

Clear Communication during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Webinar Series

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About the Speaker

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Agenda



- Applying a health literacy lens to COVID-19
- Communicating during a crisis
- Practical tips for health professionals



Communication is critical during a public health crisis.

When we're communicating with the public, we need to consider health literacy.



- ✓ Most adults have limited health literacy skills
- ✓ Some groups of people are disproportionately affected by limited health literacy
- ✓ Addressing health literacy improves understanding for everyone



Communication is 2-way street

Health Systems

Have skills to communicate information clearly

Public

Have skills and knowledge to understand and act on the information



Created by Yuri Mazursky
from Noun Project

Health literacy is an
asset – a protective
factor



Domains of health literacy

- Fundamental literacy
- Science literacy
- Civic literacy
- Media literacy
- Cultural literacy

Fundamental Literacy

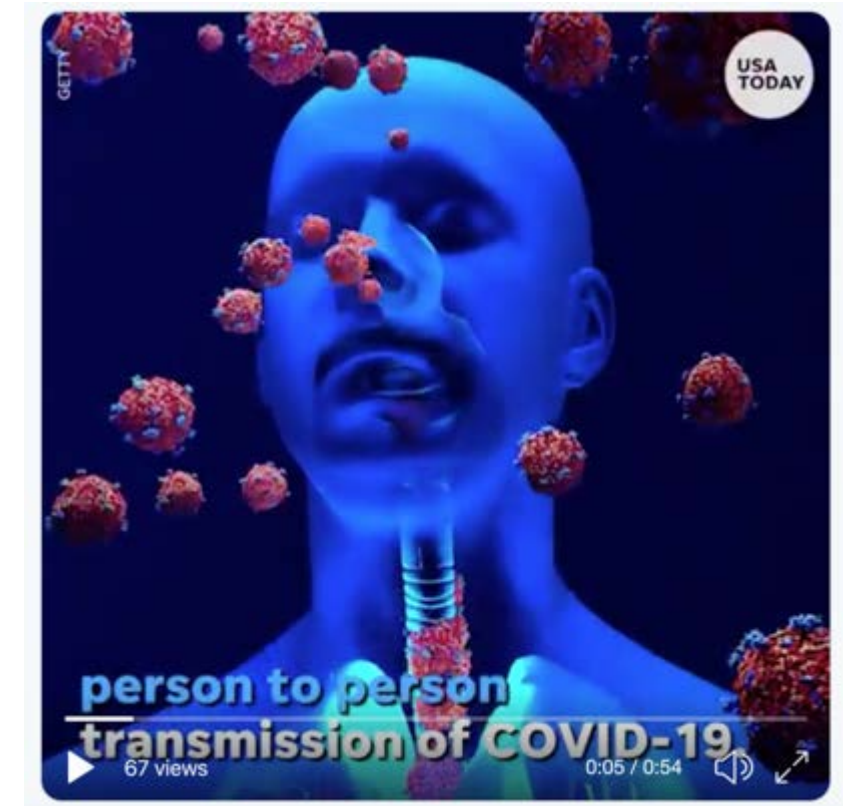


Skills needed for reading, writing, speaking, and understanding numbers

- COVID-19
- Immunity
- Exposed
- Droplets
- Quarantine
- Transmission
- Mild/severe
- Incubation period

Science Literacy

Understanding basic scientific concepts including the concept of scientific uncertainty



