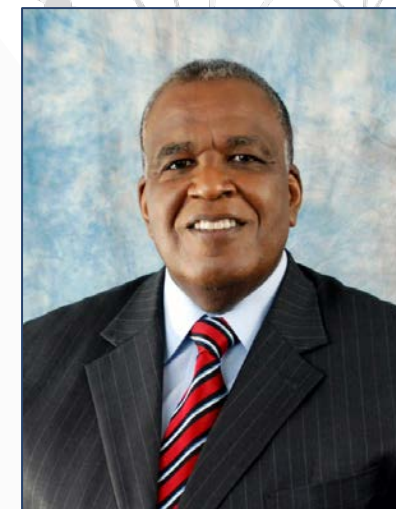
Has the vaccine been tested in communities of color?

Communication Tips

- Tap credible community members as messengers
- Debunk and explain

Example Response #2

“Specifically for the minority communities, we can always do better in our clinical trials. But there was a successful effort after a slow start to enroll more Black volunteers, Hispanic/Latinx volunteers and volunteers from other minorities in both the Moderna and the Pfizer studies...”



Dr. Keith Ferdinand
Tulane University

Source: [LA CEAL Community Town Hall Series](#) (9:58-10:10)



Pregunta

¿Han hecho estudios de la vacuna con personas minoritarias?

Consejos de Comunicación

- Reconozca miembros creíbles de la comunidad y personas de confianza
- Sea claro y transparente

Respuesta de Ejemplo #3

“Si. Se han echo varios estudios para asegurar que la vacuna sea efectiva en grupos raciales/étnicos minoritarios.”



Dr. Gilberto Lopez
Arizona State University

Esta cotización se proporcionó directamente a NIH CEAL



Question

Isn't it safer to just get COVID than to take the vaccine?

Facts

No. While getting COVID-19 may offer some natural protection or immunity, the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 is far greater than any benefits of natural immunity.

Source

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/answering-questions.html>



Question

Isn't it safer to just get COVID than to take the vaccine?

Communication Tips

- Empathize and acknowledge
- Debunk and explain
- Use plain language
- Provide links to credible resources

Example Response #1

This is a good question, especially because the vaccine can seem difficult to get. But the problem is that many people die from COVID, and many others get really sick and don't recover for months. Complications from the vaccine are very rare. You have a much higher chance of getting very sick from COVID than you do of having a severe reaction to the vaccine. The vaccine is safe, quick, and free, and I encourage you to get it as soon as possible.

For more information

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/answering-questions.html>

Response crafted by



Question

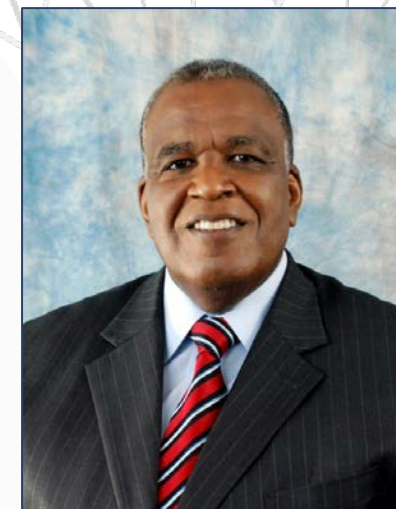
Isn't it safer to just get COVID than to take the vaccine?

Communication Tips

- Tap credible community members as messengers
- Debunk and explain

Example Response #2

“The mRNA vaccines are safe and effective, but... COVID-19 kills... and is now the third leading cause of death in the United States. Anywhere from 30% or more of people have prolonged illnesses, also known as COVID-19 long haulers. They can battle symptoms related to COVID-19 for months, including neurologic symptoms, mental fog, chronic fatigue, and respiratory symptoms.”



Dr. Keith Ferdinand
Tulane University

This quote was provided directly to NIH CEAL



Question

What are the long-term side effects of the vaccine(s)?

Facts

COVID-19 vaccines are being tested in large clinical trials to assess their safety. To learn about very rare and long-term side effects takes time and requires a lot of people getting vaccinated. That is why safety monitoring will continue. CDC has an independent group of experts that reviews all the safety data and provides regular safety updates. If a safety issue is detected, immediate action will take place to determine if the issue is related to the COVID-19 vaccine and determine the best course of action.

Source

- CDC: [Vaccines and Immunizations Answering Questions](#)



Question

What are the long-term side effects of the vaccine(s)?

