At UF Health, we’re dedicated to keeping the community healthy. We’ve developed this toolkit to empower local leaders, community organizations and others with information and tools you can use to inform and educate your communities about COVID-19 vaccines.

Resources and information are being continuously updated. Please visit coronavirus.UFHealth.org for more information about COVID-19 or for additional tools, graphics and resources.
# Table of Contents

3  How to talk about vaccines
   - Best practices
   - COVID-19 & vaccine facts
   - General guidance
   - Things to avoid
   - Must-have words to use
   - Use empathy to motivate

7  Vaccine champions

8  Social media
   - Examples of social media posts
   - Social media tips

9  Talking to the media

12 Partnering with your community

14 Ready-to-use flyers & templates

15 Resources

16 Acknowledgments
COVID-19 & VACCINE FACTS

For some people, COVID-19 can be mild. However, it can cause serious complications or death for others — including healthy people. The vaccine plays an important role in helping to prevent or reduce the effects of COVID-19.

COVID-19 vaccines help our bodies develop immunity to the virus that causes COVID-19 without us having to get the illness. Different types of vaccines work in different ways to offer protection, but with all types of vaccines, the body is left with a supply of “memory” cells that will remember how to fight that virus in the future.

It typically takes a few weeks for the body to make antibodies after vaccination. These antibodies are the shields that help prevent COVID-19 and its symptoms from becoming dangerous. Experts say that 75% to 85% of the population needs to get vaccinated to achieve community immunity. When enough people develop immunity to a disease, the disease can’t spread in the community. This usually occurs through vaccination. Some people can’t get vaccinated due to their health risks or access to health care. It’s especially important to protect these people by getting vaccinated. Community immunity protects all of us.

The Food and Drug Administration is responsible for making sure that any authorized vaccines are safe and that they work. This process can take many months to accomplish, but because of an unprecedented scientific effort, financial support and willing volunteers, researchers were able to test the vaccine on large groups of people much faster than ever before. They were able to complete this work in six months, with no safety steps skipped in the process.
GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

Timing
Coincide with vaccine availability
  • Continue communicating until community immunity is reached

Events & Social
Presentations & handouts
  • Churches
  • Community groups
  • Virtual

Social messaging
  • ID spokespeople
  • Video & infographics

Mass Media
Customized media plan to each audience

Key message points
  • Messages should focus on answering questions that support decision-making related to the vaccine.
  • Messages should focus on accessibility, including where and how to get the vaccine.
  • Messages should focus on the importance of vaccinations and recommendations from health organizations about re-vaccination.
BEST PRACTICES

Information vs. persuasion
Avoid spreading misinformation. Only share information you know to be true and that comes from a reputable source.

Listen to the concerns that people have related to the vaccine and share answers when they are available.

Do not answer anything you are unsure about. Connect your clients with experts in this area or reach out to an expert to find the most accurate answer.

Share your story related to the vaccine if you feel comfortable. Did you receive the vaccine? Tell your clients and friends.

If you choose to share your story related to the vaccine, be sure to not post your vaccine verification card. This contains private information. Share this graphic instead that tells your network you have been vaccinated!

If you choose to share your story related to the vaccine, you may receive negative feedback. Sharing your story face-to-face can limit negative feedback. If you choose to share your story on social media and receive negative feedback, respond with facts and do not engage in unproductive conversations. Sending a private message could be a more effective approach.

Communicating about the COVID-19 vaccines can be challenging, but always ensure you are practicing best communication principles.

GENERAL GUIDANCE

• Acknowledge concerns — acknowledge rather than challenge and offer scientific, unbiased answers.
• Focus on moments missed — talk about moments of human connection missed during the pandemic and the goal of getting back to making memories.
• Emphasize the importance of protection — focus messaging on protecting loved ones and those most vulnerable.
• Maintain a positive tone — be inviting and respectful, and emphasize the choice is for individuals to make.
• Remember that you need to build and earn trust with your audiences for your messaging to resonate.
THINGS TO AVOID

• Steer clear of negativity and fear — avoid using fear tactics and reminders of it being a difficult year.
• Avoid phrases about it being the right thing to do — this can come across as pushy and accusatory.
• Don’t overpromise or obfuscate — mass vaccination is a long-term strategy, so avoid implying vaccines will flip the switch.
• Stay away from “back to normal” language — life will likely never be the way it was pre-pandemic, so put the focus on looking to the future and the experiences that will come with it.

