A COMMUNICATOR’S GUIDE TO COVID-19 VACCINATION
Research, Theories, Models, and Recommendations
Communicators Should Know

Key Findings:

Vaccine hesitancy is not due to a lack of information. People are concerned about the "rushed" vaccine process, potential side effects of a vaccine in children, and whether vaccines contain ingredients that are unsafe. Public health agencies should help identify deeper issues.

Tailoring communication is critical. When communicating about vaccines, avoid jargon and technical language. Trust doctors and nurses. Healthcare providers (HCPs) are the most important source for many to increase vaccine confidence. Messaging related to vaccines should be aligned.

Marginalized groups have lower vaccine confidence. Coronavirus vaccine hesitancy is tied to systemic racism, discrimination, and government. Messaging related to COVID-19 vaccines should be sensitive to cultural beliefs, and act like a fist for those who are untreated. Cultural humility is important.

Opinion leaders should be defined. Inoculating people against misinformation requires defining influential individuals or groups of people within your audience. This is often easier said than done, especially if you need to define communities to demonstrate shared value. Vaccinate credible influencers within specific communities.

Misinformation should not be repeated. People are more likely to believe false information if they see it repeated. Inoculating against misinformation requires understanding how people think and feel as well as the determinants of behavior change.

Understand biases.

Language matters. Avoid using loaded language that can turn people off. Words like "vaccine," "vaccination," and "vaccinated" are common in vaccine discourse, but they also indicate a lack of confidence in vaccines. "Public health agencies" is often used as a technical term that can turn people off, so it should be used with caution.

Technology can help increase uptake. Technology has been effective in increasing vaccine uptake, especially for vaccines that have lower vaccine confidence. Social media can be effective in changing attitudes and behaviors regarding vaccines. Technology can be used to target specific audiences and to deliver accurate information.

Use theories and models to guide communication planning as well as strategies and tactics.

Trust doctors and nurses. Healthcare providers (HCPs) are the most important source for many to increase vaccine confidence. Messaging related to COVID-19 vaccines should be aligned.

Agencies must be aligned. All agencies (government, healthcare, and other) must be aligned. The anti-vaccination movement should not be ignored.

Inoculate people against misinformation. Inoculating against misinformation requires understanding how people think and feel as well as the determinants of behavior change. For example, using the COM-B model of behavior by applying the Behavior Change Wheel can increase vaccine uptake.

Listen. Listen to people’s and HCP’s concerns about the vaccine. Inoculating against misinformation requires understanding how people think and feel as well as the determinants of behavior change.