NHS

Co-create

NHS
Black Country
Integrated Care Board

YOUNG PEOPLE and VACCINES

TOOLKIT for MAKING VACCINATIONS BETTER for YOUNG PEOPLE

THESE AREAS for IMPROVEMENT were DESIGNED by **16-19** YEAR OLDS in COLLEGES in the BLACK COUNTRY, in WORKSHOPS FACILITATED by CO-CREATE

INFORMATION and MISINFORMATION

FEAR, ANXIETY and PHOBIAS around VACCINATION

SOCIAL and CULTURAL INFLUENCES

PERSONAL HEALTH CONCERNS and PERSON-CENTRED CARE

SAFE and SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

CONSENT and INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

YES!

HOW to USE this TOOLKIT

This toolkit has been designed to help improve the vaccination experience for young people by embedding their voices into planning and delivery. It draws on real insights shared by students across the Black Country and offers practical suggestions that can be adapted to suit your setting. It is accompanied by a report providing more detail on our methodology, what we heard from young people, and further recommendations.

Who is this for?

This resource can be used by a range of professionals involved in planning, delivering, or supporting vaccination programmes, including:

- Public Health Professionals
- ICB Vaccination Teams
- School Vaccination Teams
- Commissioned Vaccination Providers
- Schools and Colleges

Whether you're developing a local strategy or improving the experience on the day of vaccination, this toolkit is for you.

Suggested Approach
You don't need to use everything at once. Instead, use this toolkit as a flexible, reflective checklist. Here's a simple way to get started:

1. Choose one focus area at a time
Each theme in this toolkit reflects a key insight from young people. Start by selecting a section that's relevant to your role or setting (e.g. consent, anxiety, information-sharing).

2. Involve young people where possible
Ask students or youth representatives what they think about current processes and whether the experiences described in the toolkit reflect their own. This supports co-production and strengthens trust.

3. Assess your current practice
What are you already doing well?
What could be improved?
What's missing entirely?

4. Adapt ideas to your context
Not every school or area will face the same challenges, so use what's helpful and tailor it to local needs. Even small changes can make a big difference to how young people experience vaccinations.

5. Use it as a conversation starter
Share the toolkit with your team, school leaders, or delivery partners. Use it to open discussions around improvement and collaboration.

6. Check progress over time
Revisit the toolkit after implementation to reflect on changes made and identify next steps.

By using this toolkit thoughtfully and involving young people in the process, you can help make vaccinations feel more informed, respectful, and person-centred for every student.

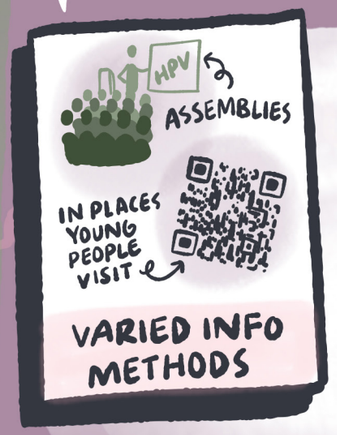


Students did not feel they had access to clear, engaging, and trustworthy information about vaccines. Many relied on what they could find on social media or simply followed their parents' lead. They would appreciate easier access to appropriate information including opportunities for discussion.

"*I rely on TikTok and Instagram for health information most of the time... sometimes I see posts that make me confused.*" - Student

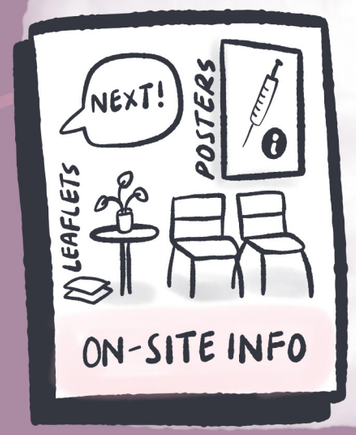
"*In my family, they don't really talk about health topics openly.*" - Student

IMPROVEMENTS



Provide information in multiple formats

One approach won't work for everyone, so multiple formats should be used. Suggestions were guest speakers in assemblies before vaccinations, and QR codes linking to trusted info in locations young people regularly visit, such as schools and bus stops.



