

Hot Topics In Risk Management



Our Risk Management Team is here to help you minimize and mitigate Medical Professional Liability risk.



Promoting COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence

In a recent [survey](#), Americans ranked physicians and other health care professionals as their most trusted source for COVID-19 vaccine information. Those surveyed also said they want to hear from their clinicians about the COVID-19 vaccine. Physicians and their practices are uniquely situated to promote COVID-19 vaccine confidence and increase overall uptake. To maximize effectiveness of vaccine recommendations, consider the following strategies.

Increase Staff Confidence

Engaged and empowered employees can build and maintain patients' trust in the vaccines and the vaccinators.^[1] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") has a [Vaccination Communication Toolkit](#), which includes a [Vaccine Communication and Confidence Checklist, strategies](#) for promoting vaccine confidence in the organization, and a [presentation](#) with slides for health care personnel.^[2]

Encourage, Support, and Share

Share information with patients about vaccine safety, efficacy, development, side effects, supply, availability, immunity, and messenger RNA or mRNA vaccines. Update patients^[3] with new information, especially when the vaccine is available for them.

Use a variety of methods, including:

- Allow time during virtual and in-person appointments to provide vaccine information and recommendations, and answer questions.
- Share information on the practice's [website](#), including fact sheets and FAQ documents from the [CDC](#) and the [American Medical Association](#).
- 46% of [survey](#) participants wanted information via e-mail, while 33% preferred texts. The practice might send *e-mails or text messages*, in compliance with HIPAA and other privacy and security laws, with a link to an FAQ document.
- 34% of patients in the [survey](#) preferred *phone calls*, which are more personal but time-consuming. Telling patients when scheduling or confirming appointments that the physician or clinician will discuss vaccine information and recommendations at their appointment and asking them to come prepared with any questions is a personal and efficient touch. Point patients with internet access to information on the practice website to prepare for their appointment.
- A *patient portal* is effective for some patients. In the [survey](#), 34% of participants ages 55-64 favored updates via the practice's patient portal, but this number dropped below 25% in both the 18-34 and 65+ age groups.
- Hang [CDC posters](#) throughout the office.
- The CDC offers [wearable stickers](#) stating, "I got my COVID-19 vaccine." In practices where all employees volunteered for vaccinations, the stickers may invite patient questions and give employees the opportunity to share inspiring personal stories.
- The CDC's sample [social media](#) (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) messages reinforce wearing a mask, physical distancing, frequent hand washing, and vaccinations to stop the pandemic.

Respond with Empathy and Understanding and a Strong Recommendation

In a 2015 [study](#), researchers found that clinician word choice and communication style affects patient acceptance of vaccines. A new Boston Medical Center [study](#) confirms that using a short unambiguous statement that assumes the patient will agree (i.e., "You are due for your vaccine today.") generally is more effective than presenting the recommendation as a choice (i.e., "Do you want to receive a vaccine today?").

Given all the news about the COVID-19 vaccine, anticipate patient questions and be prepared to answer.^[4]

- Approach the conversation with empathy and understanding.
- Share your personal experience if you have been vaccinated.
- Identify common ground to promote trust.
- Ask questions to learn the reasons for a patient's hesitancy.
- Listen carefully, and do not minimize patients' concerns. Answer their questions with available information, while acknowledging areas where more research is needed.
- Explain the need for continued precautions after being vaccinated, including distancing and masking. Many patients do not understand why this is necessary.^[5]

[1] The CDC reports that health care professionals' concerns about vaccine safety pose a risk to vaccine confidence in patients. [click here for link](#)

[2] In addition, if your practice will be administering vaccines, review these safe practice recommendations with practice employees to help prevent vaccination errors. [click here for link](#)

[3] The CDC points out that because the vaccine is new, patients will have varying comfort levels and will need continued reminders about the importance of the vaccine.

[4] For further discussion of tips for talking about vaccines, listen to National Public Radio's Life Kit podcast with Nadine Gartner, Executive Director of an organization in Oregon that provides childhood vaccination education. [click here for link](#) Also, the CDC has slides for a presentation that practices can use to help staff build patient confidence. It includes strategies for effective conversations with patients. [click here for link](#)

[5] [click here for link](#)

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