

Setting the media agenda



How to use this document

The power of media is considerable. The more media attention to an issue, the more it is considered important by the public. How the media presents an issue has great impact on how it is perceived by the public.

This document provides guidance on how to work with the media to promote your messages and ensure a balanced reflection of issues relating to vaccination.

Use the guidance to:

- prepare for media interviews,
- strengthen the immunization agenda in the media,
- respond to a negative event or story,
- prepare for important announcements, such as new vaccine introduction or other changes to the vaccination schedule, vaccine replacements, vaccine shortages or a temporary recall of a vaccine.

The document also includes references to more in-depth background papers.



How was this document developed?

This document is part of a WHO series of supporting documents concerning events that could erode confidence in vaccination. Such events can be related to vaccine safety, adverse events following immunization, changes in the vaccination programme, negative public debate, outbreaks or pandemics.

All documents were developed based on scientific evidence, laboratory research and fieldwork within psychology, social and behavioural science and communication and lessons learnt in countries. For an introduction to the theoretical background and evidence, refer to the WHO publication *Vaccination and trust*, available here: www.euro.who.int/vaccinetrust.

The supporting documents are intended for use by national

- ministries of health
- centers for disease control
- immunization programmes
- regulatory authority institutions.



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The power of media is considerable. Research shows that:

- The more media attention to an issue, the more it is considered important by the public.ⁱ
- How the media presents an issue has great impact on how it is perceived by the public.ⁱⁱ

Working with the media to promote your messages and ensure a balanced reflection of issues relating to vaccination can help build population resilience against vaccine safety scares.

Positive and well-informed populations are less likely to believe in or spread unfounded rumours.

The more informed a population is about risks and benefits associated with vaccines and vaccine-preventable diseases, the more they are able to make informed choices to demand vaccination.

To **READ MORE** refer to:

- *Tips for spokespersons*
- *How to prepare a press release*
- *Strategies used by journalists*

euro.who.int/vaccinetrust

Why do you need to engage with the media?

Studies have shown that the way in which the media has selected and presented news on vaccination has had an impact on how the topic was perceived and discussed by the public.

Based on this, it is recommended for vaccine advocates to engage in setting the agenda and leading discussions on immunization.ⁱⁱⁱ

Find out more about how you can affect the agenda of traditional and social media on the following pages



How can you affect the agenda of **traditional media**?

- Understand how journalists think and work
- Establish long-term trustful relationships with journalists
- Help the journalist understand the topic



How can you affect the agenda of **social media**?

- Improve your reputation and gain followers who trust you
- Target specific individual groups and tailor individual specifics
- Use social media as a tool to understand public sentiment

How can you affect the agenda of traditional media?

Traditional media such as newspapers, TV and radio often have both reach and impact.

Journalists rely on trusted sources for supply of information and verification of news. People or institutions that become trusted sources may have an important impact on the media agenda.

On this page is some advice if you would like to become a trusted source.

1 Understand how journalists think and work

If you understand how journalists work and think, and present the news in a way that appeals to them, you are more likely to affect the media agenda. Research has shown that factors that affect selection and editing of news include:

- **News factors**^v increase the chance of a story to be published. These factors can be taken into account when trying to attract the attention of the media. Consider these factors:
- **Characteristics of the media** (e.g. written or audiovisual, time/space available for news story, speed of publishing, focus areas, audiences, editorial guidelines etc.).^{iv}
- **Subjective attitudes** of journalists and editors^{vi} (e.g. towards vaccination).

News factors



Timeliness: The news must be relevant right now. (Launch news in relation to the European Immunization Week or other event, or create actuality through organizing an event).



Relevance: The news must be important to the readers/viewers. (Make sure to know the media and their audience and shape stories to this. Explain how this has strong public impact and explain implications for individuals, families, communities. Help the journalist create a local angle).



Identification: The issue must be familiar to people; they must be able to relate to it. (Help the journalist create a human angle. Locate people who are willing to be interviewed. Launch the news in a school, on a playground, in a health facility. Create "photo ops" with real people).



Sensation: The news must be surprising or contain new information or a new development. (Conduct surveys to obtain new facts, e.g. about disease incidence, cost implications, population opinions. Keep the results undisclosed until media launch).



Exclusiveness: The media like to be offered exclusivity on the story. If this is not possible or desirable, you may want to offer them to be the first to bring it.

