Social Media Toolkit
for Healthcare Professionals
Spreading authoritative information online

#VaccinesWork

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WHY COMMUNICATE ABOUT HEALTH & VACCINATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

Vaccines have saved hundreds of thousands of lives around the globe. Each year, vaccination stops 2.7 million people worldwide from getting measles, one million from getting pertussis and two million babies from getting tetanus.

However, in recent years, vaccine delays and refusals have contributed to declining immunisation rates in a number of EU countries. Recent measles outbreaks – the highest in the EU for years - are an illustration of the impact of non-vaccination. The situation has become so serious that in 2019, the World Health Organization listed 'vaccine hesitancy' among the top ten threats to global health. The COVID-19 pandemic is another painful reminder of the costs associated with infectious diseases. **An effective and safe vaccine against the virus is our best bet to achieve a permanent solution to the pandemic.**

Whilst vaccine hesitancy is not a new phenomenon, emerging technologies and social media platforms are making it quicker and easier to spread misinformation and sow doubts in the minds of the public. Anti-vaccination activists are also extremely organised in how they communicate their messages on social media, using all the tools available to disseminate their claims and challenge the beliefs of the hesitant part of the population. Studies show that these false messages are often liked and shared more than accurate messages and as such falsehoods surrounding vaccinations spread faster than truthful statements.

A recent study carried out by the European Commission shows that while public perception of vaccination is positive in all EU member states, there are variations in how people perceive their importance, safety, and effectiveness. These figures also underscore the need for fast action on countering misinformation in a coordinated way. **As the European Commission notes**, "Fighting disinformation in the era of social media and online platforms has to be a coordinated effort involving all relevant actors, from institutions to social platforms, from news media to single users."

Healthcare professionals play a key role in providing accurate information about vaccines and countering false narratives both in day-to-day interactions with patients and through their activity on social media. This document intends to guide you in that process. We lay out, in several steps, the proven approaches and strategies that can help react to this threat against vaccines and shift the narrative back towards science-based prevention. The time to act is now!

WHAT IS DISINFORMATION AND HOW CAN YOU SPOT IT?

We are witnessing a global epidemic of false or misleading information, which is spreading rapidly through social media platforms and poses a serious problem for our collective, public health.

Today, there are hundreds of anti-vaccine misinformation websites, whose information is amplified globally via social media channels and profiles. It's frustrating to see people sharing false information that has been proven wrong repeatedly. Knowing where misinformation and disinformation diverge is important. Misinformation is false information that is spread, regardless of purpose or intent. **Disinformation, however, is verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public. Both misinformation and disinformation cause public harm.**

Fortunately, there are some easy ways to check the accuracy of information in this space. For example, you can always check the author and the source of any information. Make sure the images or videos come from legitimate sources (seeing isn't believing anymore). And finally, if the information doesn't seem real, don't hesitate to report it.

The social media channels are also taking measures to tackle the spread of misinformation and disinformation on health.

f Facebook

Announced that educational pop-up windows will appear on the social media platforms when a user searches for vaccine-related content, visits vaccine-related Facebook groups and pages, or taps a vaccine-related hashtag on Instagram.

Looking for Vaccine Info?
When it comes to health, everyone wants reliable, up-to-date information. Learn why the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends vaccinations to prevent many diseases.

Go to WHO.int

Twitter

Launched a new tool in search that directs users to credible public health resources when they search for certain vaccine-related keywords.

▶ YouTube

Reduced recommendations for content that could misinform users & won't let anti-vaccine videos monetize.

G Google

Prioritized results from authoritative sources in its search function

Instagram

Has chosen to hide search results for anti-vax hashtags on its platform, effectively blocking any associated content from surfacing. Some, however, still report that they find posts intended to dissuade people from being vaccinated.

Pinterest

Prioritized the display of results from major public health organizations, including the World Health Organization, and others. Pinterest also allows content from members of the Vaccine Safety Net network, which includes the European Vaccination Information Portal.

RENEE DIRESTA AND GILAD LOTAN SCIENCE 06.08.15 06:00 AM

ANTI-VAXXERS ARE USING TWITTER TO MANIPULATE A VACCINE BILL

"The power to influence opinions increasingly lies with those who can most widely and effectively disseminate a message. One small, vocal group can have a disproportionate impact on public sentiment and legislation. Welcome to "Anti-Vax Twitter."

https://www.wired.com/2015/06/antivaxxers-influencing-legislation/

"The process of building, maintaining or restoring trust rests on a number of essential components. Trust is a key factor when it comes to being recognised as a credible and relevant source of information."

