

Responding to misinformation and disinformation



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Outline

1. Dealing with misinformation and disinformation
2. Attributes of a good message
3. Sample messaging
5. Do's and don'ts
5. Resources

DEALING WITH MISINFORMATION & DISINFORMATION



Doctor, when do you think the COVID-19 pandemic will be over?

I don't know, I'm not a journalist.



Misinformation and disinformation

- **Information:** things that are accurate to the best of our current knowledge
- **Misinformation:** incorrect or misleading information. It is not created with the intention of hurting others.
- **Disinformation:** Deliberate misinformation designed to deceive and mislead
- **Infodemic:** overabundance of information – some accurate, some not

“Our enemy is also the growing surge of misinformation”

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres

WHO (<https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/let-s-flatten-the-infodemic-curve>)

Ignorance

- **Definition:** when a person or group lacks the relevant information on a specific topic or issue
- They understand that they have an incomplete or inadequate understanding of the issue
- Generally open to learning more

Communicating with these groups

- **Ignorant:** Simply providing the relevant facts can be enough to persuade them to see things your way
- **Other groups:** Think they know all the facts
 - Need to be persuaded to change
 - Skeptical of your messaging



Zoom poll 1: How often do you use social media?

1. Every day
2. Several times a week but not every day
3. 2 to 4 time a month
4. Rarely
5. Never

Difficulties/barriers

- Prevalence of social media, major spreader of misinformation
- How people choose information
 - Prefer news that support their existing point of view (selective exposure)
 - Surround themselves with like-minded people (echo chamber)
- Social media algorithms (filter bubble)
 - Feed users information they will like and agree with so they stay longer
 - Reinforce rumors and misinformation
- How people remember information
 - People remember things they like/agree with
 - Difficult to change opinion

Whom do we trust?

- Misinformation spreads most easily and fast through social media
 - With few exceptions, the most problematic misinformation comes from loud and influential voices online
 - Social media spreaders with large following
- Trusted sources, mostly
 - Government agencies...usually
 - May have their own agenda
 - May be “forced” to communicate certain messages
- Trusted sources, almost always
 - US CDC
 - UN, WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO

7 best practices for correcting misinformation

1. Timing is important
 - Stay ahead or correct misinformation as soon as possible
2. Repetition, repetition, repetition
 - State correct information multiple times, WITHOUT repeating (and thus spreading) the original misinformation
3. Explain your correction
 - Explain why the lie seems so credible
4. Consider the sources/experts you use
 - Credible expert sources work better than non-experts when correcting misinformation

7 best practices for correcting misinformation

5. Be first ... and last

- People rely heavily on the first and last information
- Called primacy and recency effects

