

Strategy to Increase Awareness of Covid-19 Vaccines in the Traveller Community in the South East



Adapted from the *Strategy to Increase Awareness of Covid-19 vaccines among Roma, Refugees, Protection Applicants and LGBT+ Service Users in South East Community Healthcare* which was developed by Suzanne Nolan, Roma Health Lead, and Angela Joy, Intercultural and LGBT+ Lead, Social Inclusion, SECH.

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](http://www.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.
- 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
- South East Traveller Health Programme
- Conversations about Vaccination (Covid-19) by HSE Mid West Drug and Alcohol Service.

The key aspects of this strategy involve:

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

Our approach will involve Traveller Health Projects 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 social media for posting videos. Service users can be asked to further circulate this information
- Phoning service users and engaging them in conversations
- Face to face meetings (when appropriate and safe)
- Providing written information, posters and easy read versions

This strategy requires the Traveller Health Projects 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 vaccine 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, Traveller Health Projects 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. Regional Liaison Nurse for Traveller Health/Regional Co-ordinator for Traveller Health to provide relevant information to Traveller Health Projects to increase their ability to give Covid-19 vaccine information and agreed key messages to service users. In the absence of the RLNTH, an alternative health professional will be contacted to answer clinical queries as they arise.

3. Ongoing up to date information to be provided to by the Regional Co-ordinator for Traveller Health to the Traveller Health Projects as it is received from the HSE.

ROLE OF HSE SOCIAL INCLUSION STAFF & FUNDED AGENCIES

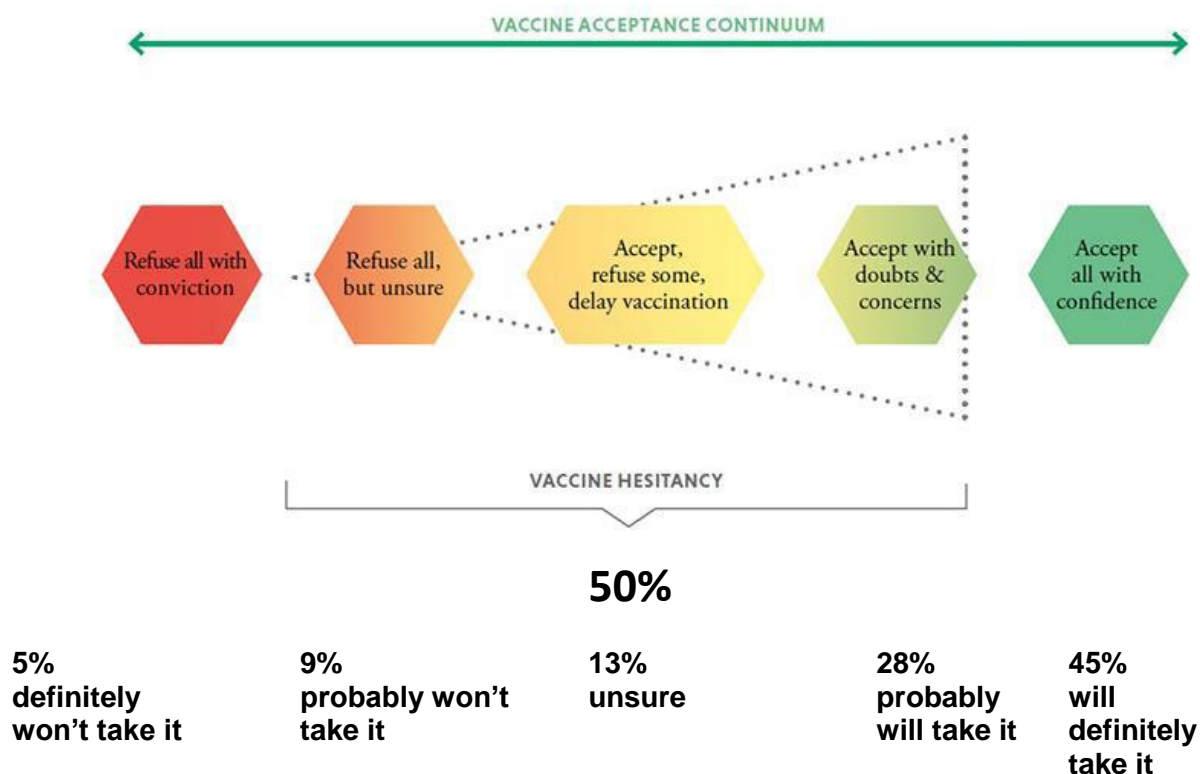
4. Consult with all relevant persons and identify people of trust within communities to act as ambassadors as appropriate, in particular with Community Traveller Health Workers
 - Engage with CTHWs to find out their views on the vaccine.
 - Try to develop a partnership with them and encourage them to assist in helping to circulate information to others in the community.
 - Keep CTHWs up-dated and maintain regular contact.

ROLE OF TRAVELLER HEALTH PROJECTS

5. **Review any information circulated to them through the Traveller Health Office and participate in discussions at the fortnightly Co-ordinators' meetings.**
6. **Communicate Key Messages regularly:**
 - Give no more than 3 messages in each post
 - Post messages / videos on social media as appropriate allowing service users time to reflect on information given
7. **Engage with service users in an empathetic way:**
 - Give the 5 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; only use trustworthy, factual information). See Appendix 1 for key messages accurate as of 11th February 2021. Please check the HSE website regularly for up to date information.
 - Remember that what Traveller Health Projects 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** (see examples in guidance document)
- **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/talking to 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 the Regional Co-ordinator for Traveller Health 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.

- **Direct service users to trusted sources of information;** Explain that trusted sources of information in Ireland are HSE, HPSC, Gov.ie and that Traveller Health Projects can help translate and understand this information.
- **How to give information:** It's important not to overwhelm service users when promoting vaccine up-date: 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 (eg HSE) as they are a very effective way of communicating information to members of the Traveller Community.
- **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). Highlight that Covid 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 user 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 and that if they would like information or support in regards to the vaccine at another stage you would be happy to help. 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 ie a peer health worker or a trusted health professional; people trust people. Traveller Health Projects are, therefore, well placed to give vaccine information.
- The Traveller Health Office will work with the Traveller Health Projects to support implementation of the strategy.
- It is important to note that people sometimes say that they understand a communication when they actually don't. As always, it is important to ensure that all information is understood.

- Also, as we know, many people have literacy issues and so information needs to be communicated orally as well as in written format.
- When asked questions, provide consistent, simple and clear information from a trusted source (HSE website).
- Make use of visuals and minimise text; make videos and post on social media as we have found this to be a very effective way of communicating information to members of the Traveller Community.

If you have any queries, at any stage, please contact Deirdre Dunne, Regional Co-ordinator for Traveller Health, on 087-3855708 or email deirdrea.dunne@hse.ie

Appendix 1

Agreed Key Messages

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

Accurate as of 11.02.21

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.
- Only use trustworthy, factual information, ie HSE website

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 your second dose.
- You will need to give your consent by either signing a form or ticking that you consent on a computer before you get 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.