

CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

# TALKING WITH PATIENTS ABOUT HOW TO PROTECT AGAINST FALL AND WINTER RESPIRATORY VIRUSES



As a healthcare provider, your patients depend on you as a trusted source of accurate health information and actionable guidance. During the fall and winter respiratory virus season, you can help patients and their families stay safe and reduce the risk of severe disease by strongly recommending vaccination.

Here are 3 tips to start the conversation with your patients:

**1** During a patient visit, talk to your patient about vaccines they need to protect themselves and their family.

**Make a strong recommendation for routinely recommended vaccines and have a conversation about vaccines recommended under shared clinical decision making.**

EVERYONE AGES 6 MONTHS AND OLDER	ELIGIBLE INFANTS AND CHILDREN	ELIGIBLE PREGNANT PEOPLE	ADULTS AGES 60 YEARS AND OLDER
<p><b>FLU AND COVID-19</b></p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Make a strong recommendation.</b></p> <p><i>"You are due for your flu and COVID-19 vaccines today. I've gotten these vaccines myself and recommend them for you too."</i></p>	<p><b>RSV</b></p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Make a strong recommendation.</b></p> <p><i>"Your baby is due for nirsevimab today, which will help protect them from severe respiratory illness."</i></p>	<p><b>RSV</b></p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Discuss the two options and make a strong recommendation for the one the patient prefers.</b></p> <p><i>"I recommend an RSV immunization to protect your infant from severe respiratory illness. We have two options—one is a vaccine for you and the other is an immunization for your baby after birth. I recommend either one of these options for you, and most babies don't need both."</i></p>	<p><b>RSV</b></p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Have a conversation with the patient about whether the vaccine is right for them.</b></p> <p><i>"You have the option to get the RSV vaccine today. Let's talk about some reasons you are at higher risk for getting RSV, why the vaccine is important for you, and what you want to do."</i></p>

**Avoid missed opportunities for vaccination:** *“You can get all three vaccines today—flu, COVID-19, and RSV. You might experience some more side effects, like fever and fatigue, but these are usually mild or moderate and only last a day or two. Getting all your vaccines today means you won’t have to come back for another appointment and will help you be protected against these respiratory diseases sooner.”*

**Use motivational interviewing when patients are hesitant or resistant to a strong recommendation:**

**Be empathetic:** Approach the conversation with compassion, show empathy, and be genuinely curious about the reasons why the patient feels the way they do. *“It’s okay to want more information before making a decision.”*

**Ask permission:** If a patient is resistant to your strong recommendation, ask to discuss vaccines further. *“If it is okay with you, I would like to spend a few minutes talking about fall and winter respiratory vaccines.”* Respect the patient’s decision if they say no and ask if they would be willing to talk about vaccines at their next visit.

**Use open-ended questions, affirm positive behaviors, reflect what you hear, and summarize the conversation:** *“What have you heard about these vaccines?” “How does that make you feel?” “On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to get an influenza vaccine?”*

**Respond to questions:** Answer questions within the boundaries of your competence, ethics, and scope of practice. If you do not know an answer, discuss how your patient can find a good source of information.

**2**

**Discuss why regular vaccinations are important and respond to any questions or concerns.**

**Why vaccination is important:** *“Flu, COVID-19, and RSV can cause serious illness. Some people, including adults 65 and over, young children, pregnant people, and patients with underlying medical conditions, are at higher risk of severe illness from these fall and winter viruses. However, even healthy adults and children can get severely ill. Vaccines are the best way to help prevent or reduce severe illness.”*

**How vaccines work:** *“Vaccines help the body learn how to defend itself from disease without the dangers of a full-blown infection. When the body has an infection, vaccines work by imitating it to engage the body’s natural defenses. This doesn’t cause illness, but it does cause the immune system to produce immune cells to fight off what it thinks is an infection. The body is left with a supply of these cells and will remember how to fight the real infection in the future.”*

**Vaccines are safe:** *“Flu, COVID-19, and RSV vaccinations are safe and are the most effective way to keep your family healthy this fall and winter respiratory season. Side effects tend to be mild and temporary; serious adverse events are rare. For example, you may experience a sore arm or low-grade fever.”*

**Benefits of vaccination:** *“Getting a flu, COVID-19, or RSV vaccine is a safer, more reliable way for your body to build protection than taking the risk of getting very sick with a respiratory virus. You could still get sick after getting vaccinated. But your symptoms will usually be milder and less severe than if you did not receive the vaccine.”*

### 3

## Administer vaccine(s) and schedule the next vaccination appointment.

**Schedule the next vaccination appointment:** *“To stay up to date with all your recommended vaccines, let’s schedule your next vaccination appointment today.”*

**Reminder about tools and everyday actions you can take:** *“You can also protect yourself and your family from respiratory viruses by covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands, staying home when sick, wearing a well-fitted mask, physical distancing, and improving airflow or ventilation in the places where you live work and play.”*

### Get the Conversation Started

Use these resources to talk with your patients about how vaccines can increase their protection against flu, COVID-19, and RSV this season. Your guidance and recommendations can help keep your patients and their families safe from serious illness.



## RESOURCES

### Conversation Tools

[Healthcare Provider Toolkit: Preparing Your Patients for the Fall and Winter Virus Season](#)

[Healthcare Providers/Professionals: Patient Education Make a Strong Influenza Vaccine Recommendation](#)

[Talking with Patients about COVID-19 Vaccination: An Introduction to Motivational Interviewing for Healthcare Professionals](#)

[How to Address COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation](#)

[Shared Clinical Decision-Making \(SCDM\) RSV Vaccination for Adults 60 Years and Older](#)

### External Conversation Tools

[ACOG | Maternal Respiratory Syncytial Virus Vaccination Practice Advisory](#)

[AHRQ | The SHARE Approach—Essential Steps of Shared Decisionmaking: Expanded Reference Guide with Sample Conversation Starters](#)

### Communication and Patient Education Resources

[Prevent Seasonal Flu](#)

[COVID-19: How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)

[RSV Prevention: How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)

### Programs and Resources

[Vaccines for Children \(VFC\) Program](#): Offers vaccines at no cost to eligible children.

[CDC’s Bridge Access Program](#): Temporarily provides COVID-19 vaccines at no cost to eligible adults.

