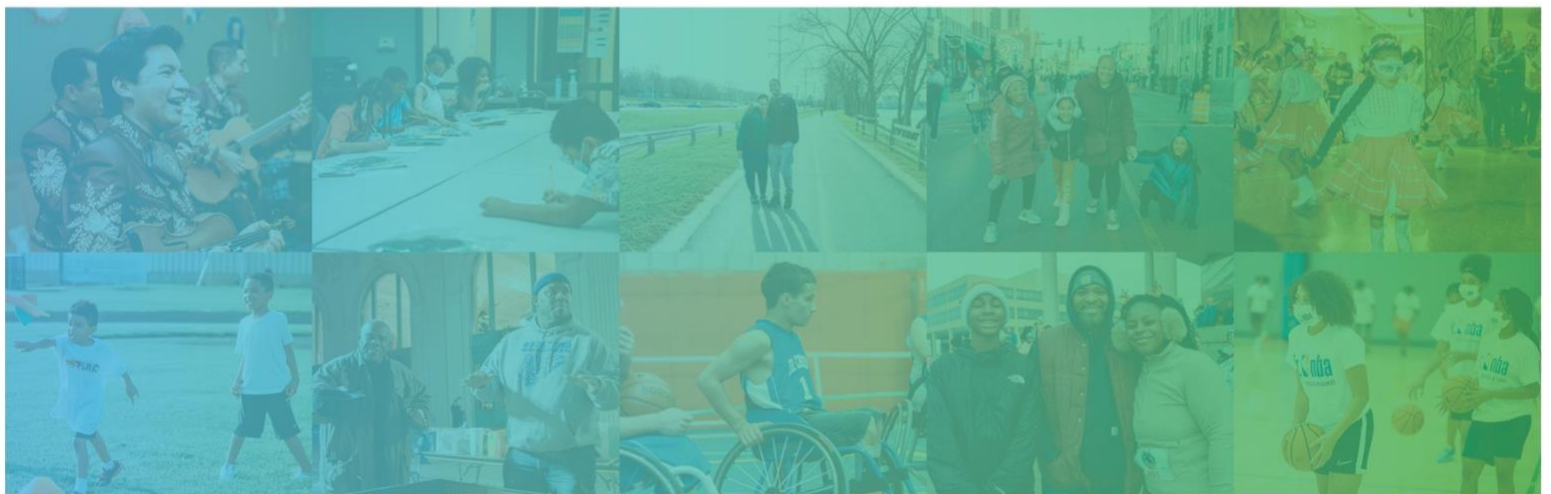




# ROCKFORD READY

healthier tomorrows start today

A COVID-19 Toolkit for Health Care Providers



[rockfordready.org](https://rockfordready.org)





## Introduction

Health care providers are a community's gateway to many positive health outcomes. That is why it is imperative to ensure that patient and health provider communications are inclusive and support building health literacy skills. This toolkit will take a deep dive into the topic of health literacy as a vehicle to positive health outcomes in the community. By utilizing the following health literacy strategies and information, we can all work to advance health equity in Rockford!

Led by the City of Rockford Health and Human Services Department, Rockford Ready is an initiative dedicated to improving the health of all Rockford residents by providing health education, connecting residents to health resources and strengthening relationships between health care providers and residents.

In partnership with the University of Illinois Chicago, College of Medicine, Office of Health Literacy and UIC College of Medicine Rockford, and trusted leaders in Rockford, we are an initiative for the community, by the community.

Up-to-date COVID-19 recommendations change frequently. Please be sure to check out the links within the Digital resource section to find the most recent COVID-19 recommendations.

This program is led by the City of Rockford, in partnership with the University of Illinois Chicago, College of Medicine, Office of Health Literacy and UIC College of Medicine Rockford as well as CURA Strategies. This program is supported by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health/Office of Minority Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$3,614,521 with 100 percent funded by the OASH/OMH/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by the OASH/OMH/HHS. For more information, please visit <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov>.

*Photos provided by Rockford Park District and Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. Updated as of 06/23/2023.*

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## What is health literacy?

Health literacy is an individual's ability to obtain, read, and understand basic health information to make appropriate health decisions<sup>9</sup>.

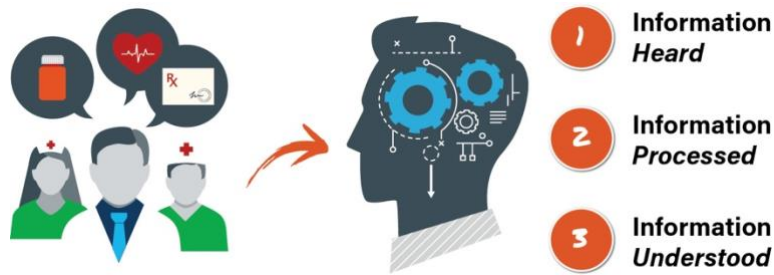


Figure 1 Source: [36]

About 90 million Americans have low or poor health literacy, and many of these individuals<sup>10</sup>:

- ... are elderly.
- ... have a lower socioeconomic status or education level.
- ... receive publicly financed health coverage (ex: Medicaid).
- ... have low English proficiency or are non-native English speakers.

