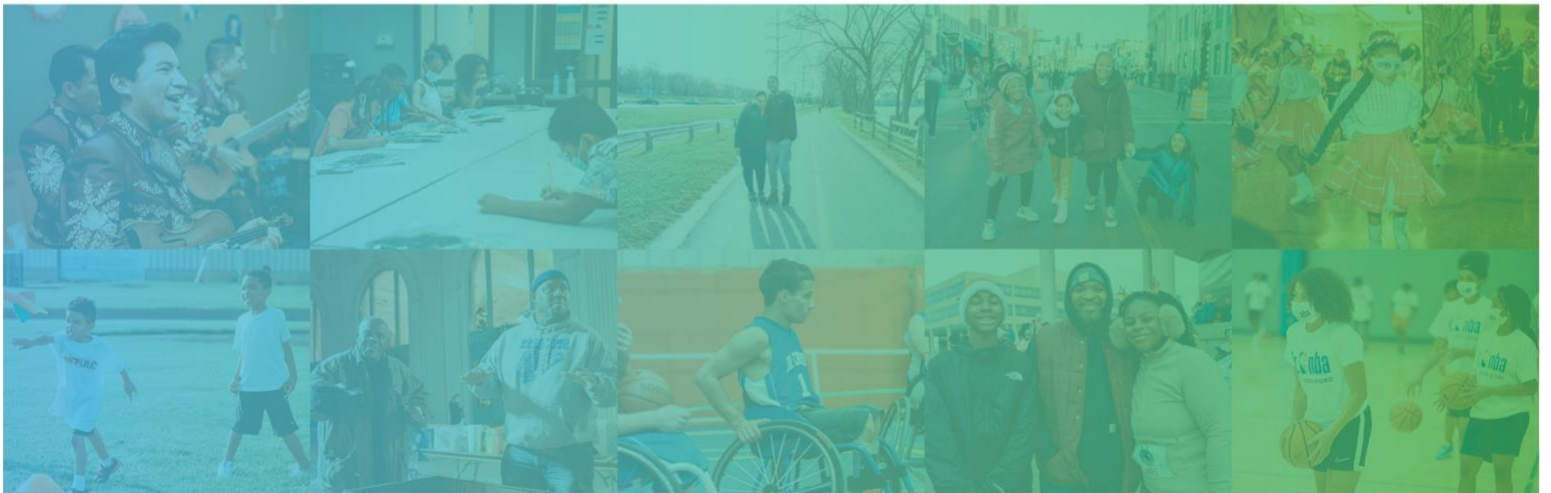




ROCKFORD READY

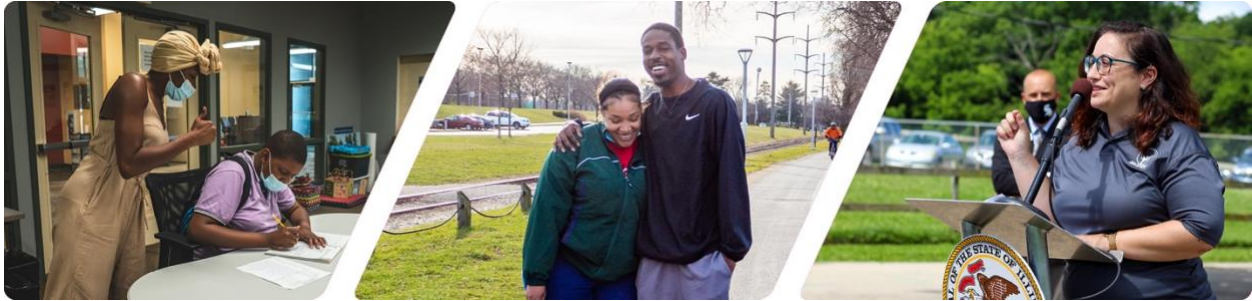
healthier tomorrows start today

A COVID-19 Toolkit for Organizations



rockfordready.org





Introduction

Organizations have a large role to play in the health of their employees and the greater Rockford community. By supporting the health and wellness of your staff, you can in turn support the health and wellness of your organization. Organizational health not only has a direct impact on the lives of your employees, but can also support your organization's bottom dollar. Learn more about health literacy and strategies your organization can implement to improve health literacy on an organizational level within this toolkit.