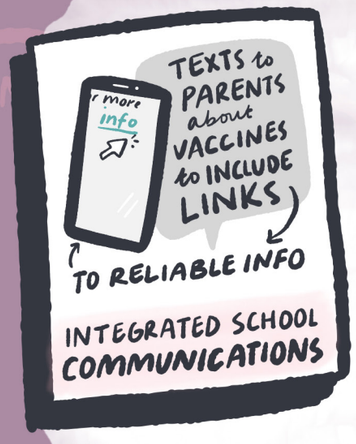
Provide on-site information in waiting areas

Posters and leaflets in vaccination areas would allow students to read important details while waiting, helping them feel more informed and reassured.



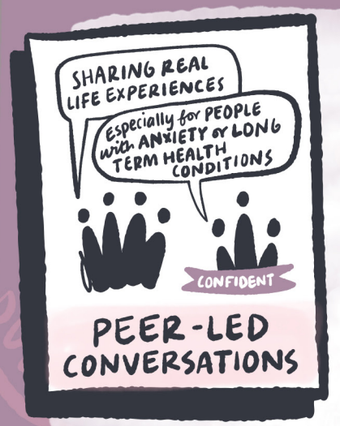
Deliver information on social media

TikTok and Instagram were identified as the most used platforms where young people searched for information. These could be used to share short, engaging videos which could be delivered by health professionals and young people with clear, youth-friendly vaccine information.



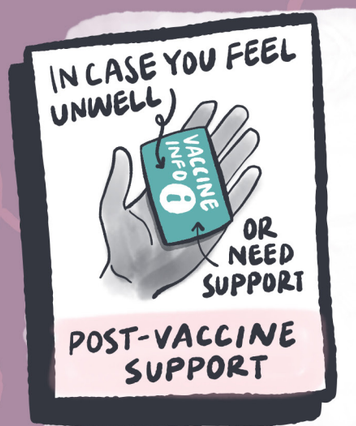
Integrate school communications with links to reliable vaccine information

When schools send texts to parents about upcoming vaccinations, they could include direct links to reliable information, ensuring parents and students have easy access to relevant information on the specific vaccination.



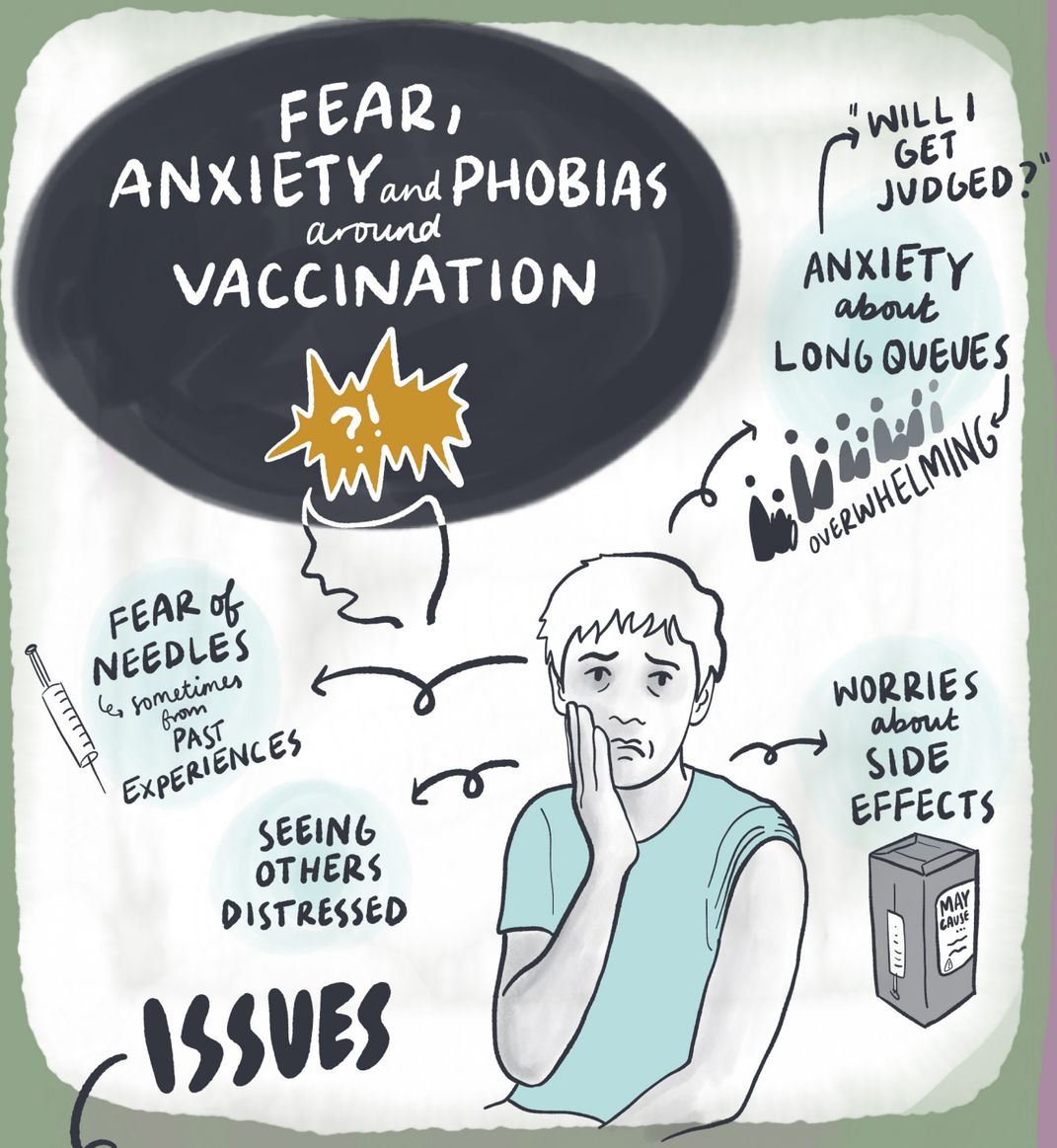
Include peer-led conversations in discussions about vaccinations

