

# Immunization for newcomer children and youth

## Insights for health professionals

Newcomer families are adjusting to life in a new country and navigating housing, employment, child care, school enrolment, and more. Vaccination may not always be top of mind, but it's a crucial part of health care. Understanding the needs, priorities and perspectives of newcomer families can help health professionals in any setting encourage immunization and create a more positive vaccine experience.

### Newcomer perspective

#### **Understanding systems and access**

- When English or French is not a family's first language or if literacy levels are low, understanding vaccine schedules and public health advice can be a challenge.
- Families may not know how to access vaccines. They may assume that children will be vaccinated at school or through public clinics.

#### **Respect for culture and religion**

- Health care decisions may involve extended family, religious leaders, and community elders. For example, a family may need assurance that vaccines align with religious dietary practices.
- Depending on where they are from, families may not trust advice from health professionals.

#### **Relationships matter**

- Families need time and space to ask questions or voice concerns about vaccines, and to make their decisions without pressure or judgement.
- When health appointments are rushed, or when families have to access care in different places, it can be difficult to build trust with a health care provider.

#### **Accessible, trusted information**

- Families want short, visual, and multilingual resources like infographics and videos, ideally in their own language.
- Materials distributed at grocery stores, religious centres, and schools are more likely to be seen.
- Trusted intermediaries such as settlement workers and parent ambassadors are preferred over institutional figures.

#### **Competing priorities and beliefs**

- Vaccination might not be as crucial as housing, employment, or legal needs.
- For some, diseases like influenza may seem relatively low risk compared to epidemics they've experienced (for example, dengue or cholera).

### What health professionals can do

#### **Improve accessibility and navigation of vaccine services**

- Provide multilingual, simplified vaccine schedules and clearly explain how and where to access services. Visit [kidsnewtocanada.ca](http://kidsnewtocanada.ca) for resources.
- Collaborate with settlement agencies or local public health on initiatives such as
  - orientation sessions for new arrivals.
  - vaccination clinics in familiar environments like community centres or places of worship.
- If you don't do immunizations, provide information about where to access them.

#### **Promote and practice cultural humility**

- Engage in ongoing self-reflection and antiracism training. Visit the [Canadian Paediatric Society](http://CanadianPaediatricSociety.org) website for resources.
- Approach every family with openness and respect for their lived experiences.

#### **Create spaces for conversation**

- Use open-ended, non-judgmental questions to guide vaccine discussions. The **OARS** approach may be helpful: open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries.
- If possible, create opportunities for drop-in or walk-in appointments that are flexible for working families.

#### **Encourage community involvement in education**

- Involve newcomer parents and youth in creating educational materials or use resources that have been co-created by organizations such as [Our Kids' Health](http://OurKidsHealth.org).
- Use materials with visuals, translated captions, and simple language.
- Promote resources through apps like WhatsApp or WeChat.
- Engage others to help disseminate vaccine messages: peer ambassadors, faith leaders, and ethnic media platforms.

#### **Provide positive vaccination experiences**

- Take time to explain each step of the process, especially when language or literacy barriers exist.
- Use pain-reduction strategies (like topical anesthetics, distraction techniques) especially with children. [CARD™](http://CARD.org) (C - Comfort, A - Ask, R - Relax, D - Distract) is an evidence-based program for patients and providers.

Source: Minhas, R.S. & Our Kids' Health (OKH). (2025). Building Vaccine Confidence in Newcomer Populations: A Community-Led Approach. Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Paediatric Society, July 2025. [www.kidsnewtocanada.ca](http://www.kidsnewtocanada.ca)

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