Getting started

First things first, the Internet is here to stay and people are going to get their medical information from the media and social media. Healthcare professionals have a responsibility to be part of this debate, especially given their high levels of trust, but what should you expect?

Although anti-vaccine sentiment is not a new phenomenon, their narratives tend to focus on a few well documented issues linked to safety, non-proven side effects, concerns regarding infringement upon personal liberties and free choice as well as distrust in science, government and industry.

To counter these voices, we need to promote transparency and ensure citizens can make informed decisions about their own health and that of their loved ones.

It is also essential to differentiate between those who are truly anti-vaccination and those who are vaccine-hesitant or who want more information or clarifications on certain issues.

Try to **focus on amplifying correct information and facts**, rather than engaging in back-and-forth arguments with those who will not change their beliefs.

SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS
(AND HOW TO CHOOSE YOURS)

We need to choose the best channels for reaching our various audiences. Different audiences communicate on different social media channels, so we need to make sure to share content where our target audiences actually spend time. To do this, we need to ask ourselves:

1. Who will care about what I have to say?

2. Which channels can I connect with these people on?

Meet some of the channels

Just like our audiences, social media channels have their individual personalities too:

	Facebook	**Twitter**	**YouTube**	**LinkedIn**	**Instagram**
AGE	18-64	18-30	18-49	25-39	18-30
What's the difference ?	Post comments, share photographs and post links to news or other interesting content on the web, chat live, and watch short-form video	Post short text "tweets", news & networking (280 characters)	Watch videos & write comments	Professional outreach & networking	Post images & videos

TO INSPIRE YOU TO START

Vaccines work

Thanks to vaccination, people can be protected against diseases that could have serious consequences for their health. Vaccination also reduces the risk of spreading the diseases among family members, school mates or colleagues, friends and neighbours, as well as to other people in the community. Research is ongoing to develop vaccines against more diseases.

Some key messages:

Vaccines are safe and offer the best protection against diseases.

Vaccines protect you and others who cannot be vaccinated.

Vaccines are an essential part of childcare.

On visuals:

The images you chose to accompany your messages are often just as important as the information inside. Try to avoid using imagery that is frightening, such as large needles, because this could sustain the notion that vaccines are something to feel anxious about. Instead try to use images that illustrate the protective power of vaccination.

MUST-HAVES FOR AN ENGAGING POST

Before going forward with writing content, it is important to understand what it is that makes people vaccine hesitant.

Hesitancy stems from a low level of trust in vaccines or their providers, complacency (meaning they do not see a need for or value of vaccines), and finally, convenience or access to vaccines. We must keep this in mind as we build content so we must respond to these issues and tailor our content to share a positive image about vaccination. This includes asking ourselves, what do we want to tell our audiences and what is the best way to get our messages across?

Let's start by taking a look at some of the key elements that make up a social media post before exploring some hints and tips:

Message

Use proper spelling, capitalisation & punctuation

Call to Action

Tell followers what you want them to do.

Tip:

Vary facts, stats, and questions to drive your story

Tip:

- Avoid using txt spk and abbr.
- Use your own professional tone. Followers want personality when they read, not robots.
- Increase the likelihood of RTs and mentions by tagging someone directly in your text.
- Limit text to as few characters as possible (don't use up the 280).
- NO ALL CAPS!

Link

Most of your tweets should link to articles, blog posts, pictures, videos or media related to your post

Tip:

- Links do not have to be at the end of your tweet

⚠ Think about shortening URLs with tools like bitly.com

Asset

Assets such as images and videos are a great way to grab the attention of your audience. They can be still or animated.

Tip:

- Try to mix tweets with assets and tweets without assets with tweets with links to websites.

Share this infographic about #vaccination #fluprevention

LINK

ASSET

**#HashtagUse** Hashtags open your tweets to a world of potential followers.

Tip:
- Use hashtags anywhere in your Tweet.
- No more than 2-3 hashtags per Tweet.

Know Your Audience

Use data analysis to track the performance of your media content and to implement effective communication campaigns that are tailored to your audience.

