

Vaccine Hesitancy in South Asian Communities: Provider Resource Guide

Combating Misinformation, Strengthening Trust, Supporting Access

Vaccine misinformation and vaccine access barriers impact South Asian communities across the United States. Misinformation may fuel hesitancy around routine childhood and adult vaccines, and travel-related vaccines.

Structural challenges can prevent individuals from accessing reliable care. This resource aims to highlight common sources of vaccine hesitancy, and share culturally tailored strategies to support vaccine confidence and equity for providers to implement in their practice.



Common Themes of Misinformation in South Asian Communities

Religious/Dietary Concerns

Common Claims

- “Vaccines contain pork/beef gelatin and violate religious dietary laws”
- “Getting vaccinated breaks religious fasting”

Culturally Relevant Explanations and Relatable Analogies:

“Just as taking life-saving medication during Ramadan doesn’t break your fast, vaccines are considered a medical necessity that protects life, which is a religious obligation.”

Major Islamic authorities have ruled that vaccination aligns with Islamic principles of preserving life and can be considered a religious obligation when it protects individuals and communities from disease.¹

Traditional/Homeopathy Medicine:

Common Claims

- “Ayurveda/traditional remedies are sufficient protection”
- “Western medicine is inferior to ancestral healing practices”

Culturally Relevant Explanations and Relatable Analogies:

“Ayurveda emphasizes prevention, which is exactly what vaccines do, they prevent disease for it starts. Vaccines work with your body’s natural immune system to strengthen it, just as turmeric supports your body’s natural healing, they don’t fight against your body’s balance.”

Many South Asian physicians support combining vaccination. Vaccines provide immunity without the dangerous complications that natural infections can cause.²

Infertility Fears:

Common Claims

- “Girls back home became sterile after HPV vaccine trials”
- “The vaccine disrupts hormones and prevents girls from having children”

Culturally Relevant Explanations and Relatable Analogies:

“Many South Asian women who received HPV and COVID vaccines have had healthy pregnancies and babies”

HPV vaccines have been used safely for over 15 years in more than 100 countries with no evidence of fertility problems. The vaccine simply teaches your immune system to recognize and fight HPV, just like other childhood vaccines do.^{3,4}

References:

- International Islamic Fiqh Academy statement, 1992; Fatwa Committee of Perlis, Malaysia, 2016
- Samina P, Chakraborty C, Grewal R, Kaura T. Public-engagement strategies of the South Asian COVID-19 Task Force: The role of racialized healthcare workers in COVID-19 mitigation in Ontario.
- World Health Organization HPV vaccine safety statements; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Key Structural Barriers & Response Strategies

Language & Communication Barriers

Limited English proficiency can complicate vaccine information, eligibility, or scheduling appointments.

Health messages and public health materials are often not available in South Asian languages



Immigration Status & Mistrust

Undocumented individuals or non-citizens may worry about interacting with institutions due to fear of deportation or violence, reducing likelihood of seeking vaccination.

Mistrust of healthcare system or government, stemming from discrimination



Structural Racism & Discrimination

Experiences of discrimination from healthcare providers can reduce trust in the system and increase vaccine hesitancy.

Systemic neglect in previous health interventions can contribute to generational distrust.



Misinformation & Disinformation

Misinformation can spread rapidly in South Asian communities via WhatsApp, YouTube, and word-of-mouth.

Disinformation from politically or religiously motivated sources can undermine trust in vaccines and public health messaging.



Strategies

Translate materials into South Asian languages for culturally tailored public health messaging, hire bilingual health workers and interpreters

Assure confidentiality and collaborate with trusted community-based organizations serving immigrants and undocumented community members

Set up mobile or pop-up clinics, offer after-hours and weekend availability, provide transportation vouchers

Host community forums, organize virtual or in-person Q&A sessions in community & religious centers, involve health professionals from the community to create campaigns that combat misinformation and disinformation across digital and print platforms

References:

- *Limited English Proficiency and Health Service Use in Asian Americans, 2019*
- *Vaccine Hesitancy among Immigrants: A Narrative Review of Challenges, Opportunities, and Lessons Learned, 2024*
- *Medical mistrust, discrimination, and COVID-19 vaccine behaviors among a national sample U.S. adults, 2022*
- *COVID-19–Associated Misinformation Across the South Asian Diaspora: Qualitative Study of WhatsApp Messages, 2023*

Vaccine Hesitancy in the South Asian Community Recommended Readings

VACCINE HESITANCY:

AHA! Awareness with Human Action project. "Research Brief Vaccine hesitancy in South Asia: Debates, Dilemmas, and Developments" 2022, <https://jfliflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Vaccine-Hesitancy-In-South-Asia-Debates-Dilemmas-And-Developments.pdf>

Akbar, M. B., Singh, L., Deshpande, S., & Amoncar, N. (2023). COVID-19 vaccine perceptions among South Asian communities in the UK: An application of the theory of planned behavior. *Health Marketing Quarterly*, 40(3), 271-288.

Ennab, F., Qasba, et al. (2022). COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy: A narrative review of four South Asian countries. *Frontiers in public health*, 10, 997884.

Harapan, Harapan, et al. "Vaccine hesitancy among communities in ten countries in Asia, Africa, and South America during the COVID-19 pandemic." *Pathogens and global health* 116.4 (2022): 236-243.

International Vaccine Access Center White Paper on Vaccine Hesitancy in South Asia. 2024.
<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2024-02/savi-vaccine-hesitancy-in-south-asia-white-paperax.pdf>

Khandelwal, Devika. "Covid lies are tearing through India's family WhatsApp groups" *Wired*, April 2021,
<https://www.wired.com/story/india-covid-conspiracies-whatsapp>

Manoharan, B., et al. (2024). Sociodemographic factors associated with vaccine hesitancy in the South Asian community in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 115(6), 924-935.

Millward, Gareth. "Vaccine Hesitancy and 'BAME' Populations" *History and Policy*, Feb. 2025,
<https://historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/vaccine-hesitancy-and-bame-populations/>

Stuetzle, Sophie CW, et al. "Factors influencing vaccine hesitancy toward non-covid vaccines in South Asia: a systematic review." *BMC Public Health* 25.1 (2025): 1246.

Sharma, Anjana E., et al. "COVID-19–Associated Misinformation Across the South Asian Diaspora: Qualitative Study of WhatsApp Messages." *JMIR infodemiology* 3 (2023): e38607.

VACCINATION LEVELS & ACCESS DISPARITIES:

Atteraya, et al. (2023). Inequalities in childhood immunisation in South Asia. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 20(3), 1755.

Jamal, A., et al. (2022). Vaccination patterns, disparities, and policy among Asian-Americans and Asians living in the USA. *The Lancet Global Health*, 10, S27.

Magee, L., et al. (2022). Facilitators and barriers to COVID-19 vaccination uptake among ethnic minorities: A qualitative study in primary care. *Plos one*, 17(7), e0270504.

Noreen, K., Naeem Khalid, S., Murad, M. A., Baig, M., & Khan, S. A. (2024). Uptake and determinants of HPV vaccination in South Asia: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12, 1453704.

For vaccine guidance resources, please see:

- [HPV Immunize Quality Improvement Tools](#)
- [Immunize.org Vaccine Information Statement Translations](#)
- [Vaccine Fears Overturned by Facts Booklet](#)
- [American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology Fact Kit](#)
- [Pan America Health Organization Myth Busting](#)
- [BBC COVID Myths Debunked - Translations](#)