Faith Leader’s Conversation Guide to Vaccinations
As some of the most trusted voices in the Black Community, faith leaders are often relied upon for guidance on very complex issues. When it comes to the COVID-19 vaccine, faith leaders may have concerns about offering advice without having easy access to science-based facts. This communication guide is designed to make it easier for you to support your congregants by answering their questions in plain language. While this guide is not intended to persuade anyone to get vaccinated, it is helpful to have in one place a list of commonly voiced concerns and be able to point your congregants in the direction of accurate information.

While reviewing this guide, we encourage you to:

• **supplement this information** with your own research on vaccines and the Centers for Disease Control’s current recommendations.

• **start a dialogue** with congregants, family, friends, healthcare providers, traditional healers, and community members.

• **share accurate information** with congregants in faith-based newsletters, messages, social media, and programs.
The Conference of National Black Churches (CNBC) is honored to partner with the American Lung Association for our Trusted Voices, Trusted Content, Trusted Spaces vaccine education project. CNBC believes the Black Church has a moral obligation not only to address the spiritual needs of our people, but also to promote physical health and well-being. As trusted voices, we must demonstrate our commitment to promote practices that prevent disease, and we must champion public health initiatives that benefit Black Church communities across the country.

Vaccine hesitancy is not a new phenomenon for Black people, however the COVID-19 pandemic made it essential for Black pastors and faith leaders to speak out. The pandemic came with many lessons. Among them was the realization that there continues to be health education gaps within the Black community that further compound the health inequities we experience every day. Questions regarding the safety and efficacy of the novel COVID-19 vaccines unearthed questions about vaccinations in general. Mistrust, rooted in a long history of medical and political injustice and manifesting in the current state of Black health, has demanded that faith leaders take up the banner to protect our people and our communities.

I am proud to present this Vaccine Education Information Guide on behalf of the Conference of National Black Churches. Please use this as a starting point for trusted content even as you collect additional resources and increase your understanding of the benefits of immunization for children and adults in disease prevention. Faith and science go together. This work can help save lives.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

—Numbers 6:24-26 (NIV)

Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson
CNBC Chairman of the Board of Trustees
The American Lung Association is proud to partner with the Conference of National Black Churches (CNBC) for our Trusted Voices, Trusted Content, and Trusted Spaces vaccine education project. Throughout the pandemic, the Lung Association has worked alongside the CNBC to reach communities of color and emphasize the importance of vaccinations in disease and virus prevention. To protect the overall population and those most vulnerable, we need a sufficiently high proportion of the population to get vaccinated, especially the Black community who has been disproportionately impacted by the virus.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought social and racial injustice and inequity to the forefront of public health and has highlighted that health equity is still a work in progress, as the virus has unequally affected many racial and ethnic minority groups, including the Black community. Understandably, immunizations have long been a topic of hesitancy for Black Americans. Thankfully, the introduction of authorized vaccines and science-based information gives us a path to both end the pandemic and ensure this community is protected from numerous diseases that are preventable through standard vaccines.

The Vaccine Education Information Guide is a trusted resource to use alongside additional resources to increase your understanding of the benefits of immunization for children and adults in disease prevention and share with your community.

Thank you for your continued dedication to staying informed through science-based information and helping our nation learn about the benefits of vaccination to return to the moments that matter most.

Harold Wimmer
American Lung Association President & CEO
Keeping our populations vaccinated can stop the spread of deadly diseases in their tracks. As in the case of smallpox, vaccines can even bring some diseases to extinction. But prolonged vaccine deliberation and hesitancy can leave populations vulnerable to outbreaks and invite a reemergence of life-altering illness. For instance, measles, a dangerous disease, is making a comeback in the U.S. as parents choose not to vaccinate their children.

Fortunately, many vaccine-preventable diseases are rarely seen in the U.S. because of effective immunization programs. The church can be a conduit to maintaining healthy, fully vaccinated communities.
Top 5 Reasons to Get Vaccines

Always be ready to tell everyone who asks you why you believe as you do.