6. Keep it simple

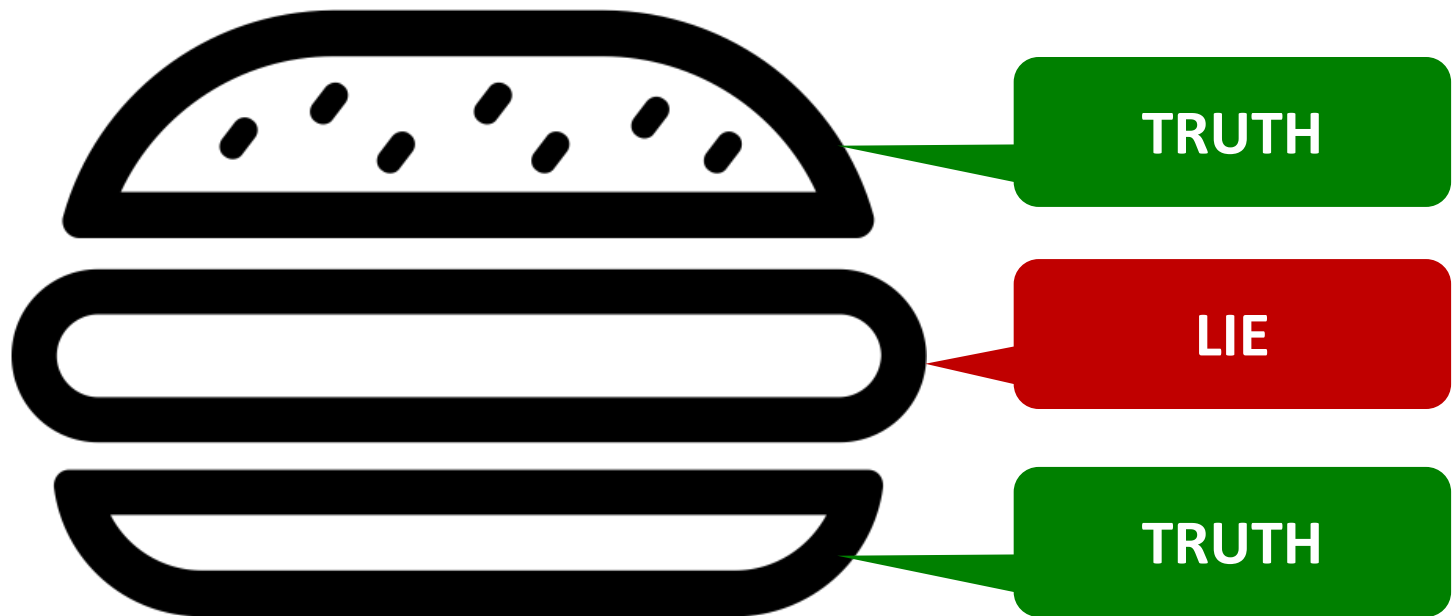
- Always use plain language

7. Combine your approaches

- When countering the spread of misinformation, consider combining the different best practices we just discussed

Use the truth sandwich

1. Start with the truth. The first frame gets the advantage.
2. Indicate the lie. Avoid amplifying the specific language if possible, and don't repeat the lie.
3. Return to the truth. Always repeat truths more than lies.



Sample truth sandwich

- 1. Start with the truth:** Our goal is to keep everyone safe and healthy, that is especially true in this challenging time. The COVID-19 vx, in addition to handwashing, distancing, and mask-wearing, is a new opportunity to protect ourselves and those around us. We know you want to stay safe and keep your family safe, and part of that involves ensuring you have the information you need about the vx so you can decide for yourself.
- 2. Indicate, but don't repeat, the lie:** We know people have questions about the vx, and some who are opposed to it have scared people with misinformation about the vx.
- 3. Return to the truth:** Many people want to get the vx or are considering it because it can mean that we keep our loved ones safe, our schools open, get our local businesses back on their feet, and move our communities forward. As more are vaccinated, we can protect health care and essential workers, people who are at highest risk, and our broader community. Our focus is on listening to your questions, providing clear, accurate, science-based information, and keeping our community healthy and safe.

ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD MESSAGE



Crafting your (spoken) message

- Present a short, clear (no jargon), focused message
 - Anxious people can't absorb lots of information
 - Get to the bottom line: only what is most important now
 - Keep answers short and focused (no longer than 2 minutes)
 - Don't explain in technical terms
- Get to the point
 - Put most important information first
 - Provide only relevant information, what they need to know right now
 - Don't add background information
- Give people things to do (action steps)
 - Present action steps in positive wording
 - Avoid negatives
 - Describe benefits of action
 - 3-part steps: must do X, should do Y, can do Z

Crafting your (spoken) message

- When the news is good, start with continued concern, then state good news
 - Although cases are still high, we have seen a steady decline in number of cases this week
 - Although we still have some vaccine shortages, 85% of the country is now receiving the needed doses
- Repeat the message often (latency effect)
 - Reflects durability and credibility
- Use personal pronouns (humanizing effect)
 - WE are committed (not FETP, CDC, or MOH is committed)

The STARCC principle

Purpose: The timely and effective sharing or dissemination of information about a high stress topic or event so that people can make an informed decision to take appropriate action

