

Strategy to Increase Awareness of Covid-19 vaccines among Roma, Refugees, Protection Applicants and LGBT+ Service Users in South East Community Healthcare (SECH)

Developed by HSE Social Inclusion SECH in collaboration with funded projects

11th February 2021

Introduction:

This strategy is informed by the following:

- The Covid-19 Vaccine Advocate Forum set up by Dr Ronan Glynn, Deputy Chief Medical Officer: [gov.ie - COVID-19 Vaccine Advocate Forum \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)
- Covid-19 Vaccines: Public Health Advice. Module 6: Talking to People About Covid-19 Vaccines: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-f8VnsKx-Q>
- HSE National Consent Policy
- Learning from the Roma Vaccination Project set up in 2015 to promote childhood immunisations
- The 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion adopted by the European Commission
- The Equality and Human Rights Statement of HSE Social Inclusion SECH
- Conversations about vaccination (Covid-19) by HSE Mid West Drug & Alcohol Service

The key aspects of our strategy involve:

- Up-skilling of Health Advocates in terms of vaccine information and interpersonal communication with service users
- Health Advocates engaging / forming partnerships with key community leaders so that they might act as ambassadors as appropriate
- Health Advocates providing agreed vaccination information to service users in ways that will best support service users to make informed decisions.

Our approach will involve Health Advocates using a variety of ways to give service users clear and factual information on the vaccine over a period of time so they can make an informed decision about vaccination. This will include the following:

- Using What's App, especially for posting videos and other social media including Facebook; Service users can be asked to further circulate this information
- Phoning service users and engaging them in conversations
- Face to face meetings (when appropriate / when food parcels are being delivered)
- Providing written translated information, posters and easy read versions

Service users will also be supported to attend vaccination appointments.

This strategy requires the Health Advocates to take into account where service users are on the Vaccine Acceptance Continuum and respond accordingly. It sets out two key ways of communicating with a) persons who are undecided or accepting of the vaccination and b) persons who have decided against vaccination. This strategy reflects the knowledge that Healthcare Professionals are the most trusted source of information on vaccines and that, as such, Health Advocates have a key role to play.

ROLE OF HSE SOCIAL INCLUSION STAFF

- 1. Facilitate agreement of this strategy and on-going review of same**
- 2. Organise a Briefing Session for Intercultural Health Advocates with a Health Professional to increase their ability to give Covid-19 vaccine information and agreed key messages to service users.**
- 3. See if it's possible for a trusted health professional known to service users can administer the vaccine.**

ROLE OF HSE SOCIAL INCLUSION STAFF & FUNDED AGENCIES

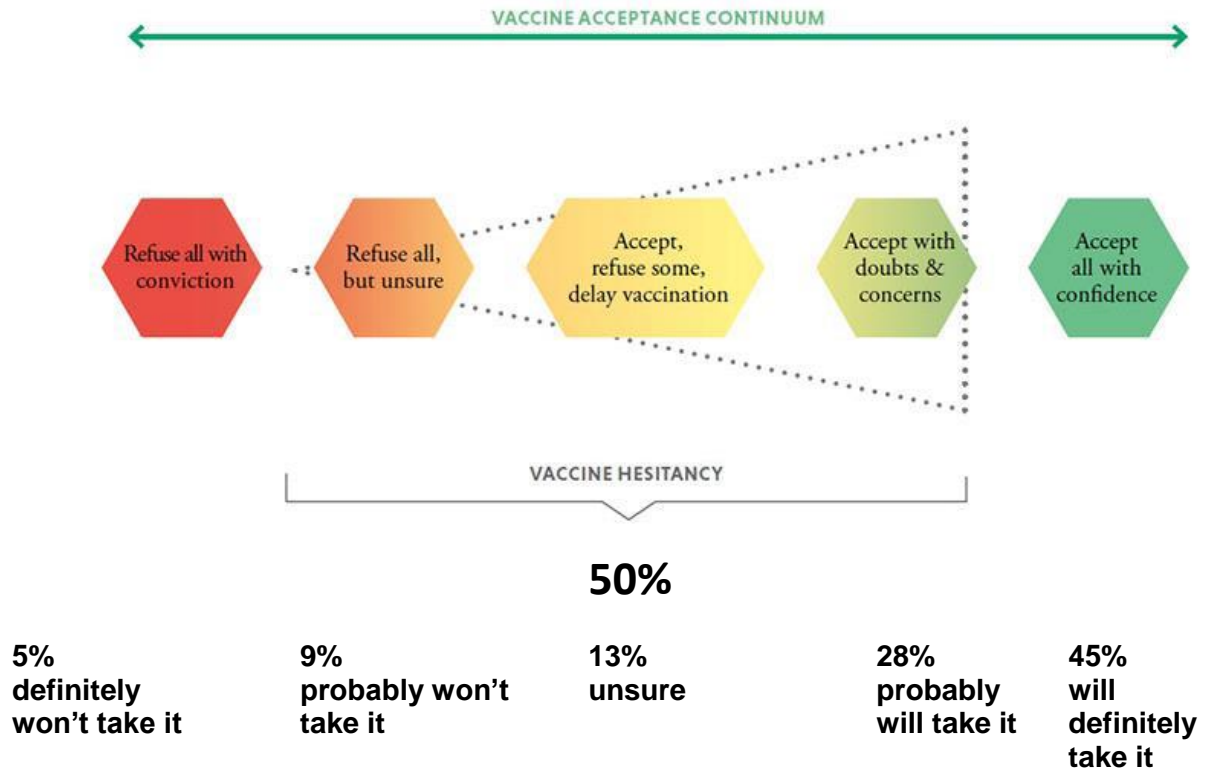
- 4. Consult with all relevant persons and identify people of trust within communities to act as ambassadors as appropriate, in particular with Roma & IPAS Managers**
 - Engage with leaders of the community to find out their views on the vaccine
 - Try to develop a partnership with them and see if they will assist in helping to circulate information to others in the community
 - Keep leaders / ambassadors up-dated and maintain regular contact