MUST-HAVE WORDS TO USE

• “COVID-19 vaccination” vs. “COVID shot”
• Focus on “safer” and “safety” over an absolute “safe”
• Authorized by FDA based on clinical testing
• “Keep your family safe” vs. “keep our country safe”
• “Medical experts” and “doctors” vs. “scientists”
• “People who have questions” vs. “people who are hesitant, resistant, skeptical”
• “Physical distancing” vs. “social distancing”

USE EMPATHY TO MOTIVATE

• Lead with empathy
• Use emotional triggers
• Motivate people to get informed
• Explore opportunities for “assumed participation,” i.e., “What are you looking forward to doing after you’re vaccinated?”

Data can inform but it’s the human connection that creates motivation. Facts about safety are key but the messenger is critical.
While data can inform, story is what motivates and connects us. When communicating with people who have questions or concerns about COVID-19 vaccines, be sure to leverage vaccine champions — those who are passionate about sharing their vaccine story.

For internal audiences within organizations:

- **Identify your champions (influencers)** — Identifying your hesitant populations can be challenging, but depending on the size of your organization, vaccine champions can help leverage personal connections and stories to influence those who may be on the fence or misinformed about the vaccine.

- **Use tools available to you** — Using tools such as the UF Health How to Talk About the COVID-19 Vaccine Guide can help anyone who supports the vaccine become a champion in their personal interactions.

- **Consider peer-to-peer communications** — Keep in mind any potential hierarchical pressure when choosing champions, as peer-to-peer communications can be more effective in persuading a shift in thought around vaccine acceptance, whereas top-down pressure can do the opposite.

For external audiences of organizations and the community at large:

- Enlisting champions in a marketed and advertised way can be helpful. Engaging local leaders to help identify local champions in the community who can share why they want or why they got the vaccine can help connect their followers, family, friends, confidants and colleagues in a way pure information sharing cannot.

- Effective champions should be identified based on your community’s local hesitant populations and who they look to for guidance, advice, feedback, support, etc.

Some examples of potential champions for your vaccine-hesitant community members might be:

- Local radio personalities
- Local political leaders
- Thought and religious leaders
- Respected members of the elder community
- Local celebrities
- Influencers
- Teachers of the year
- Local business owners (restaurants, barbershops, etc.)
At UF Health, we use social media as a tool to communicate the latest and most relevant health care news with our communities in Gainesville, Jacksonville, Central Florida and beyond. That includes any and all communications related to COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccines currently available to our communities. Using messaging guidance from medical experts and visual assets to encourage engagement, we craft our social media posts to promote facts around the COVID-19 vaccines.

See the UF Health graphics that are available for you to share via your social media channels.

**EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS**

- It’s important to stay informed when making important health care decisions for you and your family. Using scientific data and recommendations from experts in our community, we’ve compiled answers to some of your most common questions.
- From their effectiveness and potential side effects to their differences, explore the facts about the COVID-19 vaccines.
- Dr. XYZ shares why it’s important to arm yourself with the facts about the COVID-19 vaccines.
  
  #ChompOutCOVID #GatorsWearMasks
- Although this spring may look different than last, following these healthy habits will help keep you and your loved ones safer throughout the season.
- “When you see the patients, how sick they get, I would rather have the symptoms of that vaccine, than go through the disease itself.” — XYZ name, XYZ credentials, shares why they decided to get vaccinated against COVID-19.
  
  #ChompOutCOVID #GatorsWearMasks

**SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS**

- Don’t respond to negative feedback, such as comments, with more negativity. Respond with facts to dispel myths and shut down any flow of misinformation.
- Don’t encourage those who have received the COVID-19 vaccine to share their vaccination card online, as their personal information, including name and birthday, could be used maliciously against them. Instead, encourage followers to share a photo of them getting the vaccine (without others in the background), or share a graphic that says they received it.
- When sharing graphics on social media, make sure to use alternative text so that users with visual impairments can read the content. Learn how to create alternative text. Social media has some standard-sized graphics — learn more about dimensions and sizes.
- Text should be as simple as possible. At UF Health, we aim for an eighth grade reading level. Here’s an example of simplified copy we have used in the past:
- Feel free to share our Q&A video content as well.
Organizing a simple media strategy for your business or group helps you to successfully influence the media and achieve your goal of communicating about vaccines. Here are seven easy steps to help guide your media planning efforts.