Adults with limited English skills also receive far less health care than those proficient in English<sup>29</sup>.

## Health literacy skills are necessary to understand:



Medical terms and human biology



Health care issues that impact your community during local elections



Self-care guidelines



Diagnosis and test results



Risks and benefits of a treatment or medication



Complex health systems

Source: [11]

## Poor health literacy is associated with a higher risk of:



Death



Emergency room visits



Incorrectly taking medicines



Hospitalization



Making poor or suboptimal decisions about treatment



Poor disease outcomes

Source: [11]

## The application of health literacy skills requires a variety of other skills:



Visual literacy



Computer literacy



Information literacy



Numerical literacy



Verbal Communication



Decision-making

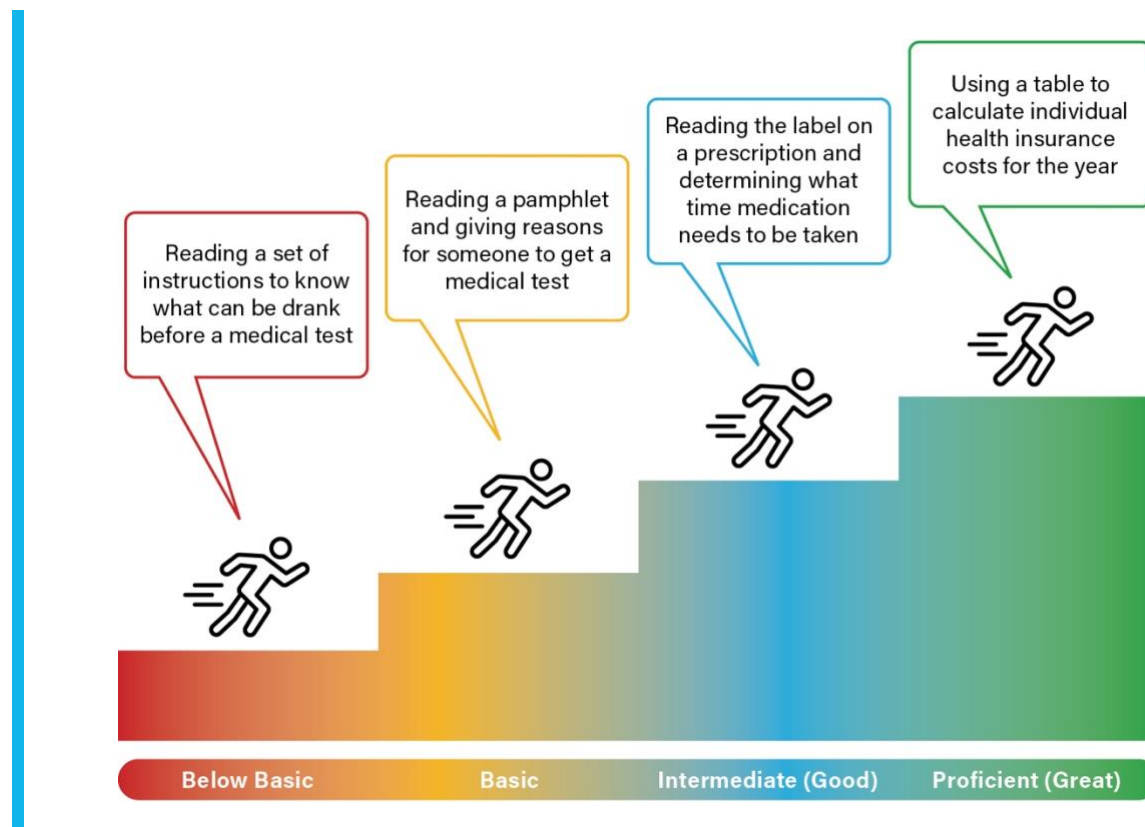
Source: [11]

## What are red flags for low health literacy?

**Red flags** for low health literacy include<sup>26</sup>:

- Frequently missed appointments
- Incomplete registration forms
- Non-compliance with medication
- Unable to name medications, explain their purpose or dosing
- Identifies pills by looking at them instead of reading label
- Unable to give coherent, sequential history
- Asks fewer questions
- Lack of follow-through on tests or referrals

**The levels of Health Literacy are<sup>27</sup>:**





## What are the characteristics of a health literate organization?

### A health literate organization:<sup>24</sup>

1. Has leadership that makes health literacy integral to its mission, structure, and operations.
2. Integrates health literacy into planning, evaluation measures, patient safety, and quality improvement.
3. Prepares the workforce to be health literate and monitor's progress.
4. Includes populations served in the design, implementation, and evaluation of health information and services.
5. Meets the needs of populations with a range of health literacy skills while avoiding stigmatization.
6. Uses health literacy strategies in interpersonal communications and confirms understanding at all points of contact.
7. Provides easy access to health information and services and navigation assistance.
8. Designs and distributes print, audiovisual, and social media content that is easy to understand and act on.
9. Addresses health literacy in high-risk situations, including care transitions and communications about medicines.
10. Communicates clearly what health plans cover and what individuals will have to pay for services.





