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Communicating on COVID-19 vaccines in a Changing Environment

Guidance

HOW TO MANAGE DEMAND AND COMMUNICATE ON COVID-19 VACCINES IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

This guidance is intended for those who are involved at the national and sub-national level in the design and delivery of demand and communication strategies on COVID-19 vaccination. It describes key considerations to ensure that these strategies adapt to the needs of communities and builds on existing technical guidance for generating demand for COVID-19 vaccines. While country and local experiences vary, factors that contribute to this changing COVID-19 vaccine environment include:



KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR COMMUNICATING ON COVID-19 VACCINES IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Many governments are now rolling out more than one type of COVID-19 vaccine. This changing environment makes it challenging to communicate about different vaccines. It is important to understand the most up-to-date vaccine demand and access information before designing communication messages.

Below, we describe key information to have before communicating with the public and media, outline message elements to consider for vaccine updates, and provide tips for how to manage expectations, build community trust, and prepare health workers.



Before communicating information with the public and media, aim to:

- Understand who is most at risk for getting and transmitting COVID-19, and differences in risk for severe illness and death between the vaccinated and unvaccinated.
- Understand patterns of trust (in vaccines, health workers, government) and inequitable access to vaccination in the community, particularly among vulnerable populations (e.g., women).
- Coordinate with service delivery and supply stakeholders at national and sub-national levels to track and update vaccine access information.
- Understand factors that influence access to and motivation for vaccination. As needed, undertake, or use available socio-behavioural data collection activities (e.g., barrier analysis, rapid assessments, research, and social listening) to assess:
 - ↳ Concerns, risk perception and knowledge about COVID-19 variants and new vaccines, including among vulnerable groups (e.g., women, displaced, etc.)
 - ↳ Health worker perceptions, knowledge, and acceptance of new vaccines, as adopters and community level advocates



Communicate with the public and media transparently, at a regularly scheduled time, including the following message elements:

MESSAGE ELEMENT	EXAMPLE
1 An expression of empathy for the ongoing pandemic and gratitude to those on the front lines.	<i>We wish to express our condolences to those who have lost a loved one from COVID-19. We highly appreciate the health workers who continue to risk their lives and the other community members who are providing essential services.</i>
2 An acknowledgement of pandemic fatigue and reminder that COVID-19 is still a threat to health and functioning of the health system.	<i>We acknowledge the fatigue and frustration you may be feeling about the pandemic, especially the economic and emotional toll it has taken. We want to remind you that COVID-19 continues to be a threat to your health and the function of the health system.</i>
3 Share good news (content of message will depend on context).	<i>The good news is that we have more and more evidence that COVID-19 vaccines work. Even with changes in the virus, vaccination greatly reduces the risk of hospitalization and death. As more people become vaccinated, our communities and health system will be protected. We are moving in the right direction!</i>
4 What is known about COVID-19 vaccination, including a summary of prior information and new updates.	<i>In review, we received XX doses of [VACCINE] from [SOURCE] on [DATE]. XX doses have been given to [TARGET GROUP] in [LOCATION] for [REASON WHY]. The remaining XX doses are targeted for [TARGET GROUP] for [REASON WHY]. Now new information: We expect a shipment of [VACCINE] from [SOURCE] in the next [TIME PERIOD].</i>
5 What is not known about COVID-19 vaccination, including a description of any gaps and how you plan to fill the gaps.	<i>The exact date and number of doses is not yet known. We plan to use the shipment to vaccinate [TARGET GROUP] in [LOCATION] for [REASON WHY]. We are meeting with [SOURCE] this week to gather more details.</i>
6 Timing and mode of the next update (conduct session even if new information is not available).	<i>Please tune in to our next regularly scheduled COVID-19 vaccine update to be held on [DATE] at [TIME] via [CHANNEL/MODE].</i>
7 A reminder of how to protect oneself and the community, along with a statement of solidarity.	<i>We encourage you to protect yourself and your community by getting vaccinated when it is your turn. Even when vaccinated, please continue to wear a mask, maintain social distance, wash your hands frequently, and follow local COVID-19 policies. We are in this together and appreciate your support to keep [COUNTRY] safe!</i>



When new vaccines arrive, help build trust and manage realistic expectations by sharing the following information:

- Reassurance that all approved COVID-19 vaccines protect against severe illness and death; emphasize that the right type of vaccine is the one that is available first.
- Use testimonials of influencers who were recently vaccinated with new vaccines; amplify their message through social media, radio, tv panels, or other communication channels.