Involving young people in discussions and sharing real-life experiences about vaccinations, particularly from those with anxiety or long-term health conditions, would help others feel more confident and reassured in their decision-making.



Offer post-vaccination support with a link to a trusted source

Providing a small information card after vaccination would give students a trusted source to refer to if they feel unwell or need support.



ISSUES

Fear and anxiety around vaccinations were a significant factor for many young people, regarding both the process and potential side effects. They would benefit from more private vaccination spaces and access to personalised support if needed.

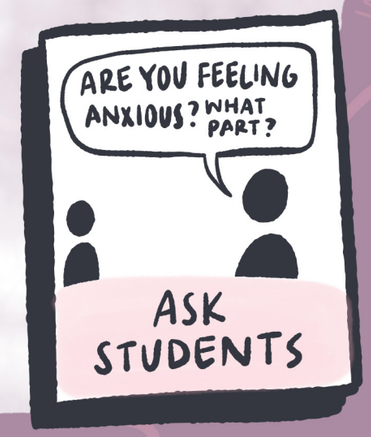
"*I had a bad reaction to a vaccination before, and this wasn't taken seriously at the time, leading me to feel anxious about any other vaccinations.*" - Student

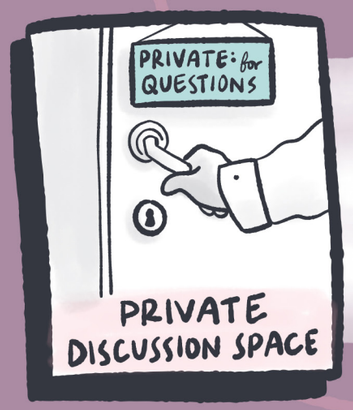
IMPROVEMENTS

Create safe opportunities for students to talk about anxiety

Young people should be offered proactive opportunities to share any anxieties they may have about vaccinations, rather than relying on them to voice concerns unprompted. Taking these steps helps ensure that no young person feels rushed, overlooked, or alone in the process. These could include:

- Routine check-ins with the school nurse to identify worries in advance
- Dedicated time in PSHE or tutor sessions to explore fears in a safe and supportive setting.
- Peer-led discussions, where students who have already been vaccinated share what helped them manage their anxiety.
- Clear communication in letters, assemblies, and vaccine information materials letting students know they can speak to someone in advance if they feel nervous.
- Inviting parents or carers to note any known anxieties when giving consent.
- With healthcare professionals: pre-vaccination information sessions that give space for questions and conversation, drop-in Q&A sessions to build understanding and reduce fear.