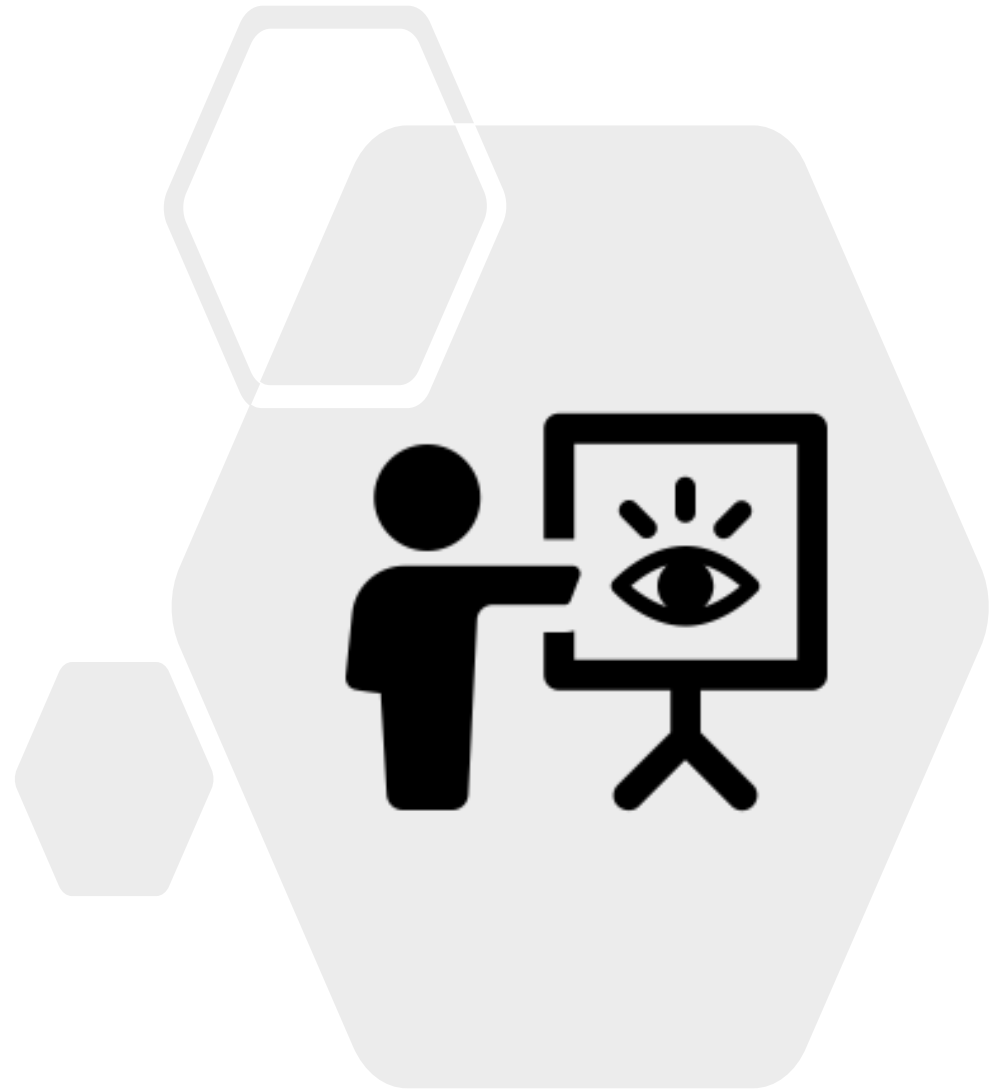
Your public messages in a crisis must be

S	Simple	Use short simple words
T	Timely	Give them information now
A	Accurate	Be straightforward
R	Relevant	Answer their questions and give action steps
C	Credible	Show empathy and openness
C	Consistent	The slightest change in the message is upsetting

Checklist for your messages: does your message...

✓	Apply risk communication principles
✓	Use plain language, simple words (no jargon)
✓	Refute negative allegations without repeating them (use the truth sandwich)
✓	Give positive doable action steps
✓	Have an honest, open tone
✓	Provide clarity
✓	Avoid humor
✓	Avoid judgmental phrases, shame, or scolding
✓	Avoid extreme speculation

