Navigating COVID-19 Dialogue: A Comprehensive Vaccination Script for Providers and Support Staff

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Provider Coaching:
I would like to spend a few minutes discussing how we can keep you healthy during the fall/winter season.

Prompts:
a. What do you usually do during the fall/winter seasons to keep yourself healthy?
b. [If patient does not mention vaccination] What is your understanding of vaccines?
Vaccinations help prevent severe illness and decrease risk of hospitalization from infections like influenza/RSV/COVID-19.
c. [If patient does not understand how vaccines work]:
Vaccines train the immune system to fight infections from viruses (I.e., influenza, RSV, COVID-19) and bacteria (Tetanus, pneumonia, etc.). It is also safe to get both the COVID-19 and flu vaccines at the same time.

d. [If patient asks why should they get another vaccine dose if they already have received previous doses or had the infection? OR If patient asks, why should they get the vaccine if it won't prevent COVID itself?]
Since the initial COVID vaccines, we have continued to learn about the effectiveness and purpose of the vaccine. While over time, the vaccine has become less efficient at decreasing your risk of catching the virus, it can still prevent you from being infected at all. But what has hasn't changed: 1) it still greatly lowers your risk of being hospitalized or even dying from COVID and 2) it decreased how severe it could be.

You've noticed that every year we have been encouraging you to get an updated vaccine. The COVID-19 virus keeps changing, and over time, a person's immune system can lose its memory from prior vaccinations or infections.

Think of it just like the annual flu shot. Every year scientists account for the most common COVID variant that is in circulation and update the vaccine so you can be best protected against the virus each year and for this upcoming season. They are designed to protect against the most recent COVD-19 variants and to strengthen your immune system so that it can fight the virus more efficiently if you get infected.

Remember, vaccines train your immune system, so it is ready to fight off the infection and keep you as healthy as possible. Additionally, by getting vaccinated you are keeping both yourself, your loved ones, community, and other people who are vulnerable (I.e., the elderly, immunocompromised, chronically ill) safe. You protect your community with your shot, and you decrease your personal risk of harm.

If you have had COVID-19 within the past 3 months, you have some protection against the virus and can consider delaying getting an updated vaccine. However, this protection decreases over time especially against getting serious illness, hospitalization, or death. So, if it's been over 3 months since your last infection, you should get an updated vaccine. Also, the updated 2023-2024 vaccines are targeting the variants currently circulating to provide better protection.

e. Don't forget that wearing a mask is an option if you want to decrease your risk of getting infections. It can protect you if you are exposed to someone who is sick and protects others if you are ill. You need a high quality KN95 or KF94 or N95 mask. To find free high-quality masks, refer patients to: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/free-masks.html In a pinch and until you can get your hands on a higher quality mask. you can wear a surgical mask that has a cloth mask.
Q: Do you have any questions or concerns regarding either of these vaccines?

If yes:
What are your concerns? Remind patients on how vaccines work, address concerns for side effects (below), and refer to resources for myth-busting.

I can connect you with vaccination sites and resources. Right now, for everyone 6 months and above, staying up to date with your vaccinations is one of the best ways to keep you healthy this season.

Some individuals who take the vaccine report symptoms such as:

Pain, swelling, or redness where the shot was given	Mild fever	Chills
Feeling tired	Headache	Muscle and joint aches

We acknowledge that you may be worried about feeling the side effects of the vaccine for 1-2 days after the shot. But try to consider and weigh your options of either feeling a bit under the weather after your vaccine, or the risk of severe illness if you acquire COVID, long-term effects of COVID infection or even the risk of long COVID.

Remember, even if you do catch COVID, if you're up to date on your vaccine – your symptoms may not be as severe, and it helps prevent you from being hospitalized, or even dying.

If you are concerned about being ill after your vaccine, consider scheduling your vaccine on a Friday or before a day off so you can allow yourself time to recover and rest. Let's try to think of when the best time would be for you to get the vaccine and recover and remember – your immunity kicks in around 2 weeks after the vaccine so now is the time to get it before the holidays and the gatherings they bring!

If no:
When was your last dose of the COVID vaccine? Now is the time to get an updated shot for both the flu and COVID-19?