## What are examples of health literacy strategies?

Principles of health literacy strategies include:

- **Encouraging questions** from the patient
- Limiting teaching to **3-5 concepts** at a time (“chunk and check”)
- Using **plain language**

### Examples of Plain Language<sup>26</sup>

#### Instead of...

Annually  
Arthritis  
Cardiovascular  
Dermatologist  
Diabetes  
Hypertension

#### Say:

Yearly or every year  
Pain in joints  
Having to do with the heart  
Skin doctor  
Elevated sugar in the blood  
High blood pressure

### The Teach-Back Method:



Provider/Educator

**Teach new concept or skill →**

← Repeat new learning in own words or demonstrate new skill (“teach-back”)

**Clarify or correct misunderstood information →**

← Repeat corrected information  
“What questions do you have?”

**Continue process until concept or skill is understood →**



Patient

Source: [15]

The teach-back method involves the health care provider/educator **asking the patient to repeat what they have heard**, as opposed to simply asking the patient, “Do you understand?” Teach-back is used to confirm that the provider/educator has **clearly explained** concepts, skills, or instructions in a way that the **patient understands**.

### Drawing Pictures & Demonstrating for Patients

One of the simplest strategies involves health care providers/educators using **pictures** or **demonstrations** for patients to assist in their explanation or teaching of concepts, skills, or instructions. Most health drawings are **too complicated**, and provider/educator drawings break down information in a way that the **patient understands**. Simple pictures from the internet may also be used.<sup>16</sup>

### Focusing on “Need-to-Do” & “Need-to-Know”<sup>26</sup>

Conversations between health care providers/educators and patients should focus on what patients **need to do** and **need to know**.

### Examples of “Need-to-Do” & “Need-to-Know”:

#### “Need-to-Do”

What does the patient **need to do**...  
...when she leaves the exam room?  
...when she checks out of the hospital?  
...everyday at home?

#### “Need-to-Know”

What does the patient **need to know** about...  
...filling out forms?  
...taking her medications?  
...practicing self-care?  
...referrals and follow-ups?

# Why is health literacy important in the context of COVID-19?

**In general, patients need health literacy skills to be able to:**



- Locate services and find information
- Communicate with health professionals
- Understand the meaning, purpose, consequences and context of information and services
- Determine the appropriate course of action

*Source: [11]*

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified how troubling a lack of health literacy skills can be. For instance, if a patient does not understand medical terms such as “immunocompromised” or “comorbidity,” they miss cautionary information that could save their life.<sup>12</sup>

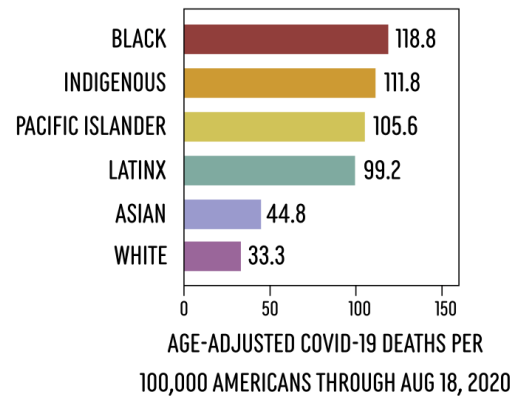
However, health literacy is about more than just educating patients about medical terms. Health literacy involves listening to patients’ concerns. Health care providers should listen and try to understand why a patient may be hesitant to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, and what kind of obstacles the patient sees between themselves and vaccination.<sup>13</sup>

Acceptance of a COVID-19 vaccine has been found to be associated with an individual’s health literacy level as well as the individual's ability to detect misinformation.<sup>14</sup>

## Which communities are vulnerable to COVID-19?

### COVID-19 has hit certain communities harder than others.

Evidence has shown that COVID-19 mortality rates are higher among BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color) communities.<sup>1</sup>



In comparison to White, Non-Hispanic individuals,<sup>2</sup>



#### Black or African American individuals are...

...**2 times** more likely to go to the hospital due to COVID-19.

...**1.6 times** more likely to die from COVID-19.

#### Hispanic or Latino individuals are...

...**1.8 times** more likely to go to the hospital due to COVID-19.