SAMPLE MESSAGING



Sample messages to respond to vx safety concerns

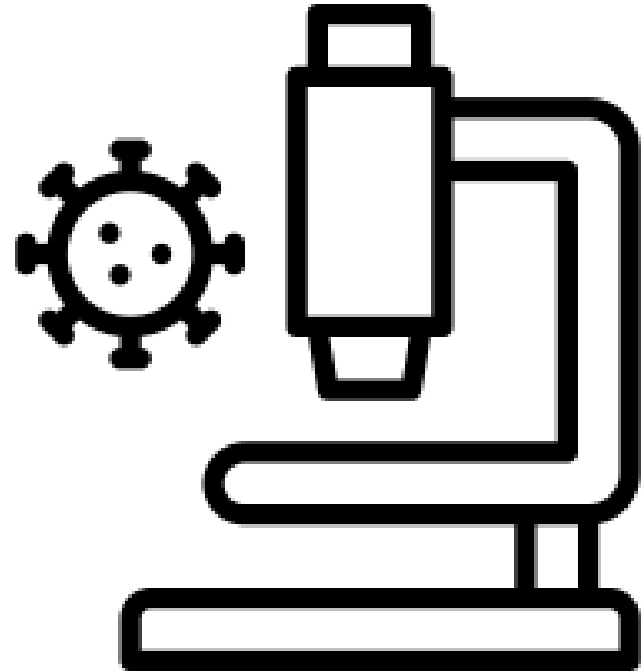
- COVID-19 vx are safe and effective
- Millions have safely received a COVID-19 vx under the most intense vx safety monitoring in history
- Millions have received COVID-19 vx and no long-term side effects have been detected
- On adverse events: These reports are rare and the known and potential benefits of COVID-19 vx outweigh the known and potential risks of...[blood clots or other..]
- We continue to closely monitor the safety of COVID-19 vx
- We know people have many questions about the vx — you can find the most accurate and up-to-date information here: [add website]

CDC COVID-19 vaccine page:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html

Sample messages about vx research process

- We understand some may be nervous about COVID-19 vx
- It's totally reasonable
- Fortunately, researchers have been working on vx technology for many years
- They have been transparent about sharing data
- These vx have undergone and will continue to undergo the most intensive safety monitoring in vx history
- All this gives us trust and confidence in vaccination



DO'S AND DON'TS



Don't shame people

- Public health has successfully shamed industries like Big Tobacco
- Shaming individuals rarely works in public health campaigns
 - Makes people defensive and resistant
- Don't shame or scold people
- Show empathy
- Acknowledge their concerns and questions
 - Listen to them, sincerely
- Recognize that these are difficult times
- Appeal to their nobler instincts (help your family, community, country)