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.

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 decisions⁹.

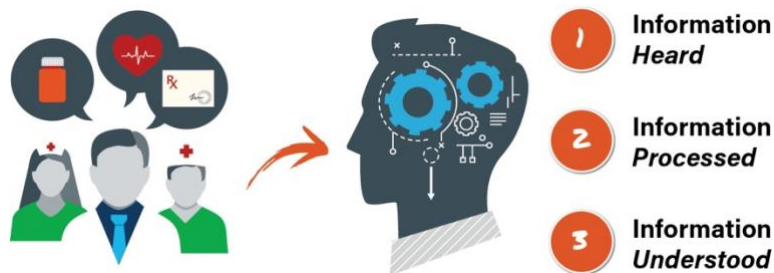


Figure 1 Source: [36]

About 90 million Americans have low or poor health literacy, and many of these individuals¹⁰:

- ... 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 English²⁹.

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

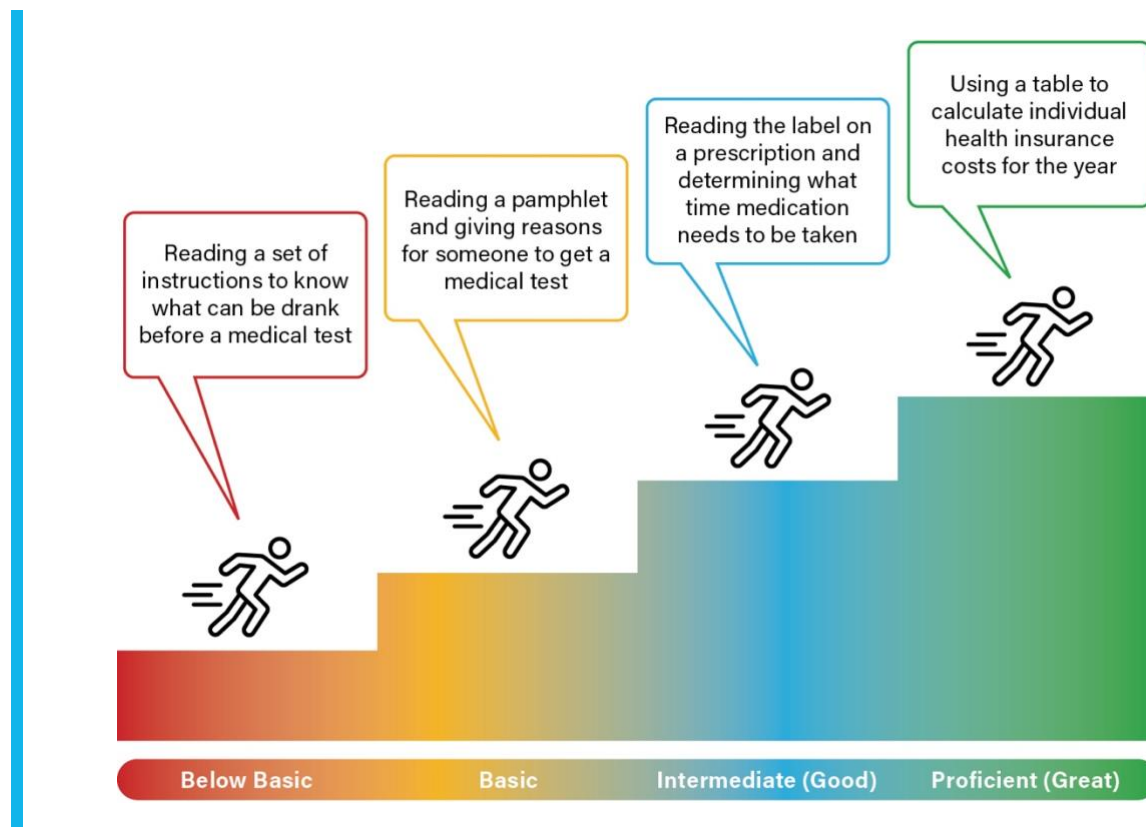
Source: [11]

What are red flags for low health literacy?