1. **State your goal.** What are you trying to achieve with your vaccine communications plan?
   
   *Example: We want to combat COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy.*

2. **Create your proposition statement and identify your audience.**
   
   *Example: We need to increase vaccination rates in our community and communicate to (insert demographic audience, i.e., Black, Hispanic, etc.) in (insert geographic location, i.e., Alachua County) that the vaccine is safe and effective.*

3. **Create an effective message.** Identify key message points.

4. **Identify subject matter experts in your organization or members of your community who are champions in the vaccine effort to speak persuasively and with authority on the subject.**

5. **Create a media list of local and regional media outlets that you want to target and their contact information.**

6. **Write a media pitch — this is a short, impactful outline of your news proposition that explains why your story is newsworthy and includes a call-to-action.**
   
   *Example: The Church of God will host a vaccine clinic on March 15 at 9 a.m. Pastor Johnson will kick off the day with a prayer and then will get his vaccine. Forty churchgoers have registered for this event and will be vaccinated. If you would like to get vaccinated against COVID-19, register at [website.com].*

7. **Evaluate outcomes and measure your impact.**
   
   *Example: How many people read your news story online? How many registered after reading your story?*
Public service announcements, or PSAs, are generally messages that are shared for free that address a social issue or something timely and of interest to the public. Here are a few pre-written radio scripts that you can share with local radio stations, or if you’re able to, record yourself as a community leader.


and

- HI, I’M _____(radio personality name)_______ AND I’M___(your role/community affiliation etc.)_____. MORE THAN 6 MILLION FLORIDIANS HAVE RECEIVED THE COVID-19 VACCINE SO FAR, BUT WE STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO. IF YOU, LIKE ME, ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO A SUMMER OF FAMILY GATHERINGS, BAR-B-QUES AND BALL GAMES, PLEASE TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY ABOUT GETTING VACCINATED. IF YOU STILL HAVE QUESTIONS, I ASK YOU TO TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR OR PHARMACIST. ANYONE OVER AGE 16 IN FLORIDA IS ELIGIBLE. CHECK WITH YOUR LOCAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH OR LOCAL RETAIL PHARMACY TO LEARN MORE. THIS MESSAGE IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY (RADIO STATION) AND UF HEALTH AND A SUMMER WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS.
WRITE AN OP-ED FOR THE NEWSPAPER

Here are some tips to help you write your story and get it published in a newspaper. Sharing your “why” is an authentic way to communicate about an issue. An op-ed is an opinion piece written by someone who doesn’t work for the newspaper. Write your op-ed (which stands for opposite the editorial page) and submit it to a newspaper local to your organization.

- Start off with an opening “hook” to grab the reader’s attention (strong anecdote, surprising fact, powerful claim, etc.).
- Emphasize your unique voice and point of view.
- If you have received the vaccine, reiterate why you chose to do so and describe the experience; if you are advocating for a specific community, share how the vaccine will impact that community.
- Explain what you are excited about getting back to doing (family gatherings, church services, football games, etc.).
- Include a couple of key facts or statistics that are relevant to your point of view when appropriate.
- Include a strong ending (a call to action for others to get vaccinated, a memorable detail, a hopeful look toward the future, etc.).
- Lend credibility to your words by including a line or two about who you are or what organization you represent and how that group engages with the community.
- Keep it to 750 words maximum.
  - Microsoft Word and Google Docs both have word count features under the “tools” section.
- Include a relevant photo whenever possible.
Here are a few tactics you can employ to reach your community. Keep in mind that engaging the community can result in increased effectiveness in communications efforts when cross-channel conversation and information sharing is intentional.