...**1.7 times** more likely to die from COVID-19.



These communities may have been hit harder by COVID-19 because of certain **risk factors**.

Individuals from these communities are more likely to<sup>1</sup>:



Not have access  
to testing



Live in  
high-density areas



Be exposed to  
pollution

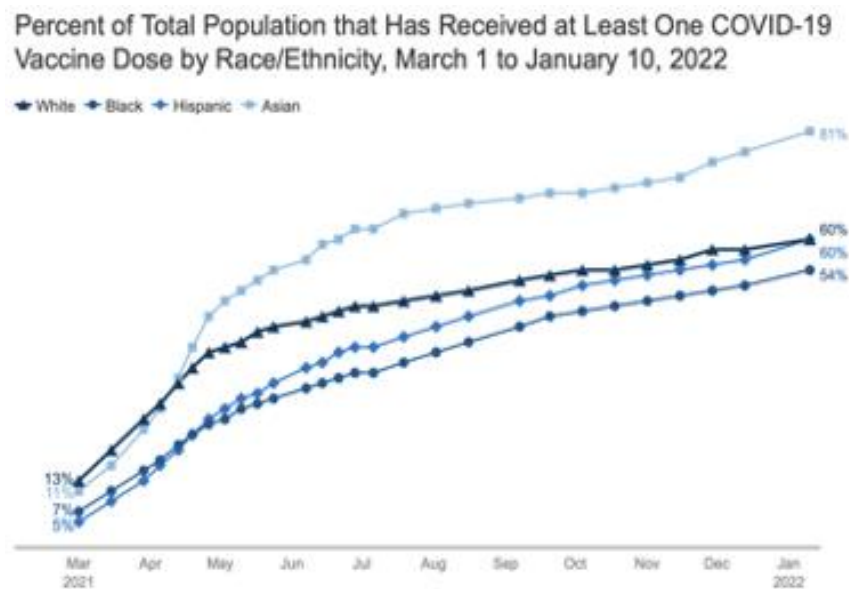


Have a pre-existing  
condition



Be an essential  
worker

Even though these communities have been hit harder, **fewer individuals in these communities are being vaccinated against COVID-19<sup>3</sup>**.



This data is concerning. Equal access to the COVID-19 vaccine is necessary to reduce COVID-19's disproportionate impact on BIPOC communities.

# How has COVID-19 affected Rockford, Winnebago County and the nation?

## Rockford and Winnebago County

### Case rate per 100,000 individuals in Winnebago County:

The orange dashed line represents the 50 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 individuals threshold. Numbers above the threshold (shown in orange) indicate a “Warning” level of COVID-19 spread.

After a period of time below the threshold, Winnebago County re-entered the “Warning” zone in August 2021.

Click on the map to check the COVID-19 rate by county<sup>38</sup>:



### The racial/ethnic makeup of Winnebago County is<sup>23</sup>:

- White: 74%
- Black/African American: 12%
- Hispanic/Latino: 11%
- Asian: 3%

*Source: Rockford Park District & Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau*

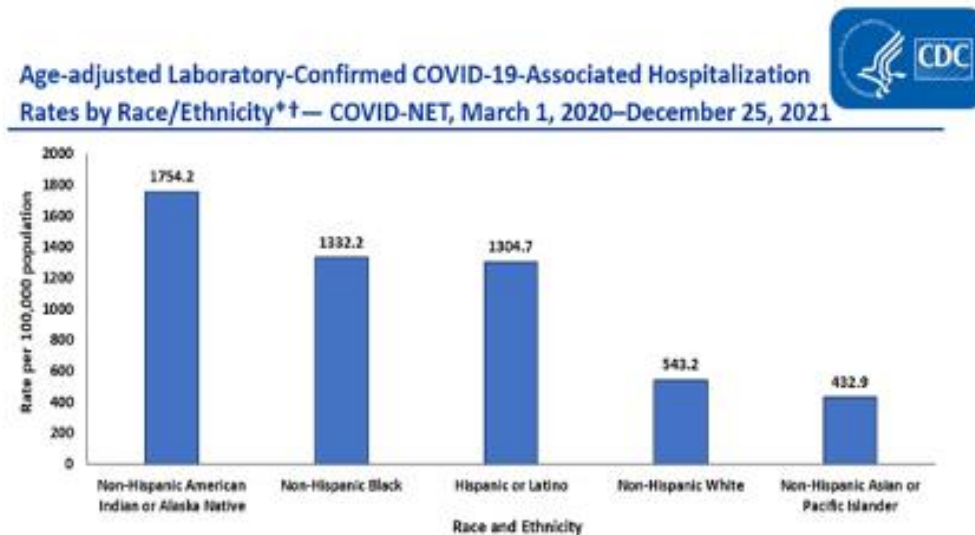
Despite making up only 12% of the population, **24%** of all COVID-19 cases are in Black/African individuals (as of 3/29/21).

