

# Elementary Discussion Guide

*Tool*

**Resource:** Vaccination Talks Toolkit

**Grade(s):** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

**Division(s):** Primary Junior Intermediate

## Activate the Discussion

### Purpose of this Guide

The global pandemic's effects on the health of individuals and communities worldwide has undoubtedly had implications for students and school communities in Ontario. It has been the catalyst for conversations in classrooms, schools, and communities about the role of vaccines and personal health decisions related to vaccinations. Schools are often the hub for easy access to available vaccinations through public health clinics. As such, schools can play a valuable role in facilitating evidence-based conversations about vaccinations, informed by current and available public health information, with teachers, students, and parents/guardians within a healthy school community. This emerging health topic, central to students' and families' lives, provides an opportunity for students to build their health literacy by participating in evidence-informed conversations about vaccinations while learning to engage in respectful conversations that honour the diversity of perspectives and personal choices related to vaccinations. Teachers play an important role in providing relevant, age-appropriate learning experiences for their students, informing parents/guardians about their child's learning, and promoting a school-wide approach to vaccination education.

Schools can play a valuable role in facilitating evidence-based conversations about vaccinations with teachers, students, and parents/guardians within a healthy school community.

These planned and/or impromptu conversations provide opportunities for teachers, students, and parents/guardians to deepen their understanding of the role of vaccines as one protective factor to support physical health. These conversations enable students to understand the implications of health decisions for themselves, their community and as part of living in a globally connected world. Students draw connections to their health and well-being and are better able to participate in informed decisions about vaccinations.

Helping parents/guardians understand what and why their child is learning about vaccines and vaccinations helps foster a home-school connection and a shared responsibility for educating children and youth about vaccinations as one choice to maintain optimum health across one's life course.

This guide aims to promote an open dialogue within the school community about vaccinations. This guide provides conversation starters that may be used among teachers, students, and parents/guardians to engage in honest, respectful conversations about vaccinations. The questions in this guide focus on vaccines and vaccinations but are relevant to any emergent health topic that becomes a catalyst for health-related conversations in the classroom, school, or community.

## Tips to consider before leading a vaccination-related conversation

### Understanding Your Audience

Considering the experiences of the participants in the conversation and the entry point to their understanding and the diverse perspectives about vaccinations will help you to meet the objectives of the conversation while making it relevant to your audience. Knowing your audience and being able to understand their reactions will:

- help guide you in the facilitation of the conversation;
- help you be conscious of what participants understand about the role of vaccines and vaccinations as one strategy in supporting overall health; and
- help you respond to questions and concerns about vaccination education.

### Starting the Conversation

Discussions about vaccinations are increasingly important and relevant as school communities navigate the issues, concerns, and questions about transmissible viruses. Starting conversations with other teachers, students, and parents/guardians is a good beginning. These conversations might include:

- how to engage others in an open dialogue about vaccinations and their effects on health;
- strategies for creating and maintaining a safe, inclusive and respectful environment to talk openly about vaccinations;
- the importance of adopting a non-judgemental stance and actively listening and respecting the perspectives and personal decisions of others;
- reducing stigma around personal choices related to vaccinations, and
- effective strategies to engage students in vaccination education to deepen their learning and to participate in informed decisions about their health.

### **Engaging Others**

The questions in this guide are designed to invite conversation and help you engage others in a dialogue about vaccinations and promote an understanding of the diverse perspectives and choices about vaccinations. When leading a group discussion or having a one-on-one discussion, it is important that you consider the following:

- create a safe, respectful, and non-judgmental environment for individuals to feel supported to express their perspectives and ask their questions;
- gather the necessary information about educator, student, and parent/guardian questions, concerns and needs; and
- facilitate learning, including building awareness of where to obtain more information and supports if needed.

It is important to approach a conversation about vaccinations in a knowledgeable, supportive, and non-judgmental way and recognize the diversity of perspectives and choices of other teachers, students, parents/guardians. We invite you to select the most relevant questions or adapt them as needed to make connections between your classroom, school, and community.

# Questions and Prompts

## Teachers with Teachers

1. How might the topics of vaccines and vaccinations specifically connect to our curriculum?
  - Why might we engage in conversations about vaccinations with our students?
  - How can we help ensure we are having meaningful conversations with our students about vaccinations when questions arise?
  - How do we tailor our conversations about vaccinations to be age and culturally appropriate for our students?
  - How might we make connections to student learning in different subjects?
  - How might the topics related to vaccinations connect to the content of other subjects at the grade level you teach?
  - What opportunities might there be to create cross-curricular connections to broaden the conversation and deepen our students' understanding of vaccines and vaccinations?
2. To what degree do you think we are equipped to answer questions about vaccines and vaccinations and to have conversations about vaccinations when questions arise?
  - What are the key issues, questions, or concerns about vaccines and vaccinations that our students might want to know more about?
  - Where can we find reliable and relevant facts about vaccines to inform discussions with students?
  - How can we build our shared knowledge and understanding about vaccines and vaccination education to enable us to adopt a common approach to our conversations?
  - What resources are available to help us understand vaccines and support our students' health literacy?
  - How might we connect with local and regional supports, such as public health units, to support us when teaching our students about vaccination?

