

PHI invites you to participate in its 2022 WE'RE STILL HERE! campaign during the week of October 9–15 by going out and spreading the word about the importance of vaccination.

As most of you are surely aware, the US recently reported its first case of polio since 2013 in Rockland County, New York, in late July. This was later followed by an announcement that poliovirus had been detected in wastewater samples in New York City. The admonition that “polio is just a plane ride away” suddenly looks very prescient.

Vaccination rates remain relatively high overall in the US, but vaccine coverage has begun to decline in recent years, leading to under-immunized communities where previously eradicated diseases have broken through. Disinformation—much of it lately linked to the Covid vaccines—has surely played a part in increasing vaccine hesitancy.

Another issue, though, is that too many people these days underestimate the threat of vaccine-preventable diseases because they have no firsthand knowledge of their effects. Almost everyone has probably heard of polio, but how many are really aware of what it would mean if their child contracted polio.

With polio in the news again, polio survivors are in a unique position to remind people about the importance of vaccines. For many of us, the vaccine came too late. But for those opting not to vaccinate themselves or their children today, it's not too late.

Here is some helpful advice¹ from National Jewish Health on how to speak with those who are vaccine hesitant:

Build Trust—To build trust while calming fear and anxiety, use a friendly tone and acknowledge that questions about vaccines are normal and understandable.

Answer Questions—Answer questions as straightforward as you can with respect and honesty. Do not overwhelm them by providing too many details or emotional appeals.

Understand Vaccine Hesitancy—Remember, many vaccine-hesitant people are exposed to an overabundance of information. They want to find out what information is accurate. Your job is not to convince them to get vaccinated but rather to be a trusted source of information so they can make an informed decision.

Ask About Their Concerns—Reasons that someone may be hesitant about vaccines are often personal. Approach people from a place of love, respect and support so they know that you want to understand their concerns.

Have a Two-Way Conversation—Be a good listener so you understand what the other person is saying. Reflect what they are saying and ask clarifying questions in a calm, friendly and respectful way.

Not Everyone Can Be Influenced—Confirm that you understand their reasons and then ask if they want to hear another viewpoint. If they are open, then calmly provide them information from reliable sources in a helpful way.

Know Common Vaccine Concerns—Some of the reasons people may be hesitant to get the vaccine may include concerns about: long- and short-term safety, side effects, misinformation, not understanding the science, distrust of government and health care entities or other issues. Research these topics.

PHI is encouraging you to use WE'RE STILL HERE! week to approach your local newspaper or television stations, schools, community groups, or even family or friends who may be vaccine hesitant to talk about your experience and the importance of vaccines.

Need some guidance or relevant information to make an impact? Simply email us at info@post-polio.org or call us at 314-534-0475. ■

So this October, get out there and show them that WE'RE STILL HERE!

1. Lockhart, Gabriel C. “How to Talk with People Who Are Hesitant to Get Vaccinated.” National Jewish Health. www.nationaljewish.org/patients-visitors/patient-info/important-updates/coronavirus-information-and-resources/covid-19-vaccines/vaccine-articles/how-to-talk-with-people-who-are-hesitant-to-get-vaccinated. Accessed August 10, 2022.