Why America is scared and confused: Even the experts are getting it wrong

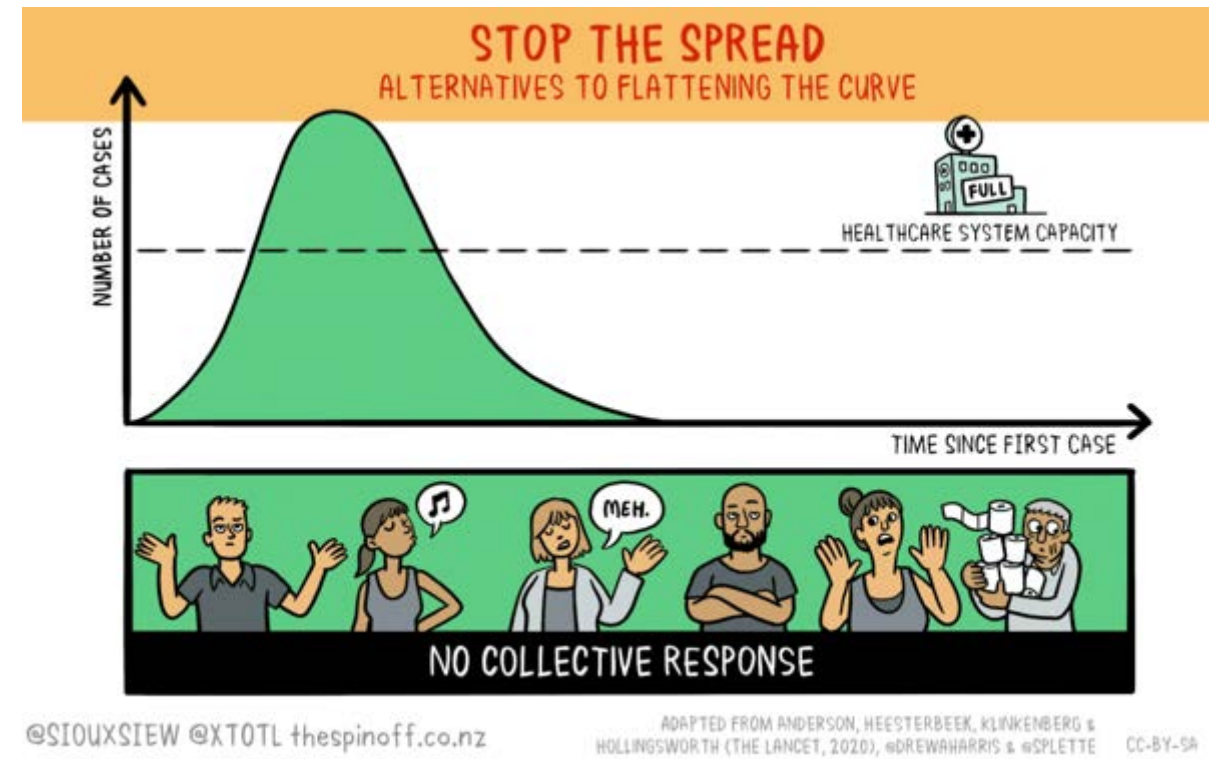
The kaleidoscope of changing messages has created more fear, confusion and distrust.



Politico.com

Civic Literacy

Awareness that our individual health decisions can impact the health of our community



“Think of it this way: There are now only two groups of Americans.

Group A includes everyone involved in the medical response, whether that’s treating patients, running tests, or manufacturing supplies.

Group B includes everyone else, and their job is to buy Group A more time.”

Ed Yong, March 25, 2020 in *The Atlantic*

Finland:
Trust in
government and a
sense of shared
responsibility



[nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com)

Media Literacy



Ability to access, analyze, and critically evaluate media and its messages

“We had a great meeting today with a lot of the great companies, and they’re going to have vaccines, I think, relatively soon. And they’re going to have something that makes you better, and that’s going to actually take place we think even sooner.”

President Trump on March 2, 2020



Los Angeles Times via Getty Images



Health literacy is context specific.



Steve Nesius/Reuters



CNBC.com New York City



Boston Globe

Cultural literacy



The ability to recognize the role social identity plays in interpreting and understanding health information

Stress!

In an emergency...

The situation and the science
are evolving rapidly.

There is a lot of uncertainty.

Something bad is
definitely going
to happen



Something bad is
maybe going to
happen

Communicating in an emergency

- Be first
- Be right
- Be credible



- ✓ Be clear
- ✓ Be credible
- ✓ Be empathetic



Be Clear

- ✓ Use plain language
- ✓ Keep it simple
- ✓ Provide action steps
- ✓ Use familiar examples

Listen and follow the directions of your
STATE AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

IF YOU FEEL SICK, stay home. Do not go to work.

IF YOUR CHILDREN ARE SICK, keep them at home. Contact your medical provider.

IF YOU ARE AN OLDER PERSON, or have a serious underlying health condition, stay home and away from other people.

If someone in your household has **TESTED POSITIVE**, keep the entire household at home.

EVEN IF YOU ARE YOUNG, OR OTHERWISE HEALTHY, YOU ARE AT RISK AND YOUR ACTIVITIES CAN INCREASE THE RISK FOR OTHERS. IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU DO YOUR PART TO SLOW THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS.