New Vaccine Details to Know and Share:

- The source, type of vaccine, and number of doses available.
- For whom the new vaccine is targeted (e.g., geographic area, priority group) and why.
- How to register, when and where the vaccine can be accessed.
- Eligibility criteria, common side-effects and how to handle them, where to go to a health facility for adverse events, and dose schedule/follow up vaccination type.



Make sure that clinical staff and CHW are equipped for the changing environment:

- Identify staff concerns or misconceptions about new vaccines and hold regular meetings to ensure concerns are heard and addressed.
- Update guidance and training materials based on health worker needs, as necessary:
 - ↳ Share updates on COVID-19 vaccination via existing health worker communication channels and networks (e.g., memos, WhatsApp forums, professional associations, etc.).
- Ensure that staff receive specific training and the most up-to-date information on new COVID-19 vaccines and processes including:
 - ↳ Highlight differences between new vaccines compared to previously used vaccines, if any.
 - ↳ Interpersonal communication skills to answer community questions about new vaccines.
- Ensure supportive non-threatening supervision, manageable health worker to patient ratio, and support social recognition.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT VACCINE CONFIDENCE AND UPTAKE AND COMMUNICATING ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINES, PLEASE SEE THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

[Generating acceptance and demand for COVID-19 vaccines](#)

– WHO

[Conducting community engagement for COVID-19 vaccines: Interim guidance](#)

– WHO

[10 steps to community readiness: What countries should do to prepare communities for a COVID-19 vaccine, treatment or new test](#)

– WHO, IFRC, UNICEF, GOARN

[Vaccine Misinformation Management Guide](#)

– UNICEF

[How to Make the Immunization Experience Better for the Community](#)

– WHO

[Health worker communication for COVID-19 vaccination flow diagram](#)

– WHO, COVAX

[Faith and Positive Change Guidance Documents](#)

– UNICEF, Religions for Peace, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities

[Explainer on Communicating about Multiple Vaccines](#)

– WHO

COMMUNICATING ON COVID-19 VACCINES IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT: KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR HEALTH WORKERS

This guidance is intended for health workers battling the pandemic and builds on existing technical guidance for generating demand for COVID-19 vaccines. It describes key strategies for communicating about new COVID-19 vaccines and emerging variants in a transparent, accurate and timely manner.



Key strategies for communicating on COVID-19 vaccines in a changing environment:

- Know trusted resources to seek the most-up-to-date information on the COVID-19 disease, preventive behaviours, and different vaccines available.
- Be prepared to explain that different vaccines are being prioritized for certain people; emphasize that the right type of vaccine is the one that is available first for their priority group.
- Be transparent about uncertainties about the vaccines (e.g., timing of availability, length of protection); saying 'I don't know' is an acceptable answer.



Encourage partners to adapt and agree on harmonised communication goals and strategies, supported by consistent messaging for marginalised populations.

MESSAGE ELEMENT	EXAMPLE
1 Welcome and message of empathy.	<i>Hello! I am happy to talk with you today. I want to acknowledge the fatigue and frustration you may be feeling about the pandemic and hearing about different vaccines.</i>
2 Good news message.	<i>The good news is that for all approved vaccines, there is more and more evidence that COVID-19 vaccines work. Even with changes in the virus, vaccination greatly reduces the risk of hospitalization and death. The best vaccine for you is the one that is available first for your priority group.</i>
3 Vaccine variants and efficacy over time.	<i>When cases of COVID-19 increase, changes to the virus can happen. Vaccines reduce the risk of being infected with [NAME OF VARIANT], especially in preventing severe disease and death. We also know that a person's immunity to the virus goes down over time. It is possible that you may need a booster dose to strengthen your body's response.</i>
4 Vaccine safety.	<i>We have [VACCINE 1] from [SOURCE] and [VACCINE 2] from [SOURCE] available. Both vaccines have proven to be [PERCENTAGE] safe for [TARGET GROUP].</i>
5 A reminder of how to protect oneself and the community, and a statement of solidarity.	<i>I encourage you to protect yourself and your family by getting vaccinated when it is your turn. Please continue to wear a mask, maintain social distance, wash your hands frequently, and follow local COVID-19 policies. We are in this together. I appreciate your support to keep the community safe!</i>



