Trusted voices – who, why and how to communicate about COVID-19 vaccines

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Communicating during crises, why trusted voices are more important than ever
What we know now about COVID-19 vaccine

A highly varied landscape is emerging:

• Attitudes are dynamic and evolving

• Substantial variation across demographics at a sub-national level

• Influences are layered, complex, and context-specific: ethnicity, geography, education, socio-economic, employment

• Hesitancy is a hurdle (information alone doesn’t address it), but is decreasing as norms are established

• Trust in government translates to trust in vaccines, and a lack of transparency feeds mistrust

• Targeted interventions emerge when focusing on specific sub-national groups

… and it matters for all vaccines

L. Menning, IVB, WHO
What we know now about TRUST

• Trust can’t be easily gained during an emergency
• People turn to sources they’ve trusted in the past
• The closer a threat comes to individual world’s the closer/localized sources will be trusted
• Consistency and provision of update information important
Understanding Demand and Hesitancy

**Vaccine Hesitancy**
delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite availability of vaccine services

**Immunization Demand**
the actions of individuals & communities to seek, support, and/or advocate for vaccines and immunization services

**Acceptance**

Spectrum of intentions related to COVID-19 vaccines*

*GACVS vaccine safety communications guide for COVID-19 vaccines (chapter 9)
“The overriding goal for outbreak communications is to communicate with the public in ways that build, maintain or restore Trust.”

WHO Outbreak Communication Guidelines, 2005
Trust is the public perception of:

- Are the risk managers skilled enough to do the job?
- Are the risk managers telling all the truth?
- Are the risk managers acting to safeguard my health?
- Do the risk managers understand me?

YES to all these questions? 

TRUST
Managing misinformation = gaining trust

Misinformation drains resources (human and financial) away from other emergency risk communication objectives

When people are misinformed they may make decisions that are not in the best interest of themselves/families/communities

Trusted channels expand beyond social media and management of misinformation can inform efforts across a range of channels and venues, including social media

Managing misinformation = gaining trust

**How can you counter misinformation at the interpersonal level?**

**Use facts to debunk myths and rumors**

**Point to trusted people/resources that support vaccination**

**‘Social Inoculation’**

1. Preparing people by telling them about misinformation they are likely to encounter before they see it via usual community and social media channels.
2. It is theorized that this may make them less likely to believe or share it.
3. This concept is promising for making people resistant to strong, future persuasive attacks.

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The art of refuting a mistruth... or not refuting

1. Fact
Lead with the truth, state the facts clearly. Do not try to refute the misinformation, just state what is true.

2. Warning
An explicit warning that misinformation is coming, which may contain a weakened version of the misinformation. Only repeat the misinformation once.

3. Fallacy
Explain why the misinformation is wrong and, as with prebunking, explain the specific misleading tactics being employed, or highlight the hidden motives of the authors of the misinformation.

4. Fact
Repeat the truth. This is crucial because the alternative correct information fills the mental "gap" generated by the correction. Make the facts "stickier" than the misinformation (see Appendix 3 for tips).

The truth may be irrelevant

People spread bad information to
• Express feelings
• Find out other people’s opinions
• Coping with uncertainty
• Building relationships
• Self enhancement
• Social cohesion
• Markers of mutuality
• Mobilizing against political order
• For fun

Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019; Duffey et al., 2020; Shah, K., 2020; Wasserman et al, 2019; 2020
Direct refutation of misinformation linked to world views can backfire, specifically within the communities that hold ideologies that oppose COVID-19 science (Berenski, 2017).

Refutation tactics, commonly used in scientific communication practice, can be perceived by those groups as challenges to individual and community autonomy and world-views (Lewandowsky, 2012).

These challenges can reinforce existing misperceptions (Berenski, 2017; Lewandowsky, 2012; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; Pickel 1995, Wolf & Montgomery, 1997).
Tips for building TRUST

- Accept and communicate **uncertainty** – explain what is known and unknown.

- **Admit when you don’t know the answer** to a question. If possible, find out the answer and provide the information later.

- Share information in a **timely and proactive** way.

- Be **transparent about possible risks** – e.g., prepare people for possible side effects. Show empathy, solidarity and understanding.

- **Respect and acknowledge** diversity of opinion.

- Use **clear and simple language** and avoid jargon.

- **Avoid over-reassuring** or making promises. It is important to set realistic expectations.
Questions?
How to have conversations about COVID-19 vaccines

Source: https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-to-talk-about-vaccines
1. Listen with empathy

And acknowledge how they're feeling.

I'm a bit worried about the vaccine...

It's okay to have questions or want more information.
2. Ask open-ended questions

To help you understand their concerns

Could you tell me more about why you feel that way?
3. Share trusted information

Visit the WHO website or chat to your doctor or nurse to find answers to common questions.

How do we know the vaccines are safe?

