

# Tips for speaking with colleagues about COVID-19 vaccination

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**Sara Berg, MS**

Senior News Writer

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The COVID-19 vaccination rollout in the U.S. has run into some resistance from an unlikely group: health professionals. While front-line workers have had top priority access to COVID-19 vaccines, some may be hesitant to receive shots. These doubts come as a surprise to many who assumed health professionals would eagerly accept one of the COVID-19 vaccines. However, physicians can help build confidence among colleagues who might be hesitant to receive a vaccination.

“In the emergency department, there is a protocol to get things done quickly and efficiently, so you can get that patient treated,” said Sandra Fryhofer, MD, an Atlanta general internist. Similarly, “with COVID, there were steps put in place to get vaccines developed and available as soon as possible, but the rapid pace of the process led to mistrust and misinformation.”



Sandra Fryhofer, MD

“There are also some people who, no matter what, you’re never going to convince that vaccines are good,” said Dr. Fryhofer, a member of the AMA Board of Trustees who serves as the AMA’s liaison to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Dr. Fryhofer also is a member of ACIP’s COVID-19 Vaccine Work Group.

However, “there are fewer of those people than you might think, because I believe in my heart that when people are given the right information, and their questions are answered in a very open, secure and nonthreatening environment, they will make good decisions,” she said. “Getting vaccinated against COVID can be a lifesaving decision.”

In an AMA interview, Dr. Fryhofer shared tips for how to respond when colleagues remain skeptical about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

## Follow the AIMS method

When addressing vaccine hesitancy, Dr. Fryhofer recommends using the mnemonic “AIMS,” which stands for announce, inquire, mirror and secure trust.

“Announce and recommend that someone should go and get their COVID vaccine today,” she said. If a colleague says that they don’t want to, then that is when “you ask why and listen to their concerns.”

Once “you’ve listened to their concerns, then you mirror by repeating what they are concerned about, which indicates you understand,” said Dr. Fryhofer. “Next, secure trust by not being judgmental and by providing information or reasons that alleviate their concerns or answer their questions.”

Read about some essential terms doctors need to know about COVID-19 vaccines.

## Explain that studies were thorough

“People didn’t just pull these mRNA vaccines out of a hat,” said Dr. Fryhofer. “Rather, they conducted studies of 44,000 people for the Pfizer trial and 30,000 for the Moderna trial—no corners were cut here.”

“These are larger than many of the studies that are usually done for vaccines,” she said. “The companies also went a step further; there’s diversity in the types of participants and they included patients with comorbidities.

“They really were trying to get the participants in the studies to more closely reflect the real world,” Dr. Fryhofer added.

Watch part one and part two of this “AMA COVID-19 Update” where Dr. Fryhofer and other experts discuss Pfizer vaccine use and allocation.

## Take it step by step

“As physicians, we are taught to make thoughtful evidence-based decisions about patients and about recommendations,” said Dr. Fryhofer. “You just have to take a deep breath and take it step by step and make sure your questions are answered.”

“We can’t be judgmental and you can’t be upset with people,” she said. “You have to show respect, you have to be open and inspire trust and confidence because if you’re judgmental, you’re just going to put people off.”

“I had to go through this with one of my employees and I went step by step with her,” Dr. Fryhofer explained, adding that “she ended up getting the vaccine and she texted me the day she got the vaccine, thanking me for being so patient with her.”

“There is a shortage of vaccines, so there’s time for people to make up their mind,” she said. However, “it is concerning when you’ve got front-line health care workers who are at risk and are not getting vaccinated.”

Discover [three ways physicians can help combat COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy](#).

## Share good resources

Whether it is a colleague or a patient, “refer everyone to good sources of information,” said Dr. Fryhofer, adding that “the CDC is a very reliable source” for information about the COVID-19 vaccines because it provides evidence-based resources.

“Until people have information, you really don’t know what they will choose to do,” she said, noting that “it’s one thing to make a decision based on limited information, but once you get your questions answered, what will your decision be then?”

“That’s what we have to work for,” said Dr. Fryhofer, adding that the “AMA is providing a lot of sources of good information and making it easy for our members and for others to find this information.”

Learn more from the AMA about [what doctors wish patients knew about COVID-19 vaccination](#).



The AMA has developed frequently-asked-questions documents on COVID-19 vaccination covering safety, allocation and distribution, administration and more. There are two FAQs, one designed to answer patients' questions, and another to address physicians' COVID-19 vaccine questions.