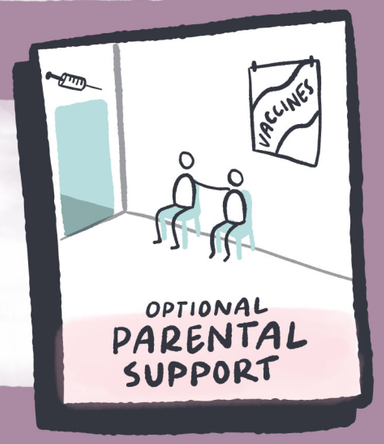


Create private discussion spaces before and after the vaccinations

Providing a quiet, private area before and after vaccination would allow students to ask questions and process their emotions without the pressure of onlookers.

Include an option for parental support on the day of vaccinations

Young people should have the option to have a parent present at school during their vaccination for reassurance.

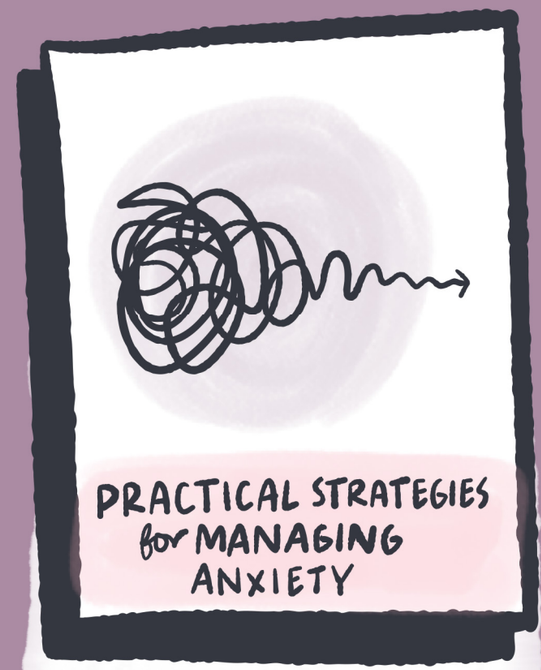






Provide access to a fully qualified health professional if individuals are exhibiting distress about vaccinations

A dedicated professional should be available to help young people work through anxiety and phobias related to vaccination. This should be offered proactively rather than assuming that young people know who to go to or feel comfortable doing so.



Consider providing practical strategies for managing anxiety

Providing clear guidance on coping techniques (such as breathing exercises or distraction methods) could help students manage their fear and feel more in control.



Ensure a compassionate approach from vaccinators

It’s important for those administering vaccines to recognise and validate young people’s anxiety, offering reassurance and support to create a more positive experience.



Offer ongoing support for needle phobias

Schools and healthcare providers should offer ongoing support for those with needle phobias, ensuring these anxieties don’t become a barrier to future vaccinations.



Young people's decisions often reflected the views of their parents, wider families and peers. They were aware that these influences may not reflect current guidance or evidence.

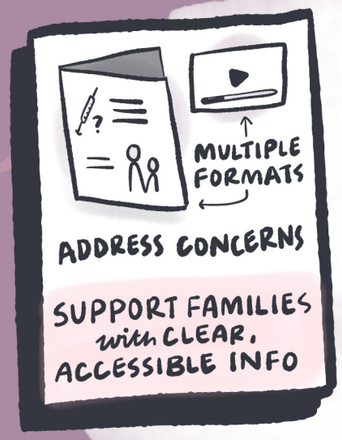
They would like more space to build their own views independently of these influences, and also support to engage constructively with families, peers and healthcare staff.

"*Health decisions are strongly influenced by my family, as they prefer traditional remedies and question modern medicine.*" - Student

IMPROVEMENTS

Ensure young people feel supported by healthcare professionals in their decisions, whether they choose to have the vaccination or not

This would ensure that healthcare professionals were leading by example to address stigma.