Other do's and don'ts

DO's

Acknowledge person's fears

Stay on message but say the situation can change

Stay focused

Say vx is 95% (or whatever) effective

Name solution = get vx to stop spread of COVID

DON'Ts

Don't be dismissive

Don't give conflicting messages

Don't try to say/explain everything

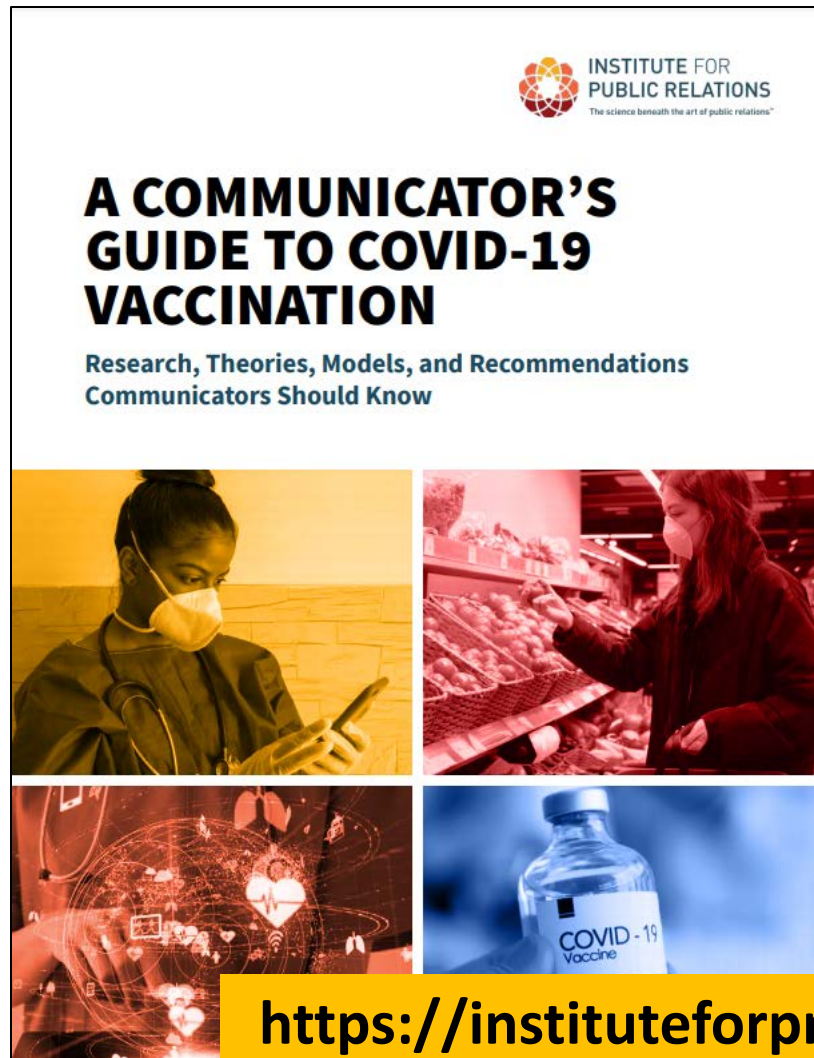
Don't say the vx is a cure

Don't repeat false claims

RESOURCES



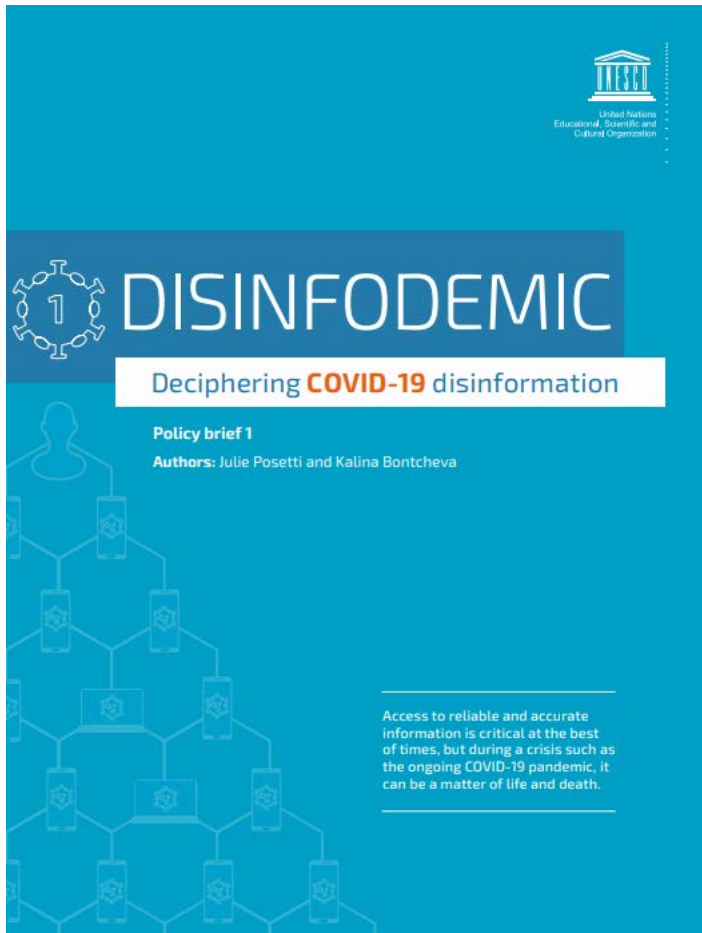
A communicator's guide to COVID-19 vaccination



- Produced by The Institute for Public Relations
- Research, theories, models, and research-driven recommendations for effective communication strategies for organizations worldwide.
- Reviewed 100+ research articles

<https://instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Guide-to-COVID-19-Vaccination-v4.pdf>

