

COMMUNICATIONS BEST PRACTICES

about the COVID-19 vaccine



MESSAGING

- **Start by listening.** Each person has a personal journey to understanding the vaccine and deciding to be vaccinated. We recommend conducting a brief survey to learn your audiences' attitudes and understanding about the vaccine, what barriers they face to receiving a vaccine, and what would motivate them to get vaccinated. This will inform your messaging strategy.
- **Trans-create, don't just translate.** Work with trusted community leaders, community-based organizations, and/or in-language media to ensure that information materials, ads, and other tools will be relevant and impactful in all languages spoken or read by county residents. Simply translating information can cause confusion and even unintentional insults.
- **Audiences must hear from people who look like them.** This is particularly true for multicultural, LGBTQ+, and older residents. Some county residents may distrust the medical community, the government, or anyone in traditional leadership roles because of the country's history of systemic racism in medical research, challenging immigration policies, societal agism, or other prejudices. Take care to feature spokespersons who will be trusted by audiences they are intended to reach.
- **Guidance will change, help your audiences understand why.** Guidance from public health organizations has been called into question because of perceived contradictions to past communications (e.g., whether masks are necessary or not). Because information about the virus and vaccines is frequently updated, guidance about public behavior will also continue to be updated. Call attention to the status in your county with regular announcements tagged with the county's information. For example: XYZ County Vaccine Alert

STRATEGIES

- **Prioritize internal communications.** The county must regularly give employees accurate and timely information for their own use and to share with family and friends.
- **Leverage existing materials, and coordinate** with nearby county health departments, local health care providers, and the CDPH on messaging and outreach. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. These are excellent resources:
 - <https://toolkit.covid19.ca.gov/>
 - <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/toolkits/health-departments.html>

- **Focus on education and access.** Counties should provide a regular cadence of information to their employees and residents. Messages should include links to public health education resources, information in a variety of languages, and specifics about when and where vaccines are available. When vaccines are not available, use a placeholder statement about when the information will be updated. Update the statement every few days or more often as necessary.
- **Facilitate proactive conversations about vaccine policies.** Some county employees are not comfortable receiving the COVID-19 vaccination. Executive teams should discuss how the county will approach issues that may arise in this area. Work with empathy and in good faith to help every employee learn about their options and make a decision that is right for them.
- **Model the language that employees should use.** While some employees will be eager to advocate for vaccination among their peers, advocacy can quickly turn divisive and cause workplace disputes. Proactively set the tone so peer-to-peer discussion is productive.
- **County executives, managers, and elected officials lead by example.** Provide county leadership daily talking points so they have easy access to current information, and they are reminded how to talk about vaccine topics and potentially difficult situations.
- **Address misinformation quickly and with certainty.** Vaccine misinformation will continue to be a public health barrier. Whenever possible, quickly ask for a correction from traditional media, or post on social media a factual statement with a link to your public health information.
- **Be mindful of phrasing.** In a language study conducted by Frank Luntz and the de Beaumont Foundation, researchers found that certain words and phrases about COVID-19 are viewed negatively and cause listeners to ignore public health information, while others inspire action.

Say:

- Pandemic
- Eliminate the virus
- Effective and safe vaccine
- Essential workers
- Personal responsibility
- Stay-at-home order
- Public health agency
- Policy based on science

Don't say:

- Coronavirus
- Defeat the virus
- A quickly developed vaccine
- Frontline worker
- National duty or civic duty
- Government lockdown
- Government health agency
- Policy based on impact