Support families with clear, accessible information

Ensure that parents get balanced, evidence-based information in multiple formats to help them make informed decisions. Provide resources that address common misconceptions and cultural concerns around vaccinations.



Reduce judgment and peer pressure around vaccination choices

Avoid public vaccination settings where young people feel exposed to scrutiny from their peers.



Use peer advocacy to share diverse experiences

Encourage young people to share their vaccination experiences in authentic ways such as social media, school discussions, or videos. Support young people from different cultural backgrounds to speak about how they navigated family expectations and personal choice.



Acknowledge and respect cultural and religious perspectives

Work with community and faith leaders to provide culturally sensitive information about vaccinations. Offer personalised support for young people navigating cultural expectations while making their own health decisions.



Empower young people to make their own informed choices

Ensure young people understand their rights, including Gillick competence, so they feel confident in making their own decisions. Provide platforms where young people can discuss social and cultural influences without fear of judgment.



Encourage open conversations between young people and their families

Create opportunities for discussions about vaccinations in schools and community settings that involve young people and their families. Offer workshops or online sessions where families can explore concerns with healthcare professionals.



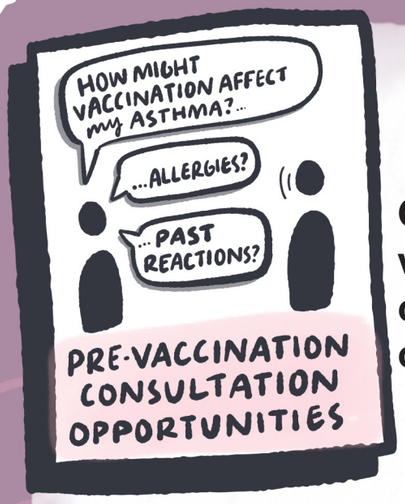
The students we worked with were studying health and social care. Students often felt that the vaccination process didn't reflect their personal health needs or align with the "person-centred care" they're taught. They would like more flexible processes for support with individual concerns such as how a vaccine might interact with a specific long-term health condition, and for individual support before or after vaccinations where required.

IMPROVEMENTS



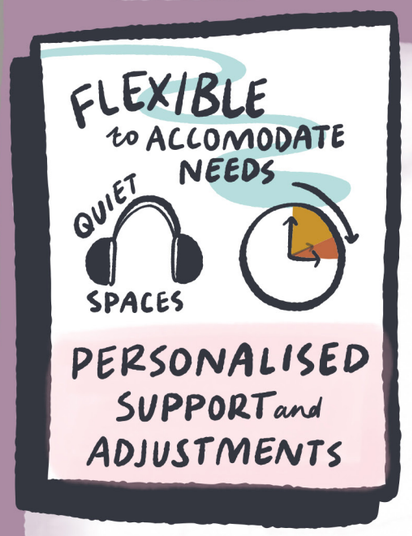
Get young people more involved in their own healthcare decisions

Instead of decisions being made for them, young people should be given space to ask questions, express concerns, and actively participate in their healthcare choices, with professionals offering guidance rather than directives, even if the ultimate decision rests with the parent.



Offer pre-vaccination consultation opportunities

Young people should have the chance to discuss how vaccinations might affect their long-term conditions, allergies, or past reactions. Providing pre-vaccination consultation opportunities would help them make informed choices and alleviate fears associated with this.



Provide personalised support and adjustments

The vaccination process should be flexible to accommodate individual needs. This could include quiet spaces for those worried about a reaction or longer appointment times for those needing extra reassurance.



Offer follow-up support after vaccination

Young people should receive ongoing information and support post-vaccination, such as a helpline or access to further advice in case of side effects or concerns.



The school settings in which young people had received vaccinations often felt too public and rushed for an important personal health decision. They would like alternative options for those for whom this setting doesn't work well and personalised support for those who felt unwell or distressed afterwards.

"I felt dizzy after the vaccination, and I just had to sit in the seat in front of others, waiting to go for the vaccination; it wasn't private at all." - student.