- How do we create and maintain safe and inclusive spaces for students to participate in respectful conversations about vaccinations?
  - What do we need to keep in mind when discussing vaccinations with our students to address the topic with sensitivity and without bias? How might this impact how we approach the topic?
  - How can we address our biases regarding vaccinations when they may differ from those of other colleagues, our students, or parents/guardians/caregivers?
  - How can we support our students in recognizing their own biases regarding the decisions of others regarding vaccinations when they may differ from those of other students during classroom and whole-school conversations?
  - How can we adopt a **health-promotion** approach when discussing health topics such as vaccinations with students while adopting a non-judgemental, unbiased stance?
3. How can we make connections between conversations about vaccinations and a healthy school community to support and inform our approach to vaccination education in our school community?
- What are the goals and common understandings for vaccination education in our school board and school community?
  - How might everyone in our school community take a shared approach to vaccination education?
  - How does the topic of vaccination education relate to each of our roles in the school?
  - How might a Healthy Schools approach be used to foster informed discussions about vaccinations? How might classroom discussions about vaccinations be used to support a Healthy Schools approach to student well-being?
  - What conversations might we engage in to support students during vaccination days at school?
  - What strategies do we currently use and/or should we consider using to promote understanding and acceptance of the diverse perspectives and choices amongst our teachers/students/parents/guardians' decisions about vaccinations?
  - What can we all do, as staff, to support our students with vaccination education to help them develop critical thinking and decision-making skills to engage in conversations about health decisions and their well-being in an age-appropriate way? What planned and/or impromptu

conversations during student learning provide opportunities to develop these skills?

## Teachers with Students

1. What information about vaccines and vaccinations do you think students need to know more about and how they can affect a person's health and well-being?
  - Do you think students your age have the information they need about vaccines and vaccinations? Why?
  - How do you think knowing more about vaccinations would be helpful for students your age to participate in conversations about vaccinations and your health and well-being?
  - What questions do you have, and what more might you want to know about vaccines and vaccinations?
  - What skills and resources would help students your age engage in conversations about vaccinations or getting a vaccination?
  - How can decision-making skills and coping skills help?
  - Where can you get more information about vaccinations?
  - How can your teachers support you in developing your understanding of vaccines and vaccinations to help you participate in informed decisions about vaccinations and overall health?
2. What types of conversations are you having with youth your age about vaccines and vaccinations?
  - Where and when do students your age engage most in conversations about vaccinations?
  - What influences students' opinions about vaccinations?
  - Do you think students experience bias about their perspectives about vaccinations or stigma about their personal choices for their health?
  - How can students use their voices when discussing vaccinations to promote inclusive conversations that respect the diversity of views about vaccinations?
  - How can you use your leadership skills to help organize, promote, and advocate for vaccination clinics in your school?

- What other sources of information and supports about vaccinations are you aware of that students your age can access?
3. If you were to design lessons about vaccinations for students in your grade, what would they include?
- Why is that important to include?
  - What would you leave out and why?
  - What do you think students would like to know about vaccines and vaccinations?
  - What would you want your teacher to know about in terms of your views on vaccinations?
  - If you were given an assignment to show what you have learned about vaccinations, what would you choose to do?
  - How can teachers make sure everyone feels included in conversations about vaccinations? How can teachers help students respect other people's views on vaccinations that differ from their own?

### Teachers with Parents/Guardians

1. Why might it be important to engage in conversations about vaccinations within our school community?
  - How can we help ensure we are having meaningful conversations with our students and school community about vaccinations when questions arise?
  - What are your key issues, questions, or concerns about vaccines and vaccinations that our students might have questions about?
  - Where do you find reliable and relevant facts about vaccines?
  - How can we build awareness about the diverse views and choices about vaccines and vaccination and the purpose of vaccination education to engage in conversations that foster a healthy school community?
2. Why might it be important to engage in conversations about vaccinations as part of your child learning about health and well-being?
  - Are you aware of the vaccination education your child is receiving in school?
  - What questions do you have about vaccination education?

- Do you have any concerns about vaccination education? If so, what are your concerns?
  - What skills would you like your child to learn to help them participate in informed conversations about vaccinations and their health?
  - How can you support your child in developing these skills?
3. How can parents/guardians be involved in conversations about vaccines and vaccinations in our school community?
- In what ways can we work together to foster a home-school connection for conversations about vaccinations?
  - How can we work together to support your child in vaccination education?
  - How can we work together when talking about vaccinations to promote inclusive conversations that respect the diversity of views and choices about vaccinations?