—1 Peter 3:15 (NLT)

1. Many deadly, vaccine-preventable diseases are still around.
   Because most of the U.S. is now vaccinated against the diseases that caused serious illness and disability in past generations, we may think these diseases no longer exist. This is not true. In fact, even in the U.S., outbreaks of vaccine-preventable disease still happen where vaccination rates are lower. With the modern age of easy travel, the risk of exposure is even greater.

2. It is better to prevent a disease than try to treat it later.
   Most vaccine-preventable diseases can lead to major complications including life-long disability or even death. For instance, the MMR vaccine protects against 3 diseases: measles, mumps and rubella which all have the potential for great complications. Measles can lead to seizures and brain damage; mumps can lead to hearing loss; and rubella can lead to brain infection and serious birth defects in pregnant women. Prevention is worth much more than treatment.

3. The threat of exposure to serious infection is everywhere and in common spaces.
   Children are at risk for contracting serious diseases from places and people they visit every day including daycare, grocery stores, neighbors’ homes or from siblings in their own homes. Vaccines allow us to live free from concern that a trip to the playground will end in an infection caused by a vaccine-preventable disease.

4. Vaccines are safe and specially tailored for children’s and adults’ differing immune systems.
   All vaccines undergo years of testing and clinical trials to ensure they are safe and effective for adults and/or children. Dosing for children may differ to accommodate developing immune systems.

   The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control continuously monitor vaccines after distribution to ensure no safety concerns arise. Common side effects are not unlike those of other medications such as low fever or soreness where the shot was given. Serious side effects for vaccines are exceptionally rare.

5. Vaccines aren’t just for you—they protect everyone.
   Getting vaccinated benefits both personal and community health. Vaccinated people cannot get a disease or spread it to other members of the community. When many people in a community are vaccinated, they help protect others who cannot be immunized because they are too young or have certain medical conditions.
Once upon a time in a pretend megachurch community far away, the congregants at Mt. Vax AME church enjoyed lively services every week. The youth ministry was vibrant, and children’s church was the highlight of the year. Nearly 80% of the members were vaccinated against whooping cough, a highly contagious disease that affects the lungs. The choir sang for joy because there had only ever been a few cases since anyone could remember. Over time, though, the members began to believe that they didn’t need to be vaccinated against whooping cough anymore. Since there had never been many cases, they just didn’t think the vaccine was important. Eventually, only about 10% of them were being vaccinated. One day, after a very eventful Friends and Family Sunday, there was a small whooping cough outbreak in the infant care room. A few days later a handful people from the singles ministry came down with whooping cough as well. Soon whooping cough began to spread all over the church. The youth ministry lost its vibrancy and children’s church was routinely canceled. Because so few people were vaccinated, little could be done to control this highly contagious disease. After about 5 years, thousands of the members had gotten whooping cough infections, and 41 of them had died.

It was only then that the members of Mt. Vax AME church realized that they had become weary in their well doing. They had neglected to recognize the importance of vaccinations, but they were determined to do better. In time, once vaccinations had again become a part of everyone’s routine, cases of whooping cough began to disappear from the Mt. Vax AME congregation. The choir sang for joy once more, and children’s church was again the highlight of the year.

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. —Galatians 6:9 (NIV)
Scripture provides guidance that is relevant for everyday living. The main idea described in Proverbs 27:12 suggests that taking steps to prevent predictable trouble is far better than dealing with the potentially life-altering consequences later. This directly applies to our health and to prevention. It is wise to include vaccination in the preventive measures we take each day to protect our health against future trouble. We can experience extended life expectancy and improved health outcomes if we are mindful of the behaviors that prevent disease.

