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# Have the Conversation

## A Toolkit For Military Communities





“ To defend this nation, we need a **healthy and ready** force. ”  
— Kathy Roth-Douquet, Co-Founder & CEO, Blue Star Families



Like everyone in our nation, our military families and the communities where they live are facing an unprecedented public health crisis that impacts every aspect of life — including mission readiness.

It is time to move past this pandemic. If you know someone who is still waiting to get vaccinated, you can help. Listen to their fears. Have a conversation.

Why? Because we know the COVID-19 vaccine is our best shot at protecting our family, country, and community together.

### **Kathy Roth-Douquet**

Co-Founder & CEO, Blue Star Families

“ Vaccinating the military [and their families] against COVID-19 will save lives and allow for the defense of our nation. — U.S. Department of Defense ”

**At the end of the day, we all want what is best for each other. Use the tips in this toolkit to have a productive conversation about vaccination in an effort to keep our loved ones and communities safe.**



# Conversation Tips

## 1. Check your judgment at the door.

Approach the conversation with empathy and a genuine willingness to listen. Listen with your whole body. Look at them. Lean in. Make eye contact. Do not interrupt. Do not prejudge or rush to give your point of view. Plan ahead to ensure you are in the right environment to speak without distraction, ideally face to face. Remember, you have your own strong feelings about COVID-19 and getting vaccinated. You may not find a middle ground with just one conversation, and that is okay.

**Conversation Starter: Hey, can we talk about COVID-19 vaccines? I love you so much, and I've got to ask... are you vaccinated?**

The concerns are especially acute in the military, where service members live and work closely together in barracks and on ships, increasing the risks of rapid spreading. Any large virus outbreak in the military could affect America's ability to defend itself in a security crisis. – AP News

## 2. Ask open-ended questions.

Ask non-judgmental questions with the goal of understanding the root of their hesitation. Many times, there are deeper issues rooted in vaccine hesitancy. For instance, a previous negative health care experience, such as a misdiagnosis or a doctor who was dismissive of their symptoms, can lead to distrust in the medical community. Understanding the basis of one's hesitancy is the first step towards a productive conversation about vaccines.

It can be challenging to manage a situation where you feel informed and are dealing with someone who is basing their opinion on incorrect information. But the goal is to find a middle ground.

According to the CDC, it is important to ask open-ended questions to explore concerns instead of eliciting yes-or-no answers that might shut down a conversation. Doing so will help you understand your loved one's concerns about vaccination and where they might be getting their information.

**Conversation Starter: Tell me what you think about COVID-19 vaccines? What are some of your concerns? Is there something I can do to help?**



### 3. Learn together by finding sources you both trust.

No one wants to be lectured. Instead of trying to force information, ask your loved one where they get their news about vaccination. See if you can find a source you both trust—whether a resource or family doctor—to gain insights from together.

**Conversation Starter: I'd love to find a source we both trust to look into this concern together.**

### 4. Be supportive.

When they are ready to take the next step, be ready to help. See if you can offer assistance with child care, transportation, or anything they may need that will make finding the time to get vaccinated easier.

**Conversation Starter: What do you need to make an appointment? Is there anything I can do to make this easier? I want to help.**

“ ... one single person not being vaccinated and bringing COVID into the unit can impact the readiness of that unit and that mission. ”

– Trupti Brahmhatt, Senior Policy Researcher, RAND Corporation





# Not Sure What To Say?

## 1. How well do the vaccines work? I am hearing that people vaccinated are still getting COVID-19, so why bother?

COVID-19 vaccine breakthrough cases are expected. No vaccine is 100% effective at preventing illness. Even when fully vaccinated people develop symptoms, they tend to be less severe symptoms than in unvaccinated people. This means they are much less likely to be hospitalized or die than people who are not vaccinated.



The Military Health System has administered more than 6.1 million doses of vaccines against the virus that causes COVID-19. – U.S. Department of Defense



## 2. I do not trust the vaccines yet. I think it is better to wait.

We get that waiting for more time to pass can feel like the safer option. According to the CDC, however, waiting to get vaccinated actually gives the virus the opportunity to develop more variants, meaning it can potentially spread more rapidly and may cause more severe illness than previous strains, especially in unvaccinated people.

## 3. I am worried about the development of the vaccines.

Researchers quickly developed COVID-19 vaccines because of years and years of previous research on related viruses. While COVID-19 vaccines were developed rapidly, all of the steps involved with bringing a new vaccine to the public, including vaccine development, clinical trials, U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorization or approval, manufacturing and distribution, have been taken.

Additionally, all COVID-19 vaccines were tested in large clinical trials and found to be safe and effective for adults of different ages, races, and ethnicities.

## 4. I already had COVID-19, so I do not need to get vaccinated.

According to the CDC, it is recommended that people who already had COVID-19 get vaccinated to help avoid reinfection. Vaccination can provide a higher, more robust, and more consistent level of immunity to protect people from hospitalization for COVID-19 than infection alone for at least six months.



**5. I want to get pregnant soon, and the vaccines are not safe for my fertility.**

The CDC has advised that there is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines cause fertility problems in women or men. Experts recommend that people who are trying or considering getting pregnant in the future also get vaccinated against COVID-19.

**6. I have a pre-existing health condition and am worried the vaccines will cause additional side effects.**

People with underlying medical conditions can receive the FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines. In fact, vaccination is especially important for adults of any age with certain underlying medical conditions, like diabetes and high blood pressure, because they are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Ask your doctor if you have specific questions.

**7. I am immunocompromised, so I do not think it is safe for me to get vaccinated.**

People with autoimmune conditions may receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. However, they should consult with their doctor, nurse, or other health care provider to discuss whether to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

**8. I have time to get a vaccine. There is no rush.**

Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 makes individuals less vulnerable to infection, making the virus less prevalent in the population. This creates herd immunity. Getting as many people immunized as quickly as possible will help keep our families and communities safe.



# Shareable Resources

We are on a mission to provide vaccinated Veterans, service members, and their families with access to trustworthy info from experts, health care professionals, and military leadership. Use these resources to prepare for tough conversations and to become an advocate for vaccination.

## The Cost of Waiting Campaign

- [Know Who You Are Talking To](#) – Figuring out why someone has chosen to wait to be vaccinated is key to knowing how to best approach your conversation with them. Use this as a guide to help understand the type of person you are talking to.
- [A Timeline for 'The Talk'](#) – While intimidating, starting a productive conversation about vaccination is easier than you think. Use this guide to get started.
- [Listen and Respond](#) – The decision to get vaccinated is highly personal. If someone tells you they have not been vaccinated, use this guide to keep the conversation going.

## Military Leadership (DoD)

- [Latest DoD Policy Guidance](#) – Active-duty service members can find up-to-date vaccine guidance here.
- [Defense Health Agency COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit](#) – Turn here for the DoD's official information on COVID-19 response and vaccine availability.
- [TRICARE Information on COVID-19 Vaccines](#) – Service members, Veterans, and their families interested in receiving the COVID-19 vaccines can find support here.

## CDC

- [COVID-19 Vaccines Q&A](#) – Experts address your questions about the COVID-19 vaccines here. Because we are learning about this virus and the vaccines in real-time, this information is updated weekly.
- [COVID-19 Vaccine Approval Process](#) – Use this infographic to learn how and why experts could bypass the normal vaccine approval process to ensure safe delivery.
- [COVID-19 Misinformation & Disinformation](#) – Use these strategies developed by the CDC to address misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 vaccines.