Despite making up only 11% of the population, **18%** of all COVID-19 cases in Hispanic/Latino individuals (as of 3/29/21).<sup>28</sup>

## In the United States

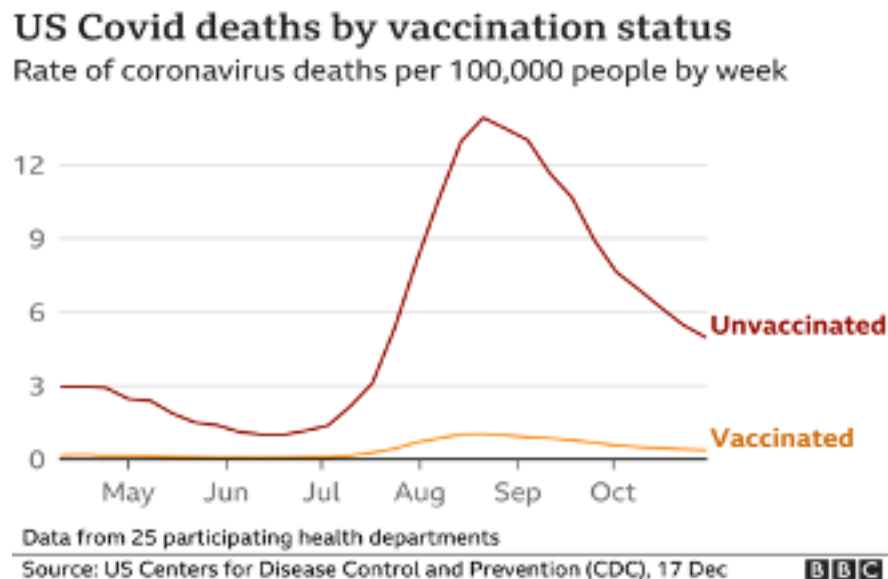
American Indians/Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanics/Latino individuals have **significantly higher rates of being hospitalized due to COVID-19**.

Source: [20]



COVID-19-associated **mortality** increases were largest for individuals<sup>22</sup>:

- Without health insurance
- With family incomes below the federal poverty level
- In occupations with limited work-from-home options

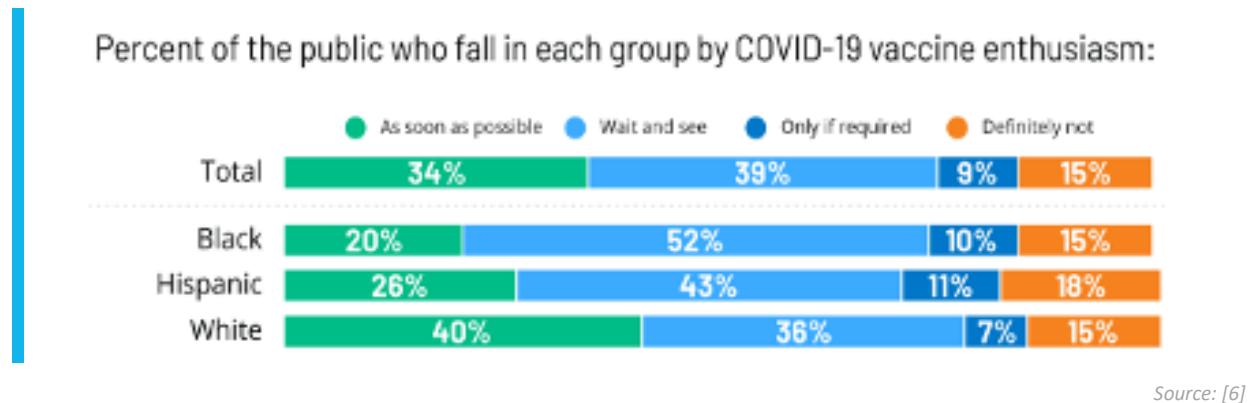


Source: [21]



## What are the reasons for vaccine hesitancy?

Although willingness to receive the COVID-19 vaccine has increased across racial/ethnic groups<sup>6</sup>, racial/ethnic disparities in vaccine enthusiasm persist:



*NOTE: Different groups have different reasons for being vaccine hesitant.*

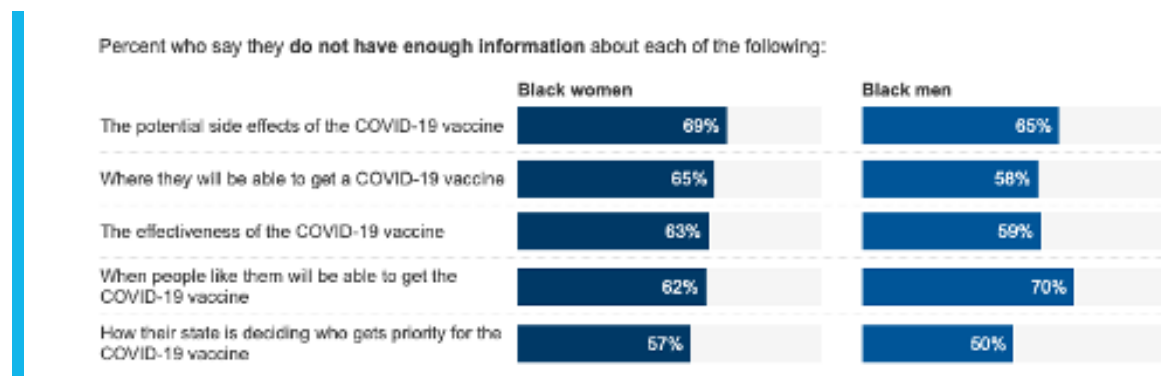
Among Black adults who would “definitely not” or “probably not” get vaccinated, commonly cited reasons are<sup>6</sup>:

- **71%** of Black adults worry about possible side effects of the vaccine, compared to 56% of White adults
- **71%** of Black adults believe the vaccine is too new and want to wait and see how it works for other people, compared to 48% of White adults
- **50%** of Black adults worry that they may get COVID-19 from the vaccine, compared to 21% of White adults

Among Hispanic adults<sup>7</sup>:

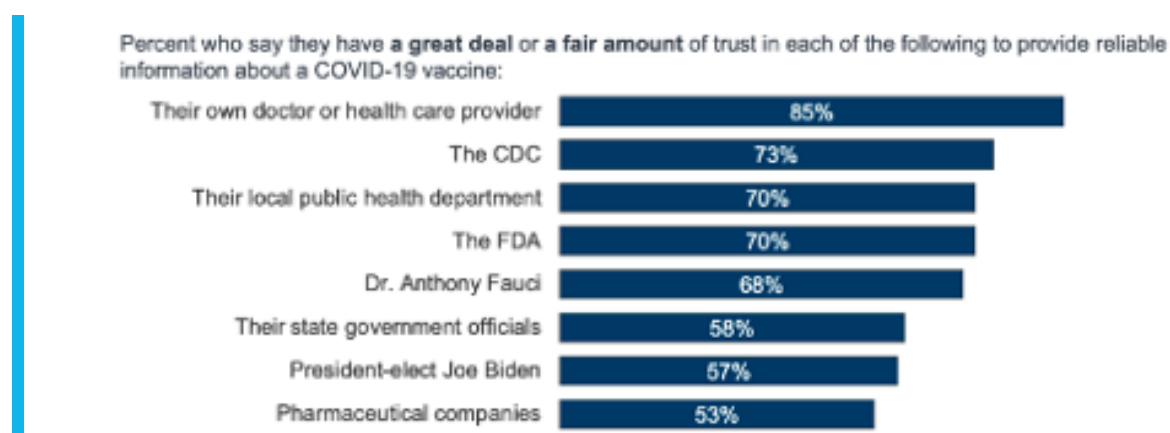
- **40%** of Hispanic adults are not confident that the development of COVID-19 vaccines considers people like them

Data suggests not only a lack of information regarding various aspects of the COVID-19 vaccine but also a lack of trusted messengers.



Source: [8]

Personal health care providers are the most trusted source of information about the COVID-19 vaccine.



Source: [6]

To increase vaccine confidence among vaccine hesitant groups, misinformation must be combatted. Health literacy (and, more specifically, vaccine literacy) are seen as important tools in achieving this.