ROLE OF HEALTH ADVOCATES (points 5-12)

- 5. Participate in the Briefing Session with the Healthcare Professional**
- 6. Communicate Key Messages regularly via the most appropriate social media:**
 - Give no more than 3 messages in each post
 - Post messages / videos twice a week or as appropriate allowing service users time to reflect on information given
- 7. Engage with service users in an empathetic way:**
 - Give the 4 key CORE messages (the vaccine offers protection; It's not mandatory but it's recommended; the vaccine cannot give you COVID-19; It's free; you will be informed when it's your turn to get the COVID-19 vaccine). See Appendix 1 for key messages accurate as of 11.02.21. **Please check the HSE website regularly for up to date information.**
 - Remember that what Healthcare Professionals say and how they interact with service users can strongly influence vaccine acceptance.
 - Remember to take account of the feelings of the service user.
 - Ask service users if they have thought about vaccinating against Covid-19.
 - Emphasise autonomy and ensure service users know that it is their decision to make and their decision will be respected.

8. Assess where service users are at on the line below. Let this inform how you will respond to each service user.

Those who are vaccine hesitant are in the middle categories.



Note: the above graph is taken from the Covid Vaccine Advocate Forum presentation (16.12.20)

APPROACH FOR SERVICE USERS WHO ARE VACCINE HESITANT:

9. **Ensure service users who are hesitant have the information they need to make an informed choice.**
- **Ask open ended questions**
 - **Listen to the fears and concerns** of service users in relation to the vaccine i.e. what prevents up-take: Understand the way service users are thinking and feeling about the vaccine. Remember: emotions matter. Be interested and do not intervene at this point – ensure the service user is heard.
 - **Affirm strengths:** say that it is good they are looking for information
 - **Acknowledge and validate concerns:** explain that it can be worrying to hear / read things on line
 - **Reflect and respond** to fears and concerns:
 - a) Answer questions and give information where that is possible
 - b) Find out the answers to questions preferably while with the service user
 - c) Assist service users to find answers to their questions on the HSE website via this link: [COVID-19 vaccine](#)

- If you **cannot find answers to questions**, send questions to Suzanne or Angela (Social Inclusion Staff) who will follow up with a Healthcare Professional and revert to you.
- **Stress the positives:** vaccination protects people against serious disease
- **Address misinformation in partnership** with the service user rather than correcting the service user. Allow the service user to correct their own misinformation with the information that you provide.

Misinformation is incorrect or misleading information but it's not created with the intention of hurting others.

Disinformation is deliberate misinformation and it is designed to deceive or mislead

Explain that there is a lot of misinformation and disinformation especially on social media platforms in all countries

- **Directed service users to trusted sources of information;** Explain that trust sources of information in Ireland are HSE, HPSC, Gov.ie and that Health Advocates can help translate and understand this information.
- **How to give information:** It's important not to overwhelm service users. Too much information can put people under pressure. Do not put service users' on-the-spot to make a decision. Give service users time and space to digest information. Give agreed key health messages.
- **Make use of videos posted on social media** from a trusted source (e.g. HSE) as we have found them a very effective way of communicating information to multicultural community members
- **When asked questions, provide consistent, simple and clear information** from a trusted source; make use of visuals and minimise text.
- Ensure service users understand that the **vaccine is an additional tool** in the fight against the virus and that **public health guidance must also be followed** (social distancing, hand washing and mask wearing etc).

