

Increasing Vaccination Rates For Patients With Cardiovascular Disease

9 Quick Tips For Your Practice



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1. Talk with patients about the vaccines they need.

Many adults don't know which vaccines they need - or that vaccines are needed throughout life. Set aside time during patient visits to explain which vaccines are recommended for people with heart disease and when they should ideally get them.

The American College of Cardiology's CardioSmart patient handout, *Have Heart Disease? Get the Vaccines You Need to Stay Healthy*, can help support your discussions.



Vaccines are an integral part of managing heart disease. They are another tool to live heart healthy – just like keeping follow-up visits, eating nutritious foods, being active, and not smoking.

Recommend and refer
for vaccination.



2. Make a clear, strong recommendation for vaccination.

A recommendation from a trusted clinician is the leading reason patients get vaccinated. For example, saying "It's that time of year, so you'll get your flu shot before you leave" or "Here is a prescription to take to your local pharmacy or primary care office to get your flu shot."

Explain to patients that 1) illness and complications from vaccine-preventable diseases can be worse for people with heart disease or who have suffered a heart attack or stroke and 2) keeping up with vaccines is an essential step to stay healthy. Make it personal if you feel comfortable doing so; for example sharing, "My family and I get our flu vaccines every year."

If your practice doesn't offer vaccines, use ACC's *Vaccination Referral Form For Adults With Heart Disease* to help reinforce the importance and urgency of routine vaccination. There are also well-established techniques for discussing vaccines that can help engage patients in our new discussion guide *How to Talk With Our Heart Patients About Adult Vaccinations*.

3. Explain, in simple language, how vaccines work.

When people - especially those who are hesitant about getting a vaccine - understand how vaccines work, they are more likely to get vaccinated.



4. Actively listen to patients who are unsure about a vaccine.

Vaccine hesitancy is real. Some patients may hesitate getting vaccines or a specific vaccine because of negative stories they've heard or a general mistrust in the medical system. Meet patients where they are and give them an opportunity to voice their concerns. Then, try to build trust, comfort and reassure them. Many patients can move from being hesitant to deciding to get vaccinated if they feel more informed and involved.

Be prepared to answer questions about the effectiveness, necessity and safety of adult vaccines.



5. Dispel myths and misinformation.

A lot of inaccurate information about vaccines circulates in news reports and on social media. You are the most trusted information source about vaccines. Take the time to correct bad information and address your patients' questions and concerns without judgment.

It can be helpful to validate their feelings too. For example, "I can see how that would be scary or unsettling, but what we do know is that you can't get the flu from the flu vaccine." Or "I'm glad you mentioned that. Tell me what it is about the vaccine that worries you." Then make sure they know you've heard them.



6. Be ready to refer patients to a provider or location that has vaccines.

If your practice doesn't stock and administer vaccines, know where to refer patients to 1) make vaccination easy and 2) reduce the lag time between your recommendation and a patient being able to get access to the vaccine.



7. Don't forget to follow up.

Loop back with patients in future visits to find out if they received a vaccine, when and where. Because not all practices offer vaccines, and patients may also get them through their workplace, community clinics or pharmacies, it's important to document vaccinations.



8. Nominate a vaccine champion.

Identify a leader in your practice who is willing to champion efforts to prioritize vaccination among your patients. They can:

- Incorporate vaccine education and assessments into visits.
- Look for opportunities to raise awareness about vaccines (posting information in exam and waiting rooms, direct patient outreach).
- Issue vaccine reminders through your practice portal, on-hold messages, letters, and text messages, if opted in.
- Celebrate vaccine victories when a certain percentage of patients have received their vaccines.
- Consider reaching out to patients who do not have a fall visit scheduled to ask them to come in for or refer them for flu vaccination.



9. Have educational materials on hand to supplement conversations.

This will help reinforce the information and help address common questions. There are time constraints during cardiology visits. Extend conversations about vaccination by handing out information or posting ACC CardioSmart's infographic-style posters about adult vaccination and how the flu shot benefits the heart.



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Need to Stay Healthy*



*Stay on Top of
Your Vaccines*



*Protect Your Heart
With the Vaccines
You Need*



Scan the QR code to access these and other vaccine resources for your patients or visit [CardioSmart.org/Vaccines](https://www.heart.org/ACC/CardioSmart.org/Vaccines).