If refusing vaccination:
Ok I understand that you are not interested in getting vaccinated today. We are here in case you change your mind. So, if you are not interested in vaccination here are some other ways to keep yourself healthy:
1. Masking: Using a high quality KN95, KF94, or N95 mask that is well fitted in areas where there are a lot of people, especially indoors, can decrease your risk of infection [see above link for resources on free high-quality masks]
2. Avoiding situations where there could be a lot of people, especially when crowded together.
3. Testing: home tests are still available for purchase and through insurance. You can test yourself and/or you can also ask friends and family to test themselves prior to having a large gathering. You may also order free COVID tests for your household here: https://www.covid.gov/tests
4. Treatment: if unfortunately, you have been unable to avoid getting infected, there may be medicine available to treat the infection. Call the clinic to see if you're eligible to be prescribed Paxlovid if you have been infected and start to feel bad. You can take it within the first 5 days of the onset of symptoms as long as we know the medications you are taking and the medical conditions you have. Basically, Paxlovid helps you feel better quicker. We can talk about the side effects of Paxlovid if you are interested in learning more about it/should you ever need it.

<u>**Clinical and non-clinical support staff coaching:**</u>
If patient not familiar with the cause, spread and symptoms, see below.
<u>**What is COVID-19?**</u>
COVID-19 (coronavirus-2019) is a disease caused by a virus named SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19 causes respiratory symptoms that can feel much like a cold, the flu, or pneumonia and may attack more than your lungs. Other parts of your body may also be affected by the infection. It is hard to predict who will have mild symptoms and who will have severe symptoms. Most people with severe symptoms and older adults (ages 50 years or older, with risk increasing with age), have underlying heart and lung conditions or have conditions with weak immune systems (lupus, cancer, diabetes, severe arthritis, senior citizens, for example,) But there are folks who have not had any of those conditions and have fallen severely ill or died. Since we are still learning about Covid, and it is hard to predict who will have mild or severe symptoms, one tool we know will decrease your risk of severe illness is getting vaccinated. Some people including those with minor or no symptoms can develop a condition after they have been infected known as "Long COVID."

<u>**How does COVID-19 spread?**</u>
COVID-19 spreads when an infected person breathes out droplets and very small particles that contain the virus. Other people can breathe in these droplets and particles, or these droplets and particles can land on their eyes, nose, or mouth. In some circumstances, these droplets may contaminate surfaces they touch.

Anyone infected with COVID-19 can spread it, even if they do NOT have symptoms.

<u>**Symptoms of COVID-19**</u>
People with COVID-19 have reported a wide range of symptoms – ranging from mild to severe. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. Anyone can have mild to severe symptoms. Possible symptoms include:

• Fever or chills	• New loss of taste or smell
• Cough	• Sore throat
• Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing	• Congestion or runny nose
• Fatigue	• Nausea or vomiting
• Muscle or body aches	• Diarrhea
• Headache	

<u>**Treatment**</u>
One option for treatment is Paxlovid, an antiviral medicine for the treatment of symptomatic COVID-19. The NYC Health Department's COVID-19 Therapeutics Webpage offers eligibility criteria, prescribing instructions, supply updates, clinical considerations, a fact sheet and other resources.

Getting Your Updated COVID-19 Vaccine(s)

Q: Can I get more than 1 dose of the updated COVID-19 vaccine?

A: Most people (everyone 5 years or older) only need 1 dose of the updated vaccine. Children younger than 5 and people with a weakened immune system still need multiple doses of vaccines. People who are unvaccinated and choose to get the Novavax vaccine will need 2 doses.

Q: What does being "up to date" mean?

A: This definition has changed over time, but y**ou are "up to date"** when you have received all COVID-19 vaccine dose(s) recommended for you by CDC – currently, this means at least 1 dose of the updated 2023-2024 Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, regardless of how many doses of COVID-19 vaccine you've received before. In other words, you have received the most recent dose.

Q: Am I required to get vaccinated for work?

A: An employer may require that their workers be vaccinated. **Check directly with your employer** to see if they have any vaccination requirements or rules that apply to you.

Q: Is the COVID-19 vaccine free?

A: Most people's insurance – including Medicaid, Medicare, and most commercial health plans – will fully cover the cost of vaccination. Vaccines are also available through the New York City Health Department and partners, for people who are uninsured or whose insurance doesn't cover vaccination, regardless of immigration status. Sites offering no-cost vaccine to uninsured individuals will be included on Vaccine Finder: https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/

Getting Children and Teens Vaccinated

Q: Are the COVID-19 vaccines the same ones that are given to adults?