UNESCO policy briefs

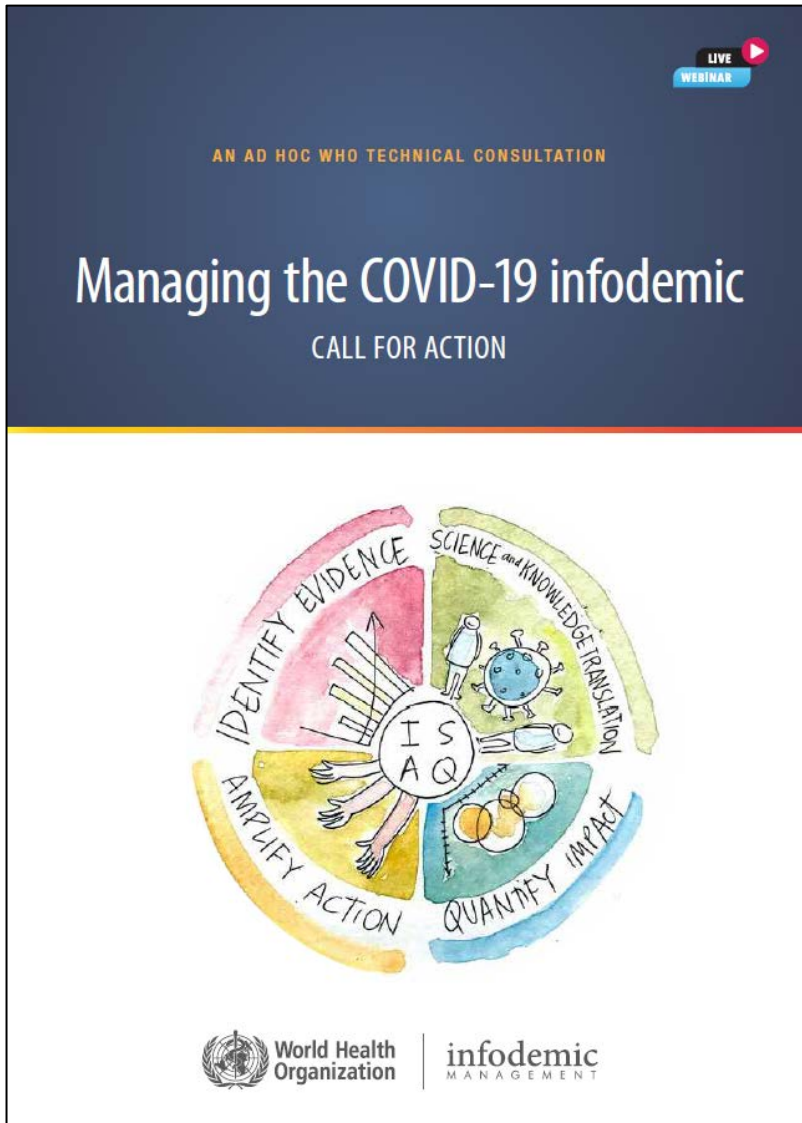


- Policy brief 1 (17 pp):
Disinfodemic: Deciphering COVID-19 disinformation
- Policy brief 2 (17 pp):
Disinformation: Dissecting responses to COVID-19 disinformation

1)https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/disinfodemic_deciphering_covid19_disinformation.pdf

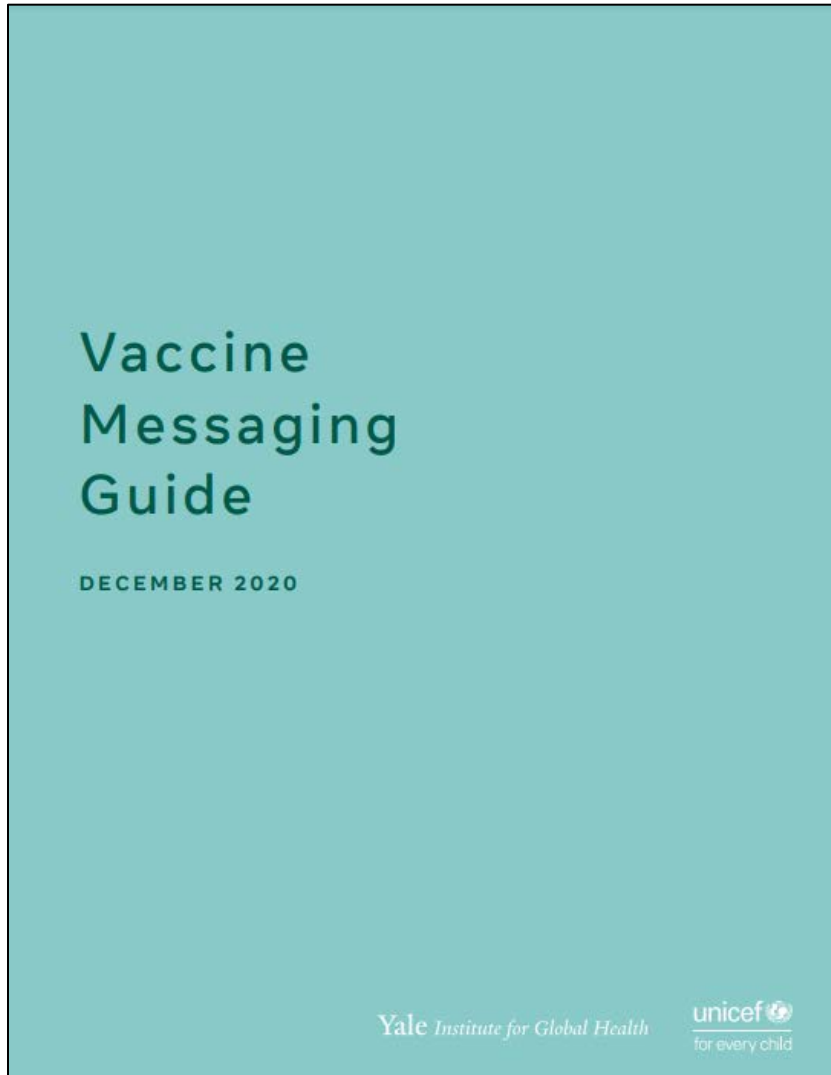
2)https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/disinfodemic_dissecting_responses_covid19_disinformation.pdf