They’ve been thoroughly tested and reviewed. If you’re interested, I know where we can find more information.
4. Explore reasons for wanting to get vaccinated

I hope my grandparents and I get vaccinated so we can see each other again.

I got vaccinated to feel safer at work.
Communicating about COVID vaccine – take a lesson from the medical community

Listen for questions and concerns about:
- Vaccine safety
- Vaccine priority groups
- Vaccine shopping

Use language:
- Respectful greeting and empathy
- Language to presume acceptance
- How to respond to questions with empathy
- Keep the conversation alive ...
Communicating about COVID vaccine – take a lesson from the medical community

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**STEP 1** Determine eligibility for vaccine
- 18 years and older, vaccine-eligible
- Patients with COVID-19 vaccine

**STEP 2** Assess acceptance of vaccine

**STEP 3** Share key messages
- Benefits of vaccination
- Common side effects and how to handle
- Side effect signs

**STEP 4** Respond to questions and concerns with empathy
- Be patient, respectful, and open to asking questions
- Provide information to support the line
- Be open to further questions

**STEP 5** Request consent to vaccinate

**STEP 6** Vaccinate and provide information to take home

- Remind to wear a mask, social distance, and practice good hand washing and personal hygiene.

Respectfully explain that the client is not currently eligible for COVID-19 vaccine

- If not a member of a priority group, give information about when the vaccine will be available
- If vaccination, provide information on how the vaccine is not safe
- Remind to wear a mask, social distance, and practice good hand washing and personal hygiene.

Share key messages about COVID-19 vaccine

Respond to questions and concerns with empathy

- Provide information to support the line
- Be open to further questions
- Communicate side effects

Ask:
- Did you have any questions?

Ask:
- Do you have any questions?

Respond to questions and concerns with empathy

- Provide information to support the line
- Be open to further questions
- Communicate side effects

Respectfully thank client for their time

Provide information to take home

Respectfully thank client for their time

- Provide information to take home

Remind to wear a mask, social distance, and practice good hand washing and personal hygiene.

World Health Organization, EPI•WIN, Infodemic Management
Communicating about COVID vaccine – take a lesson from the medical community

**STEP 1**
Determine eligibility for vaccine*
- 65+ years, health worker, essential worker, chronic illness
- Priority groups may differ by location

**STEP 2**
Presume acceptance of vaccine*

**Is the client:**
- A member of a priority group?
- Free from contraindications for COVID-19 vaccine?

- **NO**
  - Respectfully explain that the client is not currently eligible for COVID-19 vaccine

- **YES**
  - If **not a member of priority group**, give information about when the vaccine will be available.
  - If **contraindication**, provide information on why the vaccine is not safe.
  - Remind to wear a mask, social distance, and practice good hand washing and personal hygiene.

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* These steps can be adapted not only for vaccination but also for educational sessions, community meetings, or one-on-one interactions.
**Communicating about COVID vaccine – take a lesson from the medical community**

**STEP 3**
Share key messages*
- Benefits of vaccination
- Common side-effects and how to handle
- Risks/danger signs

**STEP 4**
Respond to questions and concerns with empathy*
- If hesitant, fearful, confused, or angry, ask questions to understand perceptions and give more information and resources.

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**Share key messages about COVID-19 vaccine**

**Respond to questions and concerns with empathy**
- Provide information to debunk misinformation, rumors, and myths
- Use facts, stories, and visual aids to support the information
- Is there more information you would like about the vaccine?

**Give more information**
- Point to trusted people/resources in the community that support COVID-19 vaccination (e.g., village chief, spiritual leader, women’s association)

**IF HESITANT, FEARFUL, CONFUSED OR ANGRY ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINE:**
Ask questions to better understand client perceptions
- How do you feel about COVID-19 vaccine?
- Have you heard anything about the vaccine that you want to discuss?

* These steps can be carried out in PRIOR to the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. Consider using social media, community meetings, or one-on-one interactions.
Communicating about COVID vaccine – take a lesson from the medical community

**STEP 5**
Request consent to vaccinate*

**STEP 6**
Vaccinate or provide information to take home

Ask:
- Do I have your permission to give you the COVID-19 vaccine now?

**NO**
- Provide information to take home.
- Encourage client to return if they decide to get COVID-19 vaccine in the future.

**YES**
- Give the COVID-19 vaccine.
- After evaluation period, respectfully thank client for their time.
  - Tell when to return for follow-up, as needed (e.g., 2nd dose)
  - Encourage to inform other people in priority groups to seek out COVID-19 vaccine.

- Remind to wear a mask, social distance, and practice good hand washing and personal hygiene.

*These steps can be carried out prior to the vaccination day, in-person or via virtual platforms, in a group educational session, community meeting, or one-on-one interaction.
Communicating Messages

Mixed messages cause confusion and mistrust.

