

# How to talk about COVID-19 vaccination with your employees

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The decision to receive the COVID-19 vaccine is a highly personal one, yet each individual's decision has profound implications for public health. At the farm level, that makes farmer and farm worker vaccination an important risk management issue. The more people on your farm who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, the lower your risk of experiencing a COVID outbreak with consequences for employee health and farm operations.

As a manager, your words and actions have potential to influence employee attitudes about the vaccine. How can you communicate effectively about COVID-19 vaccination with your family members and employees? Here is a list of Do's and Don'ts to help you have productive conversations that lead to more vaccinations.

## DO

### 1. Be the first person on your farm to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Actions speak louder than words. Leading by example is an easy way to demonstrate that you take the threat of COVID seriously and you view the vaccine as an important tool to reduce COVID risk. It also gives you the ability to speak from your own experience about the process of getting vaccinated and any side effects that you experienced. If one person on the farm gets vaccinated, that may make others less hesitant about receiving the vaccine. According to a survey conducted by the [Kaiser Family Foundation's COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor](#), individuals who were eager to get the vaccine were 79% more likely to know someone who was already vaccinated compared to individuals who said they would get the vaccine "only if required".

## **2. Discuss COVID-19 vaccination early and often with your employees.**

Encourage employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine and discuss how vaccination is good for the farm. Share your reasons for getting vaccinated and describe your experience with the vaccination process. Provide information about COVID-19 risks and the benefits of vaccination from trusted sources, including the [CDC](#), the [Cornell Farmworker Program](#), and the [Institute for Food Safety at Cornell](#). Be sure to provide information in your employees' native language. Share the [English](#) and [Spanish](#) recordings of a recent webinar featuring medical providers discussing "COVID-19 vaccines for farmworkers: Should I get it and what are the side effects?"

## **3. Share the fact that vaccines have a long and effective history of controlling and eradicating diseases in both humans and animals.**

Measles, mumps, diphtheria, whooping cough, and polio are just a few of the devastating human diseases that we [control routinely with vaccines](#). [Smallpox](#), an historic scourge of humanity that killed 3 in 10 of its victims and left others scarred and blinded, was eradicated worldwide by vaccines. Similarly, [animal agriculture industries](#) have long used vaccines to prevent disease in livestock. Farmers and farm employees should be very familiar with vaccines and understand the import role they play in controlling disease and promoting health.

## **4. Help employees navigate the logistics of getting vaccinated.**

Make sure your workers know that, in New York State, vaccination is free and available to [anyone age 16 and up who lives or works in the state](#). Share information with your employees about clinic locations, dates and times, and how to register. Make sure employees know they are [eligible for up to four hours of paid leave to get a COVID-19 vaccination](#). Discuss transportation options and whether the farm is able to transport employees to a vaccination site.

Once your employees have registered for the vaccine, make sure they have all necessary documentation ready for their appointment, including photo identification. This can include documents from another country, such as passports, voter registration cards and consular IDs, or photo identification from another state. Everyone should bring proof that they live or work in New York State. Those that do not have a New York State ID can bring a paystub showing the farm address. Health insurance is not required for vaccination. However, people who have health insurance should bring their insurance policy information to their appointment.

## **5. Listen to employee concerns and consider whether you can do anything to alleviate them.**

Listening without judgement to employee questions and concerns is one of the best ways to build confidence in the COVID-19 vaccine. Some employees may voice concerns stemming from a lack of information or misinformation about the vaccine. Others may worry about missing work after getting the vaccine due to potential side effects. In response, be prepared to share your own reasons for getting vaccinated, provide information about vaccine safety from reliable sources, and communicate your farm's sick leave policy. Discuss staggering vaccination dates for workers to avoid the possibility of everyone experiencing side effects at the same time.

## **6. Continue sharing information about new opportunities to get vaccinated.**

Farmworker vaccination efforts across New York State are gaining momentum. Now that eligibility is based on age, farmers and farm workers may access the vaccine through multiple channels, including sites run by New York State, county health departments, and pharmacies. According to [the Governor's April 13 announcement](#), the state is devoting additional resources to increase vaccine delivery to farmers and farm workers through convenient pop-up vaccination sites. As you learn about new vaccination opportunities, be sure to share them with your employees. If you have workers who are not ready to get vaccinated now, they may be interested in a few weeks or months.

## **DON'T**

### **1. Repeat doubts about the safety of COVID-19 vaccinations from unreliable sources.**

The scientific community is strongly in support of the vaccines that are approved for use in the U.S. because they are [safe and effective](#). This was demonstrated both through large scale trials while the vaccines were being developed and now by the hundreds of millions of people who have safely received them. Rumors and doubts expressed by leaders can make employees afraid of the vaccine. There are actual risks from vaccines, such as rare allergic reactions, but these risks are far outweighed by the risk of not getting vaccinated and the danger that unvaccinated individuals present to themselves and to everyone with whom they come into contact.

### **2. Disregard or judge employees when they ask questions or share their concerns.**

These are truly uncertain times and the pandemic has provoked historic levels of fear in our society. Stress and anxiety can hinder good decision-making and leave people vulnerable to unfounded rumors and misinformation. Do not dismiss employees' concerns with a quick judgement. Instead, listen and ask questions. A listening ear can help people unpack their concerns and hold them up for examination against the facts. You might then have an opportunity to follow up with reliable information from trusted resources after listening.

### **3. Fail to encourage your employees to get vaccinated.**

It is not enough to rely on public messages to encourage your employees to get vaccinated. As a business manager, you are a trusted source of information and guidance. Your silence about COVID-19 vaccination might be read by employees as indifference or, worse, hostility toward vaccination. The safety of your employees and their families, the future of your business, and the health of our communities depends in part on your positive communications about vaccination.

## Conclusion

Leadership matters. Your efforts to encourage vaccination for your employees and their families could have far-reaching effects in protecting health and life. Please do your part to encourage the people you lead to get the vaccine, get protected, and help snuff out COVID-19.

## Resources

Here are the full web addresses for the two webinar recordings referenced above, hosted by the Cornell Farmworker Program and [Finger Lakes Community Health](#):

- COVID-19 vaccines for farmworkers: Should I get it and what are the side effects? (English): <https://cals.cornell.edu/covid-19-vaccines-farmworkers-should-i-get-it-and-what-are-side-effects>
- Las vacunas para el COVID-19: ¿Debería obtenerla y cuáles son sus efectos? (Español): <https://cals.cornell.edu/las-vacunas-para-el-covid-19-deberia-obtenerla-y-cuales-son-sus-efectos>

A set of FAQs, based on farmworker questions during the webinars, is available through the Cornell Farmworker Program ([farmworkers@cornell.edu](mailto:farmworkers@cornell.edu)).

The Cornell Farmworker Program also has emergency resources available to assist farm workers whose families have been affected by COVID-19. Information about the farmworker emergency relief fund in both Spanish and English can be found at: <http://www.trabajadores.cornell.edu/>