IMPROVEMENTS



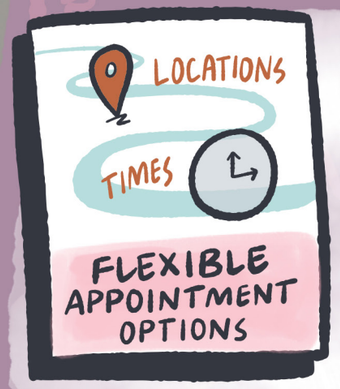
Provide private and calm vaccination spaces

Vaccinations should be offered in discreet and relaxing places, not busy public areas like dining rooms. This would help reduce anxiety and be more personal and supportive. Students suggested not having so many people queuing up at once, so smaller areas could be used.



Provide dedicated quiet areas before and after vaccinations

Providing separate spaces for young people to ask questions before or recover privately after their vaccination would help those who feel nervous or unwell.



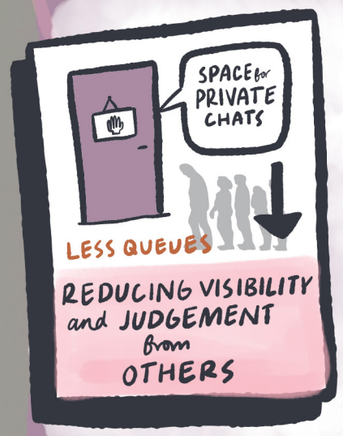
Offer flexible appointment options

Schools and healthcare settings should allow alternative times or locations for those who need a more supportive setting, such as smaller group vaccinations or clinic-based options instead of school.



Staff should be trained to offer emotional support

Those administering vaccines should be trained to recognise anxiety, offer reassurance, and create a calm, pressure-free environment where young people feel respected and understood.



Design the process to reduce visibility and judgment from others

The process should be designed to minimise social pressure, ensuring young people do not feel judged for their choice. This could include private consent discussions and less visible queuing systems.



Develop peer and mentor support programmes

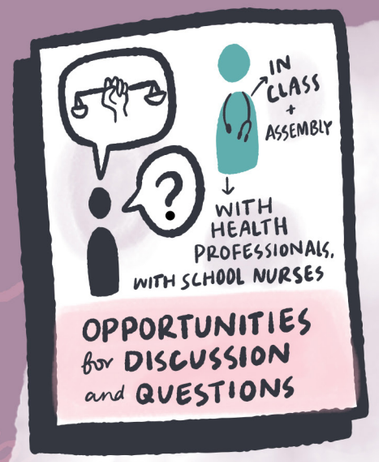
Schools could introduce peer support programs, where trained young people help reassure others, share experiences, and create a more encouraging atmosphere around vaccinations.



Many young people felt their consent around vaccinations wasn't actively sought, with decisions often made by their parents. Most didn't feel informed or supported enough to meaningfully participate in the decision making process. They would like education around vaccinations and consent to start earlier, and to have more fora for learning and exploring vaccine information.

"We should be able to consent about what goes on with our own bodies, but nobody really asks us." - Student

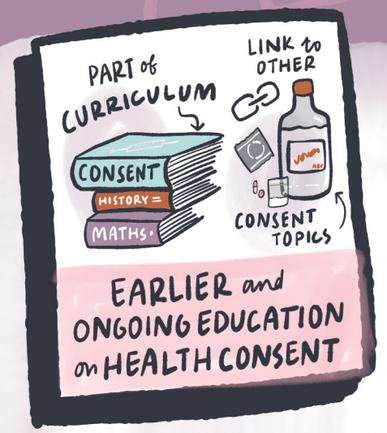
IMPROVEMENTS



Provide opportunities for discussion and questions

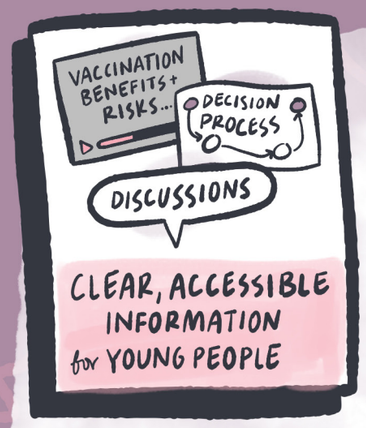
Create safe spaces where young people can ask questions and discuss concerns with trusted professionals before vaccinations take place.