A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences. —Proverbs 27:12 (NLT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preventable</th>
<th>Heart disease, stroke, cancer, anxiety, and weight gain.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXERCISE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>PREVENTS:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HEALTHY DIET</strong></td>
<td>Type 2 diabetes, chronic illness like heart disease, and bone loss.</td>
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<td>PREVENTS:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>QUITTING SMOKING</strong></td>
<td>Premature death, emphysema, tuberculosis, and many cancers including lung cancer.</td>
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<td>PREVENTS:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ADEQUATE SLEEP</strong></td>
<td>Depression, dementia, obesity and premature aging.</td>
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<td>PREVENTS:</td>
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<td>PREVENTS:</td>
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Health Inequities and How the Church Can Be an Instrument of Change

Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

—Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

Health disparities are differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations.

While it is not our responsibility to solve all of the problems created by health disparities in America, there is a role organized churches can play to help support congregants and address vaccine disparities in their communities.

### Church Level
- Provide education about how to access quality health care
- Discuss how to advocate for one’s self by asking about getting vaccinated during regular check-ups
- Find creative opportunities to explain how insurance works and how to find coverage
- Talk openly and often about how childhood and adult vaccination are important for disease prevention
- Address questions about vaccines with credible, easy-to-understand answers and resources
- Collect and report race-specific data

### Community Level
- Become an approved vaccination site or support community centers or other testing locations that serve your members
- Create partnerships with local organizations and healthcare institutions that address vaccine disparities
- Provide volunteers or use church vehicles to provide transportation for vaccination events
- Advocate for vaccine-related policy change such as paid time off for vaccination appointments
Before and After
First-Time and Booster Shots

The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

Proverbs 21:31 (ESV)

Before
Preparing for vaccinations

✓ Be sure you understand which vaccines are needed.
This applies to you and your child. Read vaccine materials and understand which vaccine will be administered and what the common side effects may be. Prepare any questions for your healthcare provider ahead of time.

✓ Don’t skip the Vaccine Information Statement.
These can feel like fine print, but it is important to be aware of both the benefits and risks of any vaccine. This statement will be provided to you, but it is also available at cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/index.html

✓ Bring your health or immunization records.
If they are not already on file with your physician’s office, a handy copy will help ensure you (or your child) are on schedule for the correct vaccines. Your records will also provide your doctor with important clues about your health including allergies or a weakened immune system.

After
Support and self-care afterwards

✓ Be ready to comfort and cuddle.
A little extra TLC will be necessary for you or your child after a vaccine. Use a cool cloth or cold pack to reduce soreness where a shot is given. Ask your doctor which fever reducers or pain killers are appropriate for you or your child. Keep snacks and comforts nearby.

✓ Take time to relax.
Create space to relax and drink extra fluids after a vaccination. Resting a bit will also give you a chance to pay close attention to any changes in how you or your child may be feeling. Report anything concerning to your doctor.
1 The shots may sting, but the vaccines won't hurt. Some vaccines can be taken by mouth, but most will be given as a shot in the arm or leg. That will hurt a bit. You may be sore where you got your shot, but any other side effects are extremely rare. Risks associated with vaccines are much smaller than the risks associated with the disease itself.

It's also important for you to know that vaccines do not cause autism. We don't know what causes autism, but scientists have scrutinized vaccines more than any other potential cause. After more than 1,000 scientific studies, even judges in a court of law have concluded that vaccines are not the cause of autism.

2 Vaccines are made with you in mind. Don't worry about vaccines being more than your body can handle. The amount of germs you're given in a vaccine is very tiny compared to the amount of germs you're exposed to in everyday life. Plus, vaccines for kids are made especially for your developing immune system, so you never have to worry about getting too much.

3 Staying on track is key. Stay on the recommended schedule for your vaccines. These schedules (along with the proper dosages) were created by top infectious disease doctors. There are no known benefits of delaying or spreading out vaccines.
### 2021 Recommended Immunizations for Children from Birth Through 6 Years Old

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2021 Recommended Immunizations for Children from Birth Through 6 Years Old</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birth</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>HepB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is your family growing? To protect your new baby against whooping cough, get a DTaP vaccine. The recommended time is the 2nd through 16th week of pregnancy. Talk to your doctor for more details.</td>
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**Footnotes:**

- Two doses given at least four weeks apart are recommended for children age 6 months through 8 years of age who are getting an influenza (flu) vaccine for the first time and for some other children in this age group.
- Two doses of HepA vaccine are needed for lasting protection. The first dose of HepA vaccine should be given between 12 months and 23 months of age. The second dose should be given 6 months after the first dose. All children and adolescents over 24 months of age who have not been vaccinated should also receive 2 doses of HepA vaccine.