WHO: Managing the COVID-19 infodemic



- Highlights the public impact of the “infodemic”
- 56 pp

Vaccine messaging guide



- Developed by the Yale Institute of Global Health and UNICEF
- Intended for public health professionals, communicators, etc.
- Helps create pro-vaccine content to motivate people to vaccinate themselves and their entourage
- 11 pp

Everyday words for public health communication

The screenshot shows the 'Everyday Words for Public Health Communication' website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with letters A through Z and a '# close' link. Below this is a search bar with the text 'Word: v' and a search icon. The main content area displays 'Results: 3' and a 'Print Results' button. The search results for 'vaccine' are shown, including a definition, CDC Original Sentences, Plain Language Sentences, and Quick-Click Results.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z # close

Everyday Words for Public Health Communication Word:

Results: 3 Print Results

Vaccine: shot, protection against a disease

CDC Original Sentences:

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination.

Plain Language Sentences:

Your body needs about two weeks to build protection against the flu after you get a shot or spray in your nose to prevent the flu.

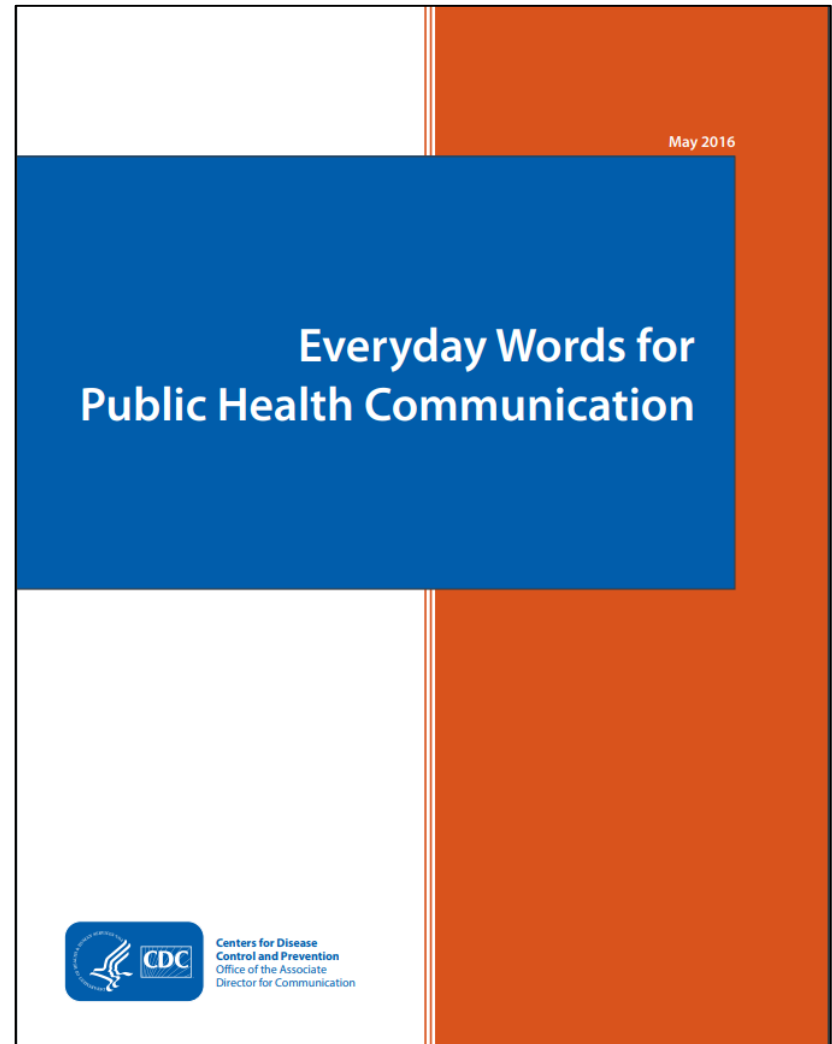
Quick-Click Results

- [Vaccine](#)
- [Valid](#)
- [Virus](#)

www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/everydaywords/

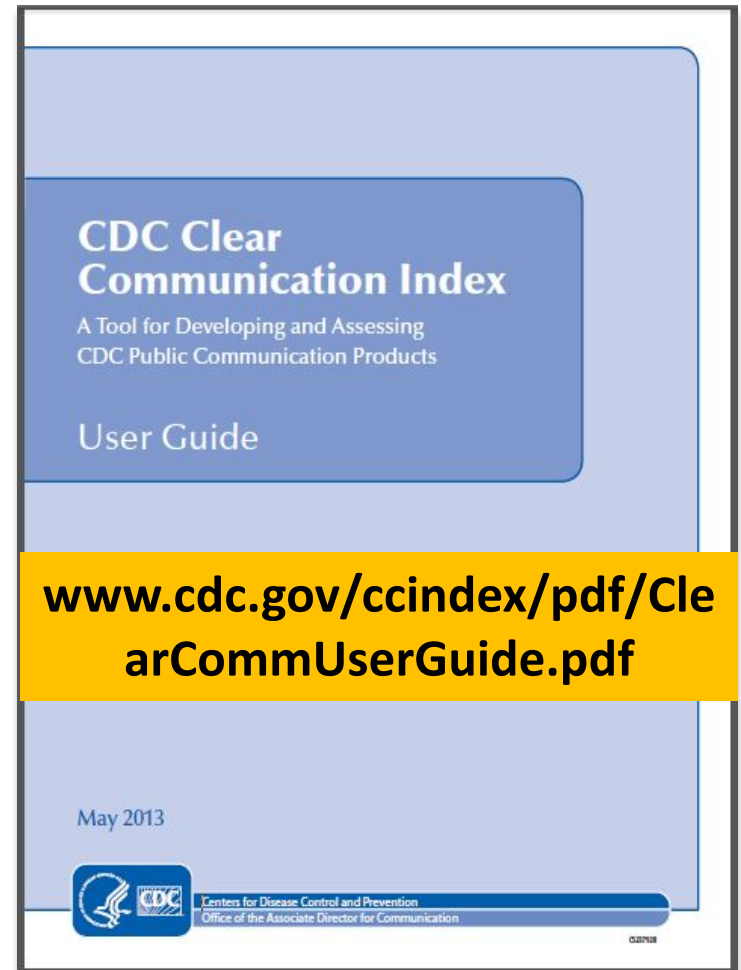
Everyday Words for Public Health Communication

- 44 page pdf
- Offers recommendations on how to reduce jargon and replace problematic terms in order to improve real comprehension



Use CDC's clear communication index

- Research-based tool to help develop and assess public communication materials
- Has 4 introductory questions and 20 scored items from scientific literature in communication and related disciplines
- The items represent the most important characteristics that enhance and aid people's understanding of information



Website: www.cdc.gov/ccindex



Zoom poll 2: COVID-related concerns?

In your opinion, what is your country's number 1 issue related to COVID-19 right now, what are people concerned about? (Examples: vx safety, vx availability, vx cost, Delta variant, economic cost, quarantine, etc...)

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