2 Establish long-term trusting relationships with journalists

Make sure key journalists know you well. Call them regularly, invite them to visit your office or invite them to participate in European Immunization Week activities or an information meeting. Conduct exercises to include the media, explain the complex nature of immunization and vaccine-preventable diseases. Establishing a trustful relationship with key media and journalists increases your chances of attracting their attention to your stories. It also makes you a preferred source for information on immunization. During a crisis, such a relationship is invaluable, as the media presentation of an issue has great influence on the public perception.

3 Help the journalist understand the topic

Journalists often have to break down complex information, simplify and reduce. As a result, the information may become inaccurate and distorted.^{vii} Health agenda setters therefore help the journalist, themselves and the cause if they prepare simple and clear messages with supporting materials and illustrations before contacting the media. Building media knowledge of immunization and vaccine-preventable diseases, e.g. through training workshops, also minimizes the risks of misunderstandings and misinformation.

How can you affect the agenda of social media?

Social media have great reach and still maintain the dynamism of interpersonal, real-time interaction. It is less structured than traditional media, and setting one agenda is almost impossible. Social media have no gatekeepers between senders and receivers of information, and misinformation and rumours spread easily and rapidly.^{xii} However, engaging in a dialogue and exchanging views may create a special bond with users which is seldom obtained through traditional media.

This page provides some advice if you would like to utilize the power of social media.

1 Improve your reputation and gain followers who trust you

By receiving and sharing information, answering and asking questions, users become more involved than with traditional media, increasing the feeling of self-efficacy and intensifying the tie to the communicator.^{viii} This provides an opportunity for you to build trust, improve your reputation and gain followers through regular interaction and engagement. During crisis this is particularly valuable, as social media can become important channels to respond immediately, convey and link to more information and ensure quick information updates.^{ix}

2 Target individual groups and tailor individual specifics

Due to its interactivity social media also provides the opportunity to target specific groups or even tailor information to individuals. Especially among young target groups, social media have become an important and trusted source of information.^{xi}

3 Use social media as a tool to understand public sentiment

Monitoring social media is an invaluable tool to better know and understand public sentiment about vaccination and respond accordingly.

More advice

The advice in this document was developed based on the papers below. Refer to these papers for more detailed information.

- ⁱ McCombs, M. E., & Reynolds, A. (2009). How the news shape our civic agenda. In J. Bryant & M. B. Oliver (eds.), *Media effects. Advances in theory and research* (pp. 1–16). New York, NY: Routledge; Dixon, H., Warne, C., Scully, M., Dobbins, S., & Wakefield, M. (2014). Agenda-Setting effects of sun-related news coverage on public attitudes and beliefs about tanning and skin cancer. *Health Communication, 29*(2), 173–181. doi:10.1080/10410236.2012.732027
- ⁱⁱ Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Towards a clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 51–58. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x; Tewksbury, D., & Scheufele, D. A. (2009). News framing theory and research. In J. Bryant, & M. B. Oliver (eds.), *Media effects. Advances in theory and research* (pp. 17–33). New York, NY: Routledge.
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- ^{iv} Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (2014). *Mediating the message in the 21st century. A media sociology perspective* (3rd edition). New York, NY: Routledge.
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- ^{vii} Peters, H. P. (2013). Gap between science and media revisited: Scientists as public communicators. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*(110(3)), pp. 14102–14109.
- ^{viii} Betsch, C., Brewer, N. T., Brocard, P., Davies, P., Gaissmaier, W., Haase, N., . . . Stryk, M. (2012). Opportunities and challenges of Web 2.0 for vaccination decisions. *Vaccine*(30(25)), pp. 3727–3733.
- ^{ix} Rossmann, C. & Krömer, N. (2015). eHealth & mHealth: Die Rolle der Online- und Mobil-Kommunikation in der Gesundheits- und Krisenkommunikation. *Public Health Forum, 23*(3), 156–158. doi: 10.1515/pubhef-2015-0057; Lai C-H, Chib A, Ling R. State of the use of mobile technologies for disaster preparedness in South East Asia. Report to Global Disaster Preparedness Center, American Red Cross. Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 2015.
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- ^{xi} Lenhart A., Purcell K., Smith A., Zickuhr K. (2010). Social media and mobile Internet use among teens and young adults. Retrieved from [http://www.pewinternet.org/](http://www.pewinternet.org;); Eurobarometer 76/2011, Media Use in the European Union, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb76/eb76_media_en.pdf
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