Work or study **FROM HOME** whenever possible.

AVOID SOCIAL GATHERINGS in groups of more than 10 people.

Avoid eating or drinking at bars and restaurants — **USE PICKUP OR DELIVERY OPTIONS.**

AVOID DISCRETIONARY TRAVEL, shopping trips, and social visits.

DO NOT VISIT nursing homes or retirement or long-term care facilities unless to provide critical assistance.

ALWAYS PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE:

- *Wash your hands, especially after touching any frequently used item or surface.*
- *Avoid touching your face.*
- *Sneeze or cough into a tissue, or the inside of your elbow.*
- *Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.*

CORONAVIRUS.GOV

Do Your Part to Slow the Spread of Coronavirus

Everyone is at risk for coronavirus.

But you can take steps to protect yourself — and your community:

- **Stay home.** Only leave your home when you really need to — like to get groceries or to work at an essential job.
- **Stay away from people who don't live with you.** If you have to go out, stay at least 6 feet away from other people.
- **Wash your hands. A lot.** Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- **Try not to touch your face.** When you need to touch your face, wash your hands first.
- **Keep your home clean.** Focus on things you touch a lot, like doorknobs and faucets.

If you're sick, **stay home and call your doctor.**

Your doctor can help you decide if you need to go to the hospital.



Remember, staying home doesn't just protect you — it **protects everyone** in your community.

We're learning more about coronavirus every day. Find the latest updates at **coronavirus.gov**.

TEXAS CORONAVIRUS PREVENTION

Wash your hands like you
just got done slicing
jalapeños for a batch of
nachos and you need to
take your contacts out.

(That's like 20 seconds of scrubbing, y'all.)



Practise social distancing



AVOID

Playdates
House Parties
Sleepovers
Group Hangouts
Weddings



USE CAUTION

Grocery Stores
Takeout Food
Picking Up Medications



SAFE

Watch Movie at Home
Read a Book
Listen to Music
Games Night at Home
Video Chat
Take an Online Class
Virtual Tour a Museum
Cook
Go for a Walk or Hike*

* We recommend avoiding crowds and maintaining a distance of 2 metres (6 feet) from those around you. While you may not feel sick, and while we know these measures are an inconvenience, please be mindful of the members of our community who are more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others.

Take care of yourself. It's OK to NOT be OK. Please know that help is available, and we encourage you to reach out to Distress Centre of Ottawa to connect with someone at 613-238-3311.

We are all in this together. For more information, visit: [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/SocialDistancing](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/SocialDistancing)

Vector



Some people may be infected with coronavirus and not know it. But they can still spread it to others.

That's why it's important to stay home, even if you don't feel sick.

Be Credible



- ✓ Be accurate and honest
- ✓ Explain what you know and don't know
- ✓ Cite reputable sources

We're learning more about the coronavirus each day.

So there's a chance that health officials may recommend something different tomorrow. Based on what we know right now, it's safe to exercise outside as long as you stay 6 feet away from other people.

Check [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) for the latest guidance.



U.S. Surgeon General ✓

@Surgeon_General



There remains scant evidence wearing a mask-
especially improperly- provides much benefit to a
healthy wearer.

However emerging data suggests facial coverings may
prevent asymptomatic disease transmission to others.

We always follow and react to the data - [@CDCgov](#) is
studying

8:59 AM · Apr 2, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

Should I wear a mask?

Yes. The CDC recommends that you wear a cloth mask when you go out in public. This is a change from guidance you may have heard before. It's based on new information that people can spread the virus even when they don't feel sick.

It's still important to stay 6 feet away from other people and wash your hands with soap when you get home.

COVID-19 is a new disease and **we are still learning about how it spreads** and the severity of illness it causes.

Person-to-person spread

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.
- These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
- Some recent studies have suggested that COVID-19 may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.

CDC.gov



Be Empathetic

- ✓ Acknowledge people's feelings
- ✓ Don't minimize what's going on
- ✓ Put yourself in others' shoes
- ✓ Withhold judgement



Dr. Nirav Shah, Director of Maine CDC
Maine Public Radio 3/20/20

Communication is critical during a public health crisis.

- ✓ Be clear
- ✓ Be credible
- ✓ Be empathetic
- ♥ Be compassionate



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What questions do you have?

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