## How can vaccine empowerment be enhanced?

### Vaccine decision process

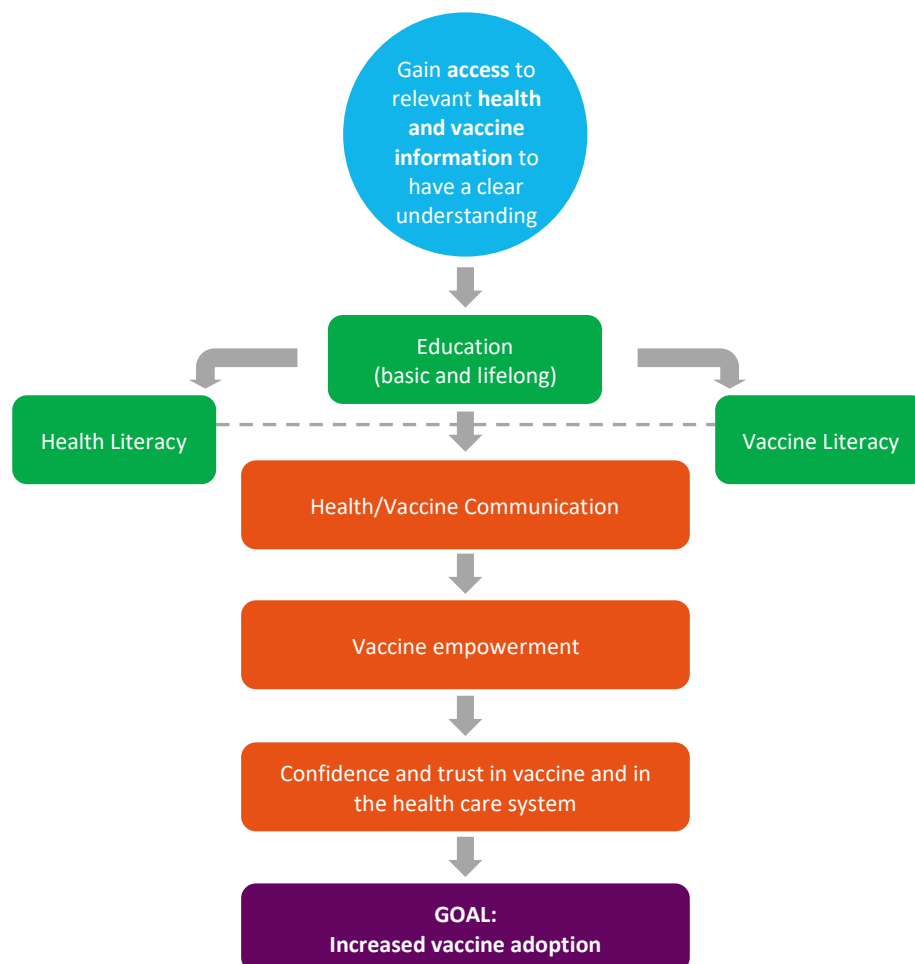
**GOAL:** To increase the vaccine adoption rate

#### Steps to follow:

**First,** gain access to relevant health and vaccine information

**Second,** educate basic & lifelong literacy to help individuals have a clear understanding

**Result,** help build confidence and trust in vaccine, as well as in the health care system



Source: [17]

## Enhancing vaccine empowerment



### Steps for the Individuals:

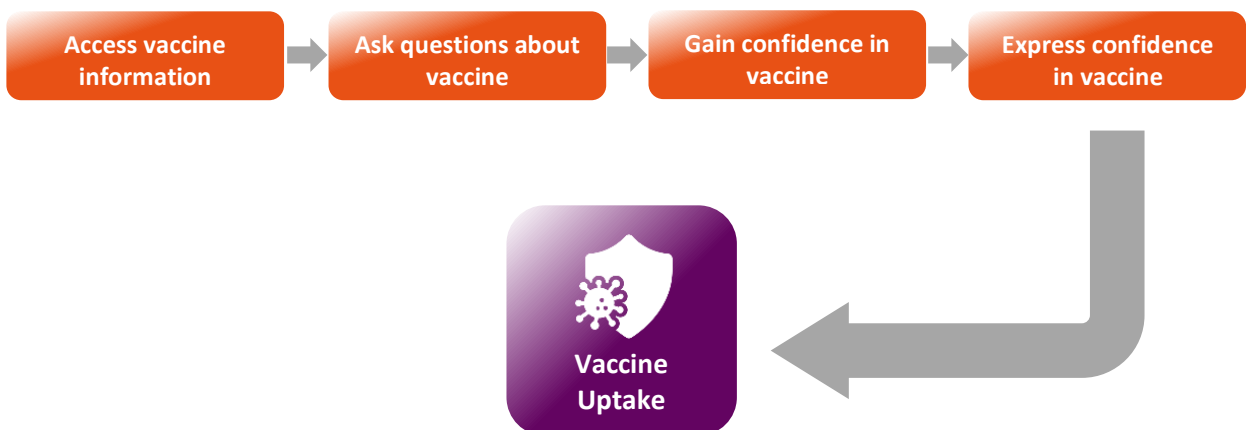
1. Access to vaccine information
2. Understand the information provided
3. Ask questions
4. Express feelings and fears



### Steps for the Health Care Professionals:

1. Provide more detailed information
2. Check for correct understanding of individual
3. Adjust information
4. Reassessment of comprehensibility

These steps allow for the individual to....



Source: [17]

Vaccine empowerment depends greatly on health care provider/educator—patient communication. This communication relies on providers'/educators' vaccine knowledge and communication skills.<sup>17</sup>

**Patients must:**

- Have trusted messengers that provide access to vaccine information
- Understand explanations from the provider/educator about the vaccine
- Have the ability to express their feelings and fears about the vaccine

**Providers/educators must:**

- Provide detailed, trustworthy information about the vaccine
- Check for correcting understanding of their explanations (e.g., via teach-back)
- Adjust information as necessary to be at the patient's level of understanding
- Reassess the patient's comprehension of the information they have been provided

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## Resources

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The [COVID-19 Health Literacy Project](#) creates and translates accessible COVID-19 information into different languages. Materials are created in collaboration with Harvard Health Publishing.



