



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

# Supporting Vaccine Confidence

A message from Dr. Helena Swinkels, FNHA Office of the Chief Medical Officer

If you have friends or family who are postponing or refusing the COVID-19 vaccine, you are likely concerned for them – and perhaps a bit frustrated. This is understandable. Nobody wants to see their loved ones at risk of contracting a serious illness, potentially infecting others in their circles who may be more vulnerable.

If you hope to support your friends/family to gain confidence in vaccines and to get vaccinated for their own health and those around them, it is important to be aware that there really are valid reasons for their hesitation. We need to approach any discussion about vaccination hesitancy tactfully, respectfully and supportively, with understanding and compassion.



*Dr. Helena Swinkels, Office of the Chief Medical Officer*

### ***Consider the possible reasons for vaccine hesitancy***

1. COVID-19 vaccines are relatively new vaccines, so some hesitancy is natural.
2. First Nations people in BC remember the colonial legacy of systemic racism, medical experimentation and mistreatment.
3. The perception that the vaccine development and approval appeared rushed.
4. Fear of needles, taking time off work, or side effects.
5. Misinformation and conspiracy theories that spread like wildfire through social media.

### ***Respond respectfully and supportively to help promote vaccine confidence***

**Be respectful.** Regardless of the reason for vaccine hesitancy, it is important to be respectful and patient if you want people to be open to your encouragement that they get vaccinated.

**Really listen!** To help people change their minds about the COVID-19 vaccine, you will need to listen to their concerns and be empathetic – not judgmental.

**Be specific.** Look into their specific concerns if you don't have the answers, and provide them with good sources of plain-language information. For example, a pregnant friend or family member may be swayed by the fact that pregnant women who get COVID-19 are as likely to be hospitalized as seniors 65 and up.

**Provide practical assistance.** Determine if there are things holding the person back from getting vaccinated. Perhaps they need free babysitting, help booking a vaccination appointment online, or a drive to a clinic.

Above all, help them find well-informed resources from experts they DO trust – such as the FNHA website or other Indigenous or local community organizations.