If you are targeting a specific demographic for example, it can be useful to know what kind of content that demographic engages with the most. There are numerous free tools that can be accessed on social media that allow you to view a statistical breakdown of your channel's performance.
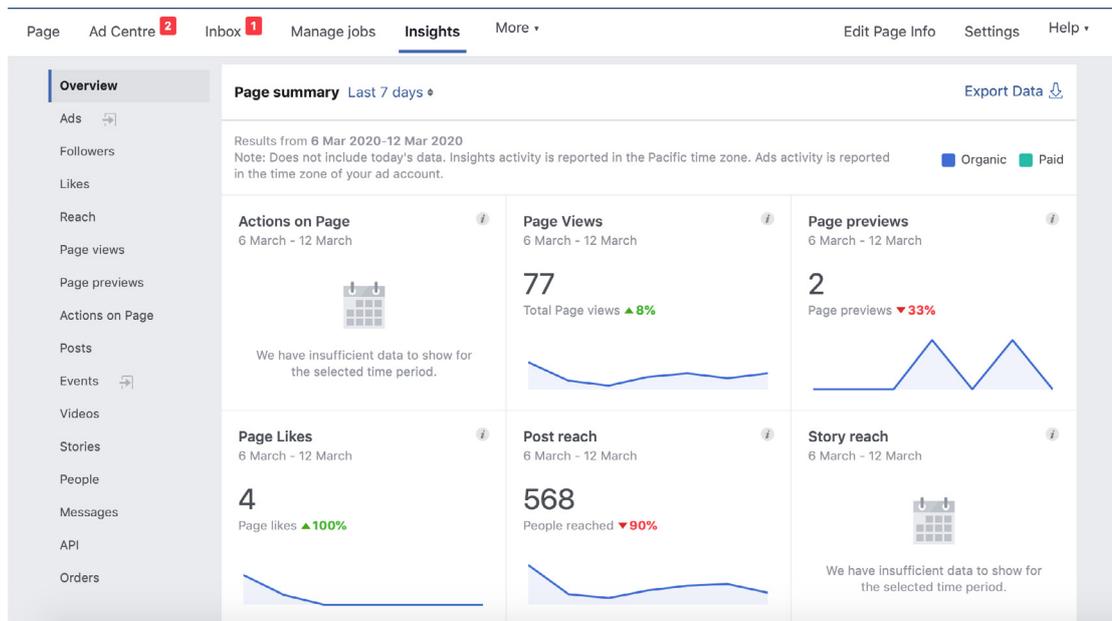
If you are running a Facebook page, try using the free 'Facebook Insights' tool provided.

Twitter also provides a free tool for data analysis

By using data analysis we can figure out what exactly our audience is looking for. If we know the age, gender, nationality and interests of our followers, then we can adjust our message accordingly, communicate more effectively, and provide our audience with a message that resonates with them.

1. Select relevant hashtags, such as #VaccinesWork

2. For content based on reports, write snippets that are easy to digest

3. Include quick facts, because less is more when it comes to social media

4. Share content from other reliable sources, including the EU or national governments

5. Use events to increase your reach

MOVING FORWARD AND SHAPING THE CONVERSATION

Consider engaging your local community in the discussion. If a local school is active on social media, for instance, engage with them. Become their 'go to person'. Look at transforming the engagement with an in-person presentation during school time or school-related activities, such as parents' meetings.

1 Be consistently part of the conversation, and make your contributions relevant.

2 Start or engage in conversations by mentioning other people and encouraging them to join the discussion.

3   Use offline methods to increase your reach

a. Create a poster with your url + social media account

b. Add social media account to business card + signature

c. Link to social profiles on your website (including API - box with dynamic content)

d. Mention twitter account during interviews with the media

4   Use hashtags relevant to your topic/post

5   Use your channels to do coverage for the events you attend

6   Test what type of messages work better for your audience

Example of testing messages.

	GAIN-framed messages	LOSS-framed messages
High context	**Ad 1A - Gain-framed message** Vaccine train our immune systems to fight the flu. When we're over 65, a flu shot helps us stay fit during the flu season so we can spend time with family and friends without worrying.	**Ad 1B - Loss-framed message** A flu shot trains our immune systems to fight the flu naturally. Catching the flu as we age would mean spending time away from our loved ones - in bed or, worse still, in hospital.
Low context	**Ad 2A - Gain-framed message** Flu vaccination helps older people stay fit and well during the flu season.	**Ad 2B - Loss-framed message** Neglecting flu vaccination in older age may lead to severe complications and take your indepence away.

* A "gain-framed" message is a message focusing on what can be gained by doing something. A loss-framed message is one focusing on the cost or risk of not doing something.

Healthcare Providers are the key

The Wellcome global monitor states that 73% of people worldwide would trust a doctor or nurse more than any other source of health advice, including family, friends, religious leaders or famous people. Healthcare providers who have built their audience online are by the public and can promote a significant societal impact.

Time management

You may be concerned that communicating on social media will be prohibitively time-consuming. But that doesn't have to be the case.

1. Prioritise
2. Plan and commit (daily 15 - 20 min) - Make it a habit
3. Delegate
4. Disseminate
5. Learn and adapt

Here are some suggestions to help you achieve more in less time:

1. Be brief. Keep your posts to about 80 characters. Remember that more is less on social media, and posts of the 80 character length usually attract 66% more responses.