The [How to Be Clear During COVID-19 Cheatsheet](#) is a plain language document that highlights important terms to use to improve patient understanding. For example, instead of saying “novel strain,” say “a new type of virus.”

[Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)



The American Medical Association has created [Health Literacy Resources on Inequities & for Non-English Speakers](#) in order to raise awareness about health equity in the context of COVID-19. The page also highlights actions and tools that can be used to advance health equity at multiple levels, including patient-focused resources.



The National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) has put together a resource for [Social Determinants of Health \(SDOH\) Tools](#) that is categorized by individual SDOH and structural SDOH. Protocol topics include health literacy, health numeracy, access to health technology, social vulnerability, and more.



[Illinois Unidos](#) is a consortium of over 100 Latino elected and appointed officials, together with health professionals and representatives of community-based organizations. The initiative aims to present one united voice in stopping the growth of COVID-19 in Illinois communities while addressing related public health issues. The website provides resources for families and individuals related to health, housing, food, and immigration, in addition to offering many downloadable COVID-19 health information flyers in both English and Spanish.



The Society for Health Communication's [Health Communication Resources for the COVID-19 Response](#) includes tips for communicating about COVID-19, addressing myths and misinformation, and more.



Action for Healthy Kids has partnered with Kaiser Permanente to create a [COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Toolkit](#) to distribute information to districts, schools, and families regarding vaccination against COVID-19. Kaiser Permanente is a trusted source of information that is easy to understand and accessible to families. Content includes guides, tips, and videos

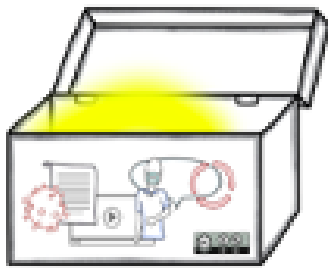


The Department of Health and Human Services has created a [Parents Toolkit](#) with resources for organizations and individuals that want to help increase confidence in uptake of COVID-19 vaccines among children and adolescents and their parents/guardians. The toolkit is regularly updated with new materials.





The Health Literacy Solutions Center's [COVID-19 Resource Library](#) offers a collection of 280+ resources that explain complex COVID-19-related topics in plain language. The collection is continually updated.



The [COVID-19 Communication Kit](#) is a free resource that contains ready-made media designed to give communicators a head start in explaining new policies and procedures. Includes images, ready-made videos, PowerPoint presentations, templates, and workbooks.



The Office of the U.S. Surgeon General has released [A Community Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation](#) to offer specific guidance to individuals, healthcare professionals and administrators, educators, librarians, and faith leaders to understand, identify, and stop the spread of health misinformation.



The [COVID Ready Communication Playbook](#) guide includes practical advice about how to talk about difficult topics related to COVID-19. Translated into many languages, including Spanish. Material is created by VitalTalk, a non-profit social impact organization, with input from over 80 clinicians from across the globe.

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## Trustworthy Sources to Obtain COVID-19 Data



[CDC - Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)



[HHS - Department of Health and Human Services](#)



[FDA - U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#)



[IDPH - Illinois Department of Public Health](#)









Winnebago County

**Health Department**

[WCHD – Winnebago County Health Departement](#)

## Video Resources

	<p><a href="#">Health Literacy Basics for Health Professionals</a> <i>from the BC Ministry of Health</i></p>
	<p><a href="#">Effective Health Communication and Health Literacy: Understanding the Connection</a> <i>from the National Library of Medicine</i></p>
	<p><a href="#">The Increased Importance of Effective Health Literacy Communications Since COVID-19</a> <i>from Maximus</i></p>
	<p><a href="#">Addressing Health Misinformation through Health Literacy Practices</a> <i>from The National Academy of Medicine</i></p>
	<p><a href="#">Fact Check: 7 Myths About COVID-19 Vaccines</a> <i>from UChicago Medicine</i></p>
	<p><a href="#">5 Things to Know About Health Literacy</a> <i>From U.S. Department of Health and Human Services</i></p>

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## About Us

Rockford Ready believes that a healthier tomorrow for all residents starts with healthy practices today. Through our initiative, we encourage residents to take an active role in their health by providing information that helps Rockford residents understand how to navigate the health care system and how to access the care they need.

Through partnerships with local health care systems, community organizations, local churches and community health advocates, Rockford Ready will host and support health education and awareness events, communicate with residents online and provide accurate and timely health resources.



For more information, please contact Rockford Ready at [RockfordReady@rockfordil.gov](mailto:RockfordReady@rockfordil.gov)

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