Offer sessions with healthcare professionals or trained educators where students can explore their rights around medical consent. Consider where conversations already happen, like science classes, PHSE classes, assembly, and school nurses.
Link the topic of vaccinations with these other areas to inform young people's decision-making.



Develop and implement earlier and ongoing education on health consent

Introduce discussions about medical consent, including vaccinations, as part of the school curriculum. Link consent in healthcare to consent in other areas young people learn about such as sex education and drug and alcohol use to create a broader understanding of personal autonomy.



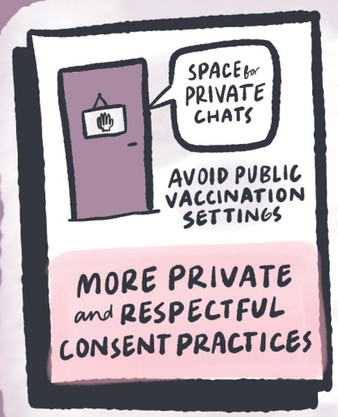
Provide clear, accessible information for young people

Provide age-appropriate materials explaining what vaccinations are, their benefits and risks, to support the decision-making process. Ensure information is delivered in multiple formats, such as videos, infographics, and discussions, to cater to different learning styles. These should be delivered at different times, not just at the point before a vaccination session.



Develop a more inclusive consent process

Ensure young people are actively involved in discussions about their vaccinations, not relying solely on parental consent. Consider supporting young people to indicate their level of understanding and involvement in decision-making, even if parental consent is still required.



Provide more private and supported consent processes

Avoid public vaccination settings that make young people feel pressured or judged for their choices. Ensure they have the opportunity to discuss their decision privately with a healthcare professional before the vaccination if they choose to.

YOUNG PEOPLE and VACCINES

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

- TRANSPARENCY
- SAFER SPACES
- INFORMED CHOICE
- ACCESSIBILITY

PRACTICAL STEPS

WORKSHOP SCHEDULING

WORK with COURSE LEADERS to...

* SHEDULE SESSIONS in CORE COLLEGE HOURS
  ↳ AVOIDING CLASHES

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

TABLE LAYOUT → to PROMOTE ENGAGEMENT and INTERACTION

WAYS of WORKING...

* INTRODUCED at START of SESSION
* STUDENTS INVITED to ADD to WAYS of WORKING
  ↳ INCLUDED: RESPECT, COLLABORATION, QUESTIONS

TIMING

ADVISED by COLLEGE STAFF

MAX. 2 HOURS → 10-15 MINUTES BREAK

to SUPPORT FOCUS and COMFORT

LECTURER PRESENCE

FLEXIBLE BASED on GROUP NEED

HELP to EXPLAIN PURPOSE and CONNECTION to EXISTING SUBJECTS

KNOWS STUDENTS + can help HIGHLIGHT NEEDS

REFLECTIONS and LEARNING

VACCINATION

NOT a TOPIC that YOUNG PEOPLE felt PASSIONATE about or SPENT TIME CONSIDERING

* FELT VACCINATION SIMPLY HAPPENED to THEM
  ↳ SUPPORTED to:
  - REFLECT on EXPERIENCES
  - EXPLORE PERSPECTIVES

INSTITUTIONAL NORMS

STRONGLY INFLUENCE HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGE in COLLABORATIVE WORKSHOPS (EVEN WHEN CO-DEVELOPED AGREEMENTS in PLACE)

↳ e.g. FORMAL EXPECTATIONS can REINFORCE POWER DYNAMICS
→ DISCOURAGES OPEN PARTICIPATION

SCHEDULING

POSES SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES for COORDINATING WORKSHOPS

ACADEMIC TIMETABLES ← FITTING AROUND → EXAMS

This toolkit was developed through a series of 15 workshops with over 250 Health and Social Care students from Dudley College of Technology, Sandwell College, Walsall College, and City of Wolverhampton College.

A big thank you to all the colleges that made this possible, and to the students whose experiences and ideas are at the heart of this work.

Co-create

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