“I am a highly trained professional. I know what I am talking about.”

“There is no need to worry. The vaccine is 100% safe!”

Talking above the client’s level of understanding can make them feel uncomfortable.

“Trust me. Side effects are minimal.”

Common Pitfalls:
- Mixed messages
- Paternalistic or condescending attitude
- Over-reassurance
- Use of jargon or medical terms
- Dismissive of concerns

Effective Communication:
- Reflect a single message
- Speak as an equal
- Be transparent
- Match the message with the listener
- Acknowledge concerns with empathy

Among your colleagues, agree on key messages and be consistent.

“I value your perspective. I have additional information that might be useful.”

“We are still learning about the safety of the vaccine for children and pregnant women.”

Providing clear information at the right level will encourage interaction.

“Thank you for sharing your concern. It is possible you may experience fatigue, headache, fever or chills. Severe reactions are rare, but if you have one please go to the health center or hospital right away.”
How faith leaders can boost vaccine confidence
What you can do

1. **Lead by example**
   - Openly *share your support* for vaccination.
   - Share your *personal experience* of getting vaccinated.

2. **Build trust**
   - Let people know they can come to you if they have questions or need advice – run Q&A sessions.
   - Listen to any concerns and communicate in a way that is *respectful and builds trust*.

3. **Break down barriers**
   - Many people’s decision to get vaccinated ultimately comes down to *whether it is convenient*
   - Set up a **fund for child care or travel costs** for parents to get to their vaccination appointments.
   - Advocate with local businesses to give employees paid time off.
   - Consider how you can help people to make vaccination appointments, organize transport or offer any other assistance that might help *make it easy* for someone to get vaccinated.
And help people to remember...

• Vaccines are safe, effective and an important part of the COVID-19 response – **but stopping the spread of disease remains key.**

• Do what you can to **facilitate** and **remind people** to continue to practice precautions **even after vaccination**, such as:

  - physical distancing
  - wearing a mask
  - keeping rooms well ventilated
  - avoiding crowds
  - cleaning hands
  - coughing into a bent elbow or tissue

Kayaks DOING IT ALL, PROTECTS US ALL

Always remember to follow these 5 precautions, even after getting vaccinated.
Providing a ‘hierarchy’ of information

- Key message
- Simple explanation
- In depth explanation
Addressing current issues in COVID-19 vaccination
Do vaccines contain pork products? Are they halal?

Key message:
COVID-19 vaccines are halal. They do not contain pork or animal products of any kind.

Simple explanation:

In depth explanation:

We don’t have one. Is more info needed?
Will vaccines cause blood clots?

Key message:
A very rare but serious side effect (blood clotting with low platelets) has been reported in a very small number of people after their first dose of the AstraZeneca and the J&J vaccines. The benefits of vaccination are far greater than the risk of this rare side effect; blood clots are far more commonly caused by COVID-19 than by the vaccine. Millions of doses of AstraZeneca have been administered with very few serious side effects.

In depth explanation:

GACVS Statement – AstraZeneca, 16 April 2021
EMA Statement – AstraZeneca, 18 April 2021
GACVS Statement - J&J, 19 May 2021
Which vaccine is most effective?

Key message:
All COVID-19 vaccines approved for use by WHO are highly effective at preventing severe illness or death. When it’s your turn to be vaccinated, take whichever vaccine you are offered first.

Simple explanation:
• Science in 5: Which vaccine should I take and what about side effects?

In depth explanation:
• Vaccines Explained: The different types of COVID-19 vaccines
• Individual information on vaccines:
  ➢ AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine
  ➢ Johnson and Johnson
  ➢ Moderna
  ➢ Pfizer/BionTech
  ➢ Sinopharm
  ➢ Sinovac
What effect will variants like the Delta variant have on vaccines?

Key message:
All of the WHO emergency use listed vaccines do protect against severe disease, hospitalization and death due to the delta variant. As soon as it is your turn, make sure you get vaccinated to protect yourself against all COVID-19 variants. Whether you are vaccinated or not, continue to practice all the protective behaviours to protect yourself and others.

Simple explanation:
• Science in 5 (short video): The delta variant and COVID-19 vaccines

In depth explanation:
• Vaccines Explained (long read with graphics): The effects of virus variants on COVID-19 vaccines
Why do I still need to wear a mask after I’ve been vaccinated?

Key message:

Vaccination against COVID-19 is **highly effective** against severe symptoms and death. We still don’t know to what extent being vaccinated stops you picking up the virus and passing it on to others. The best way to **protect yourself** from the small remaining risk of illness and to **avoid infecting others** is to keep practicing the key protective behaviours, including wearing a mask.

Simple explanation:

Science in 5 (short video) – I’ve been vaccinated – What next?

In depth explanation:

Vaccine explain series (long form read with graphics)
Questions?