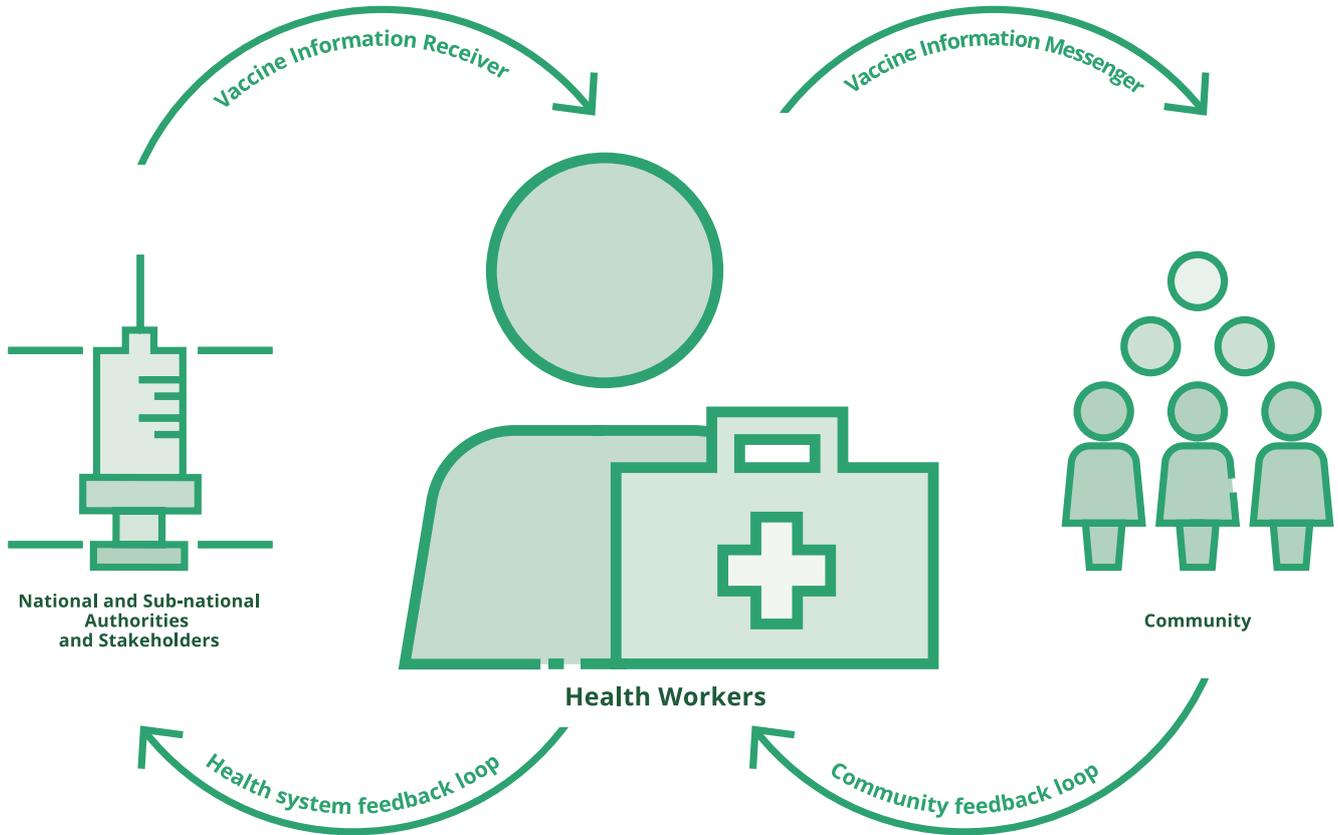
Build community trust in the vaccine and vaccine roll-out:

- Share new vaccine and access information with Community Health Worker (CHW) and local leaders.
- Ensure you know who the COVID-19 vaccine AEFI focal point is for your area and how to respond.
- Leverage existing community structures to provide COVID-19 vaccine updates and to receive and acknowledge feedback from the community.



COVID-19 vaccine information will continue to change. The figure below shows the critical role health workers play in receiving and sharing new information with communities and providing feedback to higher levels.

I Health Workers are an Essential Information Link Between Authorities and the Community for COVID-19 Vaccination.



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