A: The COVID-19 **vaccines for children have the same active ingredients as the vaccines given to adults**. However, children receive a smaller and more age-appropriate dose that is right for them.

Q: Is there any reason to wait to get my child vaccinated?

A: *There may be a variety of reasons people choose to delay vaccination. Consider asking probing questions to understand the reasoning the patient may have and respond to specific concerns. If patient is receptive to considering vaccines see below:*

Parents and caregivers should get their child vaccinated as soon as possible.
Getting vaccinated provides the best protection against serious illness if a child gets infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.

Some parents and caregivers delay vaccination up to three months after a recent infection. If your child has recently had COVID-19, they still need to stay up to date with their vaccines, but you may consider delaying the next vaccine dose by 3 months from:

- When their symptoms started.
- Or, if they had no symptoms, when they first received a positive test.

You may personalize your recommendation accordingly, and conclude the above points with a statement such as, "Ultimately I recommend my patients to get vaccinated, even after an infection, for maximum protection" - etc.

Safety
Q: What are the risks of getting a COVID-19 vaccine?
A: Adults and children may have some side effects from a COVID-19 vaccine, including pain, redness or swelling at the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever, and nausea. Most side effect symptoms are mild, and short-lived. Serious side effects are rare but may occur.

Q: If I am pregnant or planning to become pregnant, can I get a COVID-19 vaccine?
A: Yes, COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for people who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or trying to get pregnant now, as well as people who might become pregnant in the future.

COVID infection during pregnancy can put the health of the birthing person and baby at risk.
 People who get COVID-19 during pregnancy are more likely to deliver a preterm (earlier than 37 weeks) or stillborn infant and may also be more likely to have other pregnancy complications.
COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy helps:

- Prevent severe illness and death in people who are pregnant
- Protect babies younger than 6 months old from hospitalization caused by COVID-19
- Learn more about vaccination considerations and the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccinations for people who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Masking and COVID-19 Transmission
Q: Do you still have to wear a mask in NYC?
A: Currently we are at a low level of COVID-19 community transmission, but this can change (*Provider – check your local transmission rates if possible, and tailor your response*). To reduce your risk of getting COVID-19, consider still wearing a mask in

crowded indoor public settings, such as on public transit, at large events, and when shopping in crowded stores. Well-fitting masks are an important tool we have to prevent COVID and other respiratory infections.

It is especially important to consider for those that are at the highest risk for severe COVID-19, including older adults (≥65 years), people who are pregnant, people who are immunocompromised, people with certain underlying medical conditions, and people with certain disabilities that may increase their risk for chronic conditions or immunodeficiency.

Preparing for Your Vaccine

Q: If I already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

A: Yes, you should get a COVID-19 vaccine even if you already had COVID-19 but not necessarily right away.

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine after you recover from COVID-19 infection provides added protection against COVID-19. You may consider delaying your vaccine by 3 months from when your symptoms started or, if you had no symptoms, when you received a positive test.

Q: Can I get vaccinated against COVID-19 while I am currently sick with COVID-19?

A: No. You should wait to be vaccinated until after your symptoms have resolved and you **complete your isolation period.** People who have symptoms will end isolation at a different time than people who do not have symptoms. This also applies to people who have been vaccinated but get COVID-19 before getting any additional or booster doses. Additionally, you *may* consider delaying your next vaccine by 3 months from when your symptoms started or, if you had no symptoms, when you received a positive test.

**To find COVID-19 vaccine locations near you:
Search https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/**

To find COVID-19 Testing locations near you:
https://maps.nyc.gov/covid-testing

To find the City-run free at-home test distribution sites most convenient to you, view a list of locations here:
https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/covid-19-testing-sites/ **or Text "COVID TEST" to 855-48 to find a test site near you**

Long COVID
Help with long COVID will remain available. If you think you have long Covid, talk to your provider or visit a Post-COVID Care Clinic:
  o   NYC Health + Hospitals: AfterCare Program

Treatment:
COVID-19 Treatments and Medications

For now, oral antiviral medicines, including Paxlovid, remain free.
  o   Find a pharmacy or Test to Treat location on the COVID-19 Test to Treat Locator or call 212-COVID-19.
  o   NYC Health + Hospitals ExpressCare will continue to prescribe Paxlovid or help you get other types of treatment at low to no cost.

Additional COVID-19 questions can be found here:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html