Collaborate with public health officials, educational institutions and health care associations, in addition to community leaders, to pool resources and minimize redundancy.

- Engage community, religious or other influential grassroots leaders to promote vaccination access, awareness and education. Enlisting them as champions in vaccine communications efforts can help influence those they are connected to.

Form community workgroups to help establish local efforts. This can be key to ensuring messaging gets to those who need it.

- Workgroup members can include thought leaders and professionals such as political leaders, religious leaders, business leaders and communications professionals.

Partner with existing federal, state and local vaccination programs.

- Develop targeted initiatives to identify and address the vaccination needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations such as BIPOC, children, elders, families, immigrants, refugees and LGBTQ individuals.
- Local health departments and hospital epidemiology departments can collaborate in a cross-channel effort to ensure equity in vaccine access to the community and thus further engage and build trust where it may be lacking.

Improve access to vaccines at focal points for the local community (e.g., community center, school, church).

- Use physical distancing best practices.
- Identify transportation networks and other low-cost mechanisms that enhance the likelihood that people can access immunizations without sacrificing jobs or other responsibilities.

Connect with parents and guardians via local school boards to help local families better understand their options.

- Include children and youth in communications about vaccination behaviors.
- Early exposure to immunization information may influence vaccine confidence during adulthood.
- Social media and text messaging campaigns are strategies that may benefit older children and youth.

Download our templates for events, vaccine clinics, handouts and social media graphics.
Engage the community in town halls and focus groups with local health and medical communities. These can help identify community concerns and misinformation or disinformation that could be circulating.

- Invite local leaders and medical experts to join in a virtual town hall (on Zoom, for example) or an in-person event (like a church worship service) to answer your community’s questions about COVID-19 and vaccines.
- Simple focus groups of a few people within a community can be used to help understand local community vaccine concerns.
- Information learned from these focus groups and town halls can be helpful in the development of direct messaging used to improve vaccine communications and increase acceptance and uptake of the vaccine.

Identify vaccine champions! While data can inform, story is how we connect.

- Engaging local leaders to help identify local champions in the community to share why they want or got the vaccine can help connect their followers, family, friends, confidants and colleagues in a way information cannot.
- Effective champions should be identified based on your community’s local hesitant populations and who they look to for guidance, advice, feedback, support, etc. (i.e., local radio personalities, thought and religious leaders, respected members of the community, local celebrities, influencers, teachers of the year, etc.).
Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine

The vaccine is being distributed to individuals across the state, starting with people who are most at risk for getting sick. When it’s your turn to get the vaccine, here’s what you need to know.

How the COVID-19 Vaccine Works

For some people, COVID-19 can be deadly. However, in cases where severe outcomes or death occurs — including hospital stays — the vaccine plays an important role in helping to prevent or reduce the effects of COVID-19.

COVID-19 vaccine helps to develop immunity in the body that causes COVID-19 without having to get the illness. Different types of vaccines work in different ways to prevent or reduce the effects of COVID-19.

It typically takes a few weeks for the body to make antibodies after vaccination. These antibodies are the shields that help prevent COVID-19 and its symptoms from becoming serious. Antibodies are the body’s way of recognizing and remembering a pathogen to help fight it off in the future.

For some people, COVID-19 can be mild. However, it can cause serious complications or death for others — including healthy people. The vaccine plays an important role in helping to prevent or reduce the effects of COVID-19.

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EXPERT SOURCES TO FIND INFORMATION

- Ad Council Toolkits for Black, Hispanic and Other Audiences
- CDC COVID-19 Vaccine Information
- CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Toolkits
- Florida Department of Health
- Institute for Public Relations Communicator’s Guide to COVID-19 Vaccination
- COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Guide from the Center for Public Interest Communications at UF in partnership with Purpose and the United Nations Verified initiative
- American Psychological Association Building Vaccine Confidence Guide

CONTACT US

If you are interested in hosting a town hall and would like to invite an expert to speak about COVID-19 and vaccinations, please email Fidela James, assistant to Dr. Michael Lauzardo, fidela.james@medicine.ufl.edu.

If you have questions related to media or need an expert for an interview, please contact Ken Garcia, UF Health Communications, kdgarcia@ufl.edu.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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