If your child has any medical conditions that put him at risk for infection or is traveling outside the United States, talk to your child's doctor about additional vaccines that he or she may need.

For more information, call toll-free 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) or visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents

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## Grown-Ups Need Shots, Too

Check this quick list of vaccines recommended for adults. Even if you were once vaccinated as a child, booster shots are often necessary.

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<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>COVID-19 is currently available for adults and children as young as 12.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Seasonal influenza vaccine is recommended annually.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine is recommended for adults 19 years and older who have a weakened immune system.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Tdap vaccine (Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis/whooping cough) is recommended for all adults who did not have one as an adolescent. Tdap is also recommended for pregnant women at 27–36 weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>Tetanus vaccine booster shot is recommended every 10 years.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td>HPV vaccine are recommended for preteens (age 11–12) and adults up to age 26. This protects against the virus that causes cervical, anal and other cancers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td>Shingles vaccine are recommended for adults age 50 and older.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td>Chickenpox/varicella vaccine is recommended for adults who have never had chickenpox.</td>
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Some vaccines are especially recommended for people who work in certain environments such as healthcare workers. Some people should not be vaccinated due to allergies or a weakened immune system. Always consult your doctor to help you make the best-informed decisions about your care.
Faith leaders like you are regularly called upon to provide emotional support, inspiration, prayer, and advice for making important life decisions. You are a trusted voice in your church family, and it is important for you to be comfortable and prepared to lead conversations about congregant’s spiritual and physical health.

When it comes to health decisions like immunization, you can be a trusted source. Consider the following approaches for starting conversations about adult and childhood vaccines:

**Approach 1: The Invitation**

During small gatherings, such as prayer, create an opportunity to make mention of the need to care for one’s physical health alongside spiritual health. Note that some questions may arise before the session begins.

**Biblical Support:**

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

—James 2:15-17 (NIV)

**Potential Script:**

Before this time of prayer, I want us to be ever mindful of the importance of tending to our physical temples as we also lift up our spirits. I know that conversations about viruses and vaccines have been happening more often these days, and it is important for us all to ask questions and get an understanding of how vaccinations of all kinds can benefit and protect our health. After prayer, I’d like to have a short talk with those who are interested in learning about immunization for our babies as well as immunization for adults who may have long forgotten about much-needed booster shots and other vaccines like the flu shot. Here in the U.S. we are very blessed not to see many of the diseases of the past like polio, and even chickenpox. But these diseases still exist. Some are life-threatening, and outbreaks do still happen. So let’s take 15 minutes to talk about these things after prayer/service before we go home today. Thank you.
Key Talking Points for Immediate Questions:

• **Does this meeting apply to me?** I don’t have children, and I don’t take the flu shot. Vaccinations like the COVID-19 vaccine remind us that vaccines are for everyone, even for adults. Many vaccines you may have received as a child require booster shots during adulthood. But remember vaccines not only keep us from getting seriously ill; they also help because when we are protected, we can protect others in our community who aren’t yet able to be vaccinated because of their age or certain health conditions.

• **What do you mean when you say “vaccine”?** Vaccines are what we use to protect against dangerous diseases. They help us build immunity so that our bodies know how to fight off that disease without us having to become sick with it first. You have likely already received many vaccines such as MMR which protects against measles, mumps and rubella.

### Approach 2: Informational Announcement

Make a special 3-minute Sunday morning announcement concerning immunization and make printed resources available in a common area.

**Biblical Support:**

*Wisdom shouts in the streets. She cries out in the public square.* —Proverbs 1:20 (NLT)

**Potential Script:**

Good morning! If you’ve never seen anyone hooked up to an iron lung, or never seen an entire city of children crippled by polio, thank a vaccine. In today’s announcements we want to include information we can all use about our physical health. One of the most important things you can do to prevent the spread of disease is to be sure you, and especially your children, are current on all vaccinations.