Communication Tips

- Use plain Language
- Be transparent
- Tap credible community members as messengers

Example Response #1

It may take time before we know if there are any serious long-term side effects, but so far, the COVID-19 vaccine has been very safe. In fact, vaccines have been used safely for many years and have wiped out many diseases, like polio. Scientists and the U.S. government are carefully monitoring the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines. If they learn of a safety issue, they will immediately take action to find out if it is because of the vaccine and take the best actions to keep people safe.

Response crafted by



Question

What are the long-term side effects of the vaccine(s)?

Communication Tips

- Offer alternative explanations
- Tap credible community members as messengers

Example Response #2

“I don’t have concerns...about the long-term effects of the COVID-19 vaccine... When I looked into the data, mRNA vaccines have been in development for decades ...and what we know of mRNA vaccines and their safety... is that it was not a live vaccine. When it came to those parts, and the fact that I didn’t want to bring the virus home to my babies, or my parents, I made the choice to get it.”



Dr. Wendy McDonald
Northwestern Medicine

Source: [Women's Health, COVID, & Disparities Instagram Live \(2:08-3:15\)](#)



Question

What are the long-term side effects of the vaccine(s)?

Communication Tips

- Tap credible community members as messengers
- Debunk and explain
- Offer alternative explanations

Example Response #3

“Long-term side effects from vaccines are extremely rare. Most vaccine side effects happen within the first two months of the vaccine which is why the FDA told these companies they couldn’t submit an EUA (emergency use authorization) until they were two months into their phase three clinical trials and had that safety data...”



Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett
National Institutes of Health
Source: [Addressing the Challenges of COVID-19 in Black and Latinx Communities](#) (45:06-45:59)



Pregunta

¿Que son los efectos a largo plazo de las vacunas?

Consejos de Comunicación

- Reconozca miembros creíbles de la comunidad y personas de confianza
- Desacredite la desinformación

Respuesta de Ejemplo #4

"Los efectos se ven en los primeros días... los médicos y los científicos tenemos plena confianza de que esta tecnología es segura y de que no va a causar efectos secundarios severos."



Dra. Giselle Melendez

Wake Forest Baptist Health

Fuente: [Hablemos de Vacuna Town Hall](#) (21:32-22:21)



Question

Is it safe for me to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I would like to have a baby one day?

Facts

Yes. People who hope to get pregnant one day may receive the vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccine, like other vaccines, works by training our bodies to develop antibodies to fight against the virus that causes COVID-19 to prevent future illness. There is currently no evidence that antibodies formed from COVID-19 vaccination cause any problems with pregnancy, including the development of the placenta. In addition, there is no evidence suggesting that fertility problems are a side effect of ANY vaccine. People who are trying to become pregnant now or who plan to try in the future may receive the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available to them.

Source

- CDC: [COVID-19 Vaccine Myths and Facts](#)



Question

Is it safe for me to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I would like to have a baby one day?

Communication Tips

- Empathize
- Debunk and explain
- Use plain language

Example Response #1

Many young women are concerned about whether the vaccine is safe for them, especially if they hope to have a baby one day. People who are trying to become pregnant now or who plan to try in the future may safely receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Experts believe that COVID-19 vaccines do not pose a risk to a person trying to become pregnant in the short or long term. The COVID-19 vaccine, like other vaccines, works by training our bodies to develop antibodies to fight against the virus that causes COVID-19. There is no evidence that this causes any problems with pregnancy, including the development of the placenta. Also, there is no evidence that fertility problems are a side effect of ANY vaccine.

Response crafted by



Question

Is it safe for me to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I would like to have a baby one day?

Communication Tips

- Tap credible community members as messengers
- Debunk and explain

Example Response #2

“The Moderna studies show no adverse outcomes or effects on pregnancy or fertility and the preliminary Pfizer studies showed the same thing. I don’t have any substantiated concerns about fertility and the vaccines.”



Dr. Wendy McDonald
Northwestern Medicine

Source: [Women's Health, COVID, & Disparities Instagram Live \(4:30-5:36\)](#)



Pregunta

¿Es seguro tomar la vacuna para COVID-19 si pienso tener un bebe algún día?

Consejos de Comunicación

- Reconozca miembros creíbles de la comunidad y personas de confianza
- Desacredite la desinformación

Respuesta de Ejemplo #3

“En realidad el mecanismo biológico y la manera como actúa la vacuna no nos hace pensar que infertilidad vaya a ser un efecto secundario... ya llevamos información recolectada desde Julio y infertilidad o disfunción eréctil no han sido un problema reportado.”



Dra. Giselle Melendez

Wake Forest Baptist Health

Fuente: [Hablemos de Vacuna Town Hall](#) (20:48-21:30)