10. Offer re-assurance:

- **Communicate why the vaccine is safe** (use video explainers / translated information). Highlight that Covid-19 vaccines have to meet the exact same standard and data requirements as all vaccines and that the HPRA monitors all medicines in Ireland.
- **Explain how it was possible to develop vaccines so quickly:** the Covid-19 vaccines have gone through all the usual steps needed to develop a safe and effective vaccine. But the work to develop them has moved much faster than usual. This is because they have gone through all their development phases at the same time, not one after the other. This was done to make them available as soon as possible. The process was accelerated but not rushed.

11. Leave the door open for service users to come back for further information:

ensure they know you will still support them in other areas.

- 12. Follow up:** It is important to follow up after health information is given; phone the service user back as agreed. Ask if they have any further questions or queries you could assist with.

APPROACH FOR SERVICE USERS WHO REFUSE VACCINATION:

- **Take a non-judgemental approach:** acknowledge the service users feels strongly and wants to make the best decision for their health.
- **Ask for permission to discuss:** ask if it would be alright to talk about vaccinating against Covid-19.
- **If the service users says YES then:**
 - o Follow approach as per vaccine hesitant and focus on their specific concerns
 - o Leave space for future discussions
 - o Do not enter into debate / argument
- **If the service users says NO then:**
 - o Do not enter into debate / argument
 - o Acknowledge the service users feelings: state that you see the person feels strongly about this
 - o Ensure the relationship with the service user is maintained so the door remains open

Key points:

- We know that key health messages are more readily received and taken on board when they are delivered by a trusted person i.e. a peer health worker or a trusted health professional (e.g. Public Health Nurse or GP); people trust people. Health Advocates are therefore well placed to give vaccine information.
- The Intercultural Health Hub will work with IPAS Centre Managers to support the implementation of the strategy.
- As we have learned, many people do not speak / understand English even if they've lived in Ireland for a long number of years. People sometimes try to cover this up and convey that they do understand a communication, when they actually don't. As always, it's important to ensure that all information is understood.
- Also, as we know, many people are not literate even in their native language and so information needs to be communicated orally as well as being translated into different languages. Many people have both literacy and language barriers.
- When asked questions, provide consistent, simple and clear information from a trusted source (HSE website).
- Make use of visuals and minimise text; make videos for local groups and post on social media as we have found this a very effective way of communicating information to multicultural community members

APPENDIX 1:

Agreed key messages for SECH Intercultural & LGBT+ Service Users

From HSE website and agreed by Public Health & Social Inclusion GP SECH

Accurate as of 11.02.21

Please check the HSE website regularly for up to date information

Core Messages:

- Getting a COVID-19 vaccine should protect you from the serious complications of COVID-19
- The vaccine is not mandatory. But the HSE, Department of Health and the World Health Organization recommends people get the COVID-19 vaccine when it is offered to them.
- The COVID-19 vaccine cannot give you COVID-19.
- The COVID-19 vaccine is free. The vaccines will not be available privately. You do not need to apply or register; you will be informed when it's your turn to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Your COVID-19 vaccine appointment

- You will get the vaccine as an injection in your upper arm. It will only take a few minutes. You will need a second dose of the vaccine. The Doctor or Nurse will tell you when you need to come back for the second dose.
- You will need to give your consent by either signing a form, or ticking that you consent on a computer before we give you the vaccine. Any information you give will only be processed for the specific purpose of managing your vaccination
- If you have already had COVID-19, you still need to get the vaccine. This is because you could become infected with the virus again. The Doctor or Nurse will advise you about when it's the best time for you to get the vaccine.
- Even after you get the vaccine, continue to follow public health advice on how to stop the spread of the virus. For example, social distancing, wearing a face covering and washing your hands properly and often.

Safety of COVID-19 vaccines

- Vaccines are tested for safety and effectiveness before they can be used. The HSE only uses a vaccine if it meets the required standards of safety and effectiveness.
- The COVID-19 vaccines have gone through all the usual steps needed to develop a safe and effective vaccine. But the work to develop them has moved much faster than usual. This is because they have gone through all their development phases at the same time, not one after the other. This was done to make them available as soon as possible.
- Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild to moderate and short-term. Not everyone gets side effects.

End.