Vaccines allow us to build immunity against diseases without ever having to become sick with them first. What we know about vaccines is that they are safe and effective. Many vaccines, like those for the measles or the mumps have been around for decades, so we know we can trust them. Newer ones, like the chickenpox and COVID-19 vaccines have gone through rigorous testing just like the older ones, and have passed clinical trials involving thousands of people, so we know they are safe and that they work.

Be sure to stay on top of your baby’s or young child’s immunization schedule as this is best way for them to build a strong immune system without having to suffer the often devastating and life-changing complications that some can cause. It is also important to note that vaccines are not the cause of autism. Scientists still don’t know the cause of
autism, but no other potential cause has been studied more than vaccines. After more than 1,000 studies, the medical community has said time and time again that vaccines do not cause autism spectrum disorder. The risk of disease is far too great to ignore the science here.

Now, Grown-ups and Elders: We know many of you have got proof right on your shoulders that you’ve been vaccinated, but don’t forget that some vaccines like tetanus do require a booster shot during adulthood. And, you want to be sure you have also protected yourself against pneumonia, COVID and seasonal flu which all disproportionately affect African Americans.

Now I know that many people ask, what about side effects? This is a valid question. But unless you have a major allergy or a specific health condition, side effects associated with vaccines are always mild. A little soreness where you got the shot is nothing compared to smallpox or meningitis. And if you start to feel a little tired or come down with a slight fever after a vaccination, this does not mean you have contracted the illness. This is your body’s normal response as it learns to fight off a new threat. For anything that feels a little off, always talk to your doctor.

The bottom line is that vaccines not only protect our personal health, but they also protect our neighbors as well—and we are called to care for others as ourselves. Many of us are too young or have certain health conditions and cannot be vaccinated. So when most of us get vaccinated, we contribute to our entire community’s good health.

Thank you.

Key Talking Points for Immediate Questions:

- Many of the diseases you mentioned like smallpox and polio don’t exist anymore, do they? These diseases do exist, but may be rarely seen in the U.S. because of our expansive immunization program. Communities with low vaccination rates remain at risk. With international travel being so easy, and with many parents opting not to vaccinate their children, we often see outbreaks and even resurgence of diseases like measles in some communities.

- Where can I learn more? You can learn more about vaccines at CDC.gov or grab some information from the table in lobby/foyer. Be sure to provide printed information in a common area.

- How do I pay for necessary vaccines? Most insurance companies cover vaccinations as a part of preventive care, but it is also possible to get vaccinated without insurance. Learn more at https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/pay/index.html

- Isn’t it better to acquire diseases naturally? Most vaccine-preventable diseases can lead to major complications including life-long disability or even death. Prevention is worth much more than treatment after getting the disease.
Approach 3: Include Vaccine Information in Your Community Church

As you and/or congregants conduct community outreach, come equipped with health information about topics like immunization. Before or after you begin conversations about church going or spiritual needs, be sure to ask if they are interested in learning more about how to participate in community health efforts through immunization. Keep resources like the Better For It toolkit handy.

Key Talking Points and Questions to Ask to Start the Conversation:

• **There are currently 17 vaccine-preventable diseases from which you can be protected.** Can you name them? Are you up-to-date?

• **Getting vaccinated is one of the most important things we can do to prevent disease.** What prevention measures do you take to take care of your health? Are you up-to-date on your vaccines?

• **More than 35 million Americans get the flu each year.** Will you consider getting a flu shot to help protect the most vulnerable members of our community?

• **The COVID-19 vaccine was developed quickly in order to address an international public health emergency.** It is now available at no cost. Are your friends and family vaccinated against COVID-19? Can we leave information for them to review?

• **Vaccinations help ensure that an equal opportunity for optimal health is available to everyone.** Do you have friends or family that would like to learn more about immunization?