

# CONVERSATION STARTERS:

## Talking to parents about recommended and required childhood vaccines

Throughout the United States, rates of childhood vaccination have declined during the course of the COVID pandemic.

This job aid offers suggestions that staff working in clinical or community settings can use to start a conversation with parents and caregivers about recommended and required vaccinations, using the opportunity afforded when you may be meeting with them for another reason.

### Conversation Basics

- **Set a positive, affirming tone.** “It’s great to see you today” or “It’s so good that you’re taking care of your child’s health.”
- **Use normalizing language, so that the caregiver doesn’t feel singled out or judged.** “I talk about this with all of my [patients/families/individuals]” or “A lot of parents/caregivers have questions about...”
- **Ask permission to continue the conversation.** “May I ask you some questions about vaccines your child has had in the past?” or “Would it be okay if we spend some time talking about this today?”
- **Ensure the caregiver knows it is their choice to vaccinate their child.** “While I strongly recommend that your child receive the required and recommended vaccines, as their parent/caregiver, this decision is completely up to you.” or “If you need to take some time to think about this after our conversation, you do not have to decide today. We can always revisit this conversation another time.”
- **Use presumptive language, if you are a healthcare provider.** It is a best practice for healthcare providers to use [“presumptive language”](#)<sup>1</sup> when talking about vaccinations with families. Using presumptive language assumes that vaccination is the default option and is shown to increase the likelihood that parents will vaccinate. Presumptive language is a strong, confident vaccine recommendation. It might sound like “Your child is due for 3 vaccines today: HPV, Meningococcal, and Tdap. The nurse is going to prepare them and will be back in a few minutes. Do you have any questions I can answer?”
- **Use inclusive language.** For example, say “parent” instead of “father” or “mother.”



## Conversation Starters and Follow Up Questions

Here we present several conversation starters as well as follow-up questions you may use to initiate and continue the conversation. You may modify these based on your role. We recommend practicing these with a co-worker or peer to increase comfortability in conversation.

### Starting the Conversation

- “Many parents and caregivers I talk to appreciate the chance to talk about the recommended and required vaccines their child needs, so they know what to expect. Can we review which vaccines your child is due for?”
- “Since you’re here, I’d like to review the vaccines your child is currently recommended or required to receive. Over the past few years, some children have fallen behind on their vaccinations, and I’m working with all of my [patients/families/individuals] to get their children back on track. How does this sound?”
- “I know we often have conversations about your child’s health and development. One part of a child’s growth and development is getting their vaccines. Would it be okay if we have a conversation about this?”
- “Is your child planning to or do they currently attend childcare or school? There are several vaccinations that are required by the state of California for children attending childcare or school. Would you like to review them together?”
- “We have [child’s name] down for a [reason for visit]. It’s nice to see you two again. We like to let everyone coming into our office know about the recommended and required vaccines children need at this age. Let’s plan to go through this today.”

### Continuing the Conversation

- “I know that you prioritize your child’s health. What are your hopes and expectations for their health in the future?”
- “Do you have any questions or concerns about getting your child vaccinated? It is possible that they may experience side effects but these are normal and mild.”
- “I wanted to revisit the conversation that we had about vaccination a few weeks ago. How are you feeling about that?”

#### Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7553710/>