2. Share other people's content.

3. You don't need to reply to every comment. If your time is limited, perhaps check your social media accounts just twice a week and respond to a few comments. As more healthcare professionals use social media, you will be among friends who can support you in how to respond to the inevitable negative comments – and how not to feed their messages.

4. It is ok not to post yourself. Create a batch of messages in a "Cribsheet" ahead of time, then use an automatic publisher to schedule your posts. You can use our Facebook tool or tools such as Tweetdeck. Here is an example of a Cribsheet:

Example of planning

Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
As a healthcare professional, you are exposed to the flu much more than the average person. That's why it's vital to protect yourself this flu season and get a flu shot. Click here for more info and spread the word!	*A new study of over 100,000 people born to mothers who got the flu jab while pregnant found no link between that vaccine and any later health issues* *Find out more here:*	*A decision not to vaccinate, for whatever reason, poses a risk to others as well as the individual from being infected themselves.* *@WHO lists vaccine hesitancy as one of the top 10 threats to global health. #VaccinesWork*	*Ever wondered what the biggest communication challenges are when it comes to the flu and vaccinations online? Take a look at this graphic for more. And tell us, what are your great ideas to combat fake news about vaccines online?*	*Creating tailored ad campaigns, connecting patients w/ medical societies & recognising info gaps of social media audiences are great ways to use social media to provide better information to the public.*

Hashtags to use

In your social media communications and especially on Twitter, you'll come across something called the 'hashtag'. A hashtag is simply a word or phrase preceded by a hash mark (#). It's used in social media messages to identify a keyword or topic of interest, and helps users search for related messages. Some users follow hashtags to see all the posts that use them. For example, if someone follows the hashtag #vaccine, they'll see recent posts that have this hashtag. Adding hashtags to your posts will make it easier for users interested in this topic to find them. We've selected some relevant hashtags to get you started. Use these in your online conversations around health.

General vaccination hashtags: **#VaccinesWork** **#VaccinesSaveLives** **#ImmunizeEurope**

Linking trusted sources

When looking at health-related information, it can be difficult for people to judge the quality and accuracy of information found. With all the information that is available on the internet and circulating on social media on vaccination, people may sometimes get lost. Here is a quick guide to some trusted sources that you can link to.

European Vaccination Information Portal

The European Vaccination Information Portal (EVIP) provides accurate, objective, up-to-date evidence on vaccines and vaccination. It also provides an overview of the mechanisms in place in the European Union (EU) to ensure that available vaccines conform to the highest standards of safety and effectiveness. https://vaccination-info.eu

The Vaccine Safety Net

The Vaccine Safety Net (VSN) is a global network of websites, established by the World Health Organization, that provides reliable information on vaccin e safety. For more information about the network visit: https://vaccinesafetynet.org. Information and links to the VSN member websites is available here: https://www.vaccinesafetynet.org/vsn/network.

Official websites from EU and EEA countries

All EU Member States have official websites with information on vaccination from public health organisations of the European Union (EU) and European Economic Area (EEA) countries. You can find the links on the EVIP: https://vaccination-info.eu/en/trusted-sources. They often have dedicated social media accounts too.

Accounts to follow to connect to active networks and initiatives

Being a successful social media influencer is about building a network. Start building your own by following the accounts of active networks and initiatives.
We've made a list of relevant accounts for you to follow on various channels to help you join the online conversation.

Twitter @EU_Health @ECDC_EU @EMA_News @WHO_Europe @WHOatEU

Start by following the accounts above. Engage in the conversations they start, and begin following the people who engage on topics that interest you. Participating in existing conversations is key to finding new people to follow and part of the process of getting them to follow you back.

Facebook @ECDC_EU @WHO_Europe @EuropeanCommission

6 STEPS TO GET STARTED

1 **Just do it. Go to where your audience is and engage.**

2 **Communicate and amplify your network with passion.**

3 **Apply the rules of journalism to find interesting, and accurate clear stories.**

4 **Review what works and react accordingly.**

5 **Earn credibility by being open and honest.**

6 **Show your credibility by getting external endorsements.**

Useful resources:

European Commission council recommendations: https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/vaccination/docs/com2018_2442_en.pdf

Fighting disinformation about coronavirus: https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation_en

Eurobarometer: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/final-results-eurobarometer-fake-news-and-online-disinformation

Vaccine hesitancy among healthcare workers and their patients in Europe: https://ecdc.europa.eu/sites/portal/files/media/en/publications/Publications/vaccine-hesitancy-among-healthcare-workers.pdf

Wellcome Report: https://wellcome.ac.uk/reports/wellcome-global-monitor/2018

Getting in touch with the EU

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