Red flags for low health literacy include²⁶:

- 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 are²⁷:



What are the characteristics of a health literate organization?

A health literate organization:²⁴

1. Has leadership that makes health literacy integral to its mission, structure, and operations.
2. Integrates health literacy into planning, evaluation measures, client 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 or other assistance programs cover and what individuals will have to pay for services.



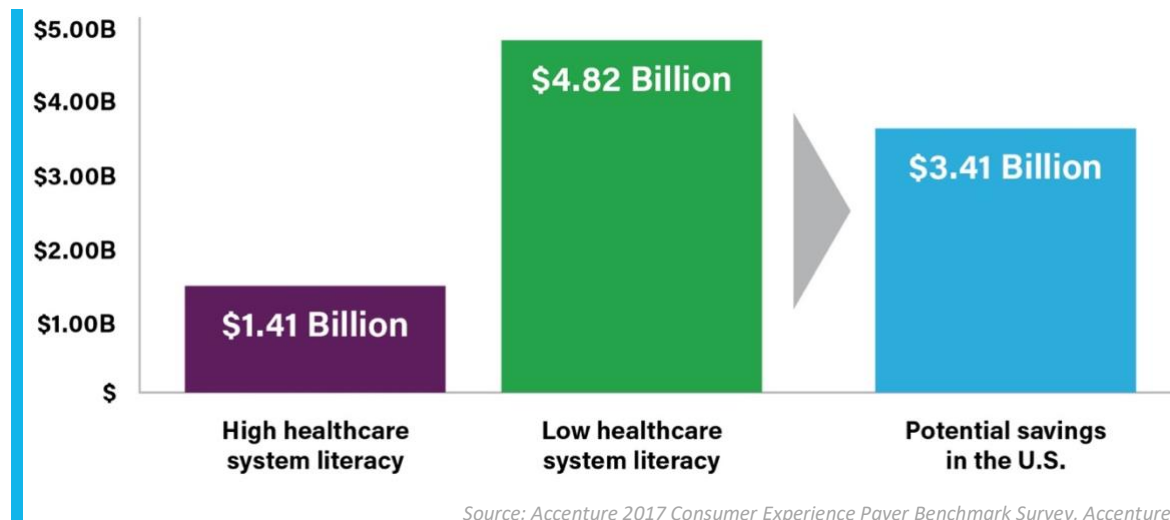
Why should organizations prioritize employees' health literacy?

It's important that organizations look to improved health literacy as the next frontier of well-being for employees and ultimately improved business results. Employees with lower health literacy have worse health outcomes, which causes missed time at work, inefficiency, and impact to the organization's bottom line.

According to new research, U.S. employers and payers are saddled with \$4.8 billion annually in administration costs. \$1.4 billion of this total accounts for administrative costs for consumers with high health literacy. This cost gap indicates that \$3.4 billion a year in administrative costs could be saved if all individuals had high health literacy ³⁸. (pull quote?)The same research found that half of U.S. consumers are unable to navigate the complexities of the health care system, and experts suggest that employers create employee assistance programs to promote more health literacy.

As an employer, you are more likely to improve employees' health literacy than the CDC ³⁸. Organizations who focus on health literacy reinforce the investment they are making in their employees' lives, and this focus is a natural extension of paying for benefits like health care ³⁸.

Because we spend so much time at work, employers have the opportunity— and responsibility —to influence employees' levels of health literacy.



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

In general, clients 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 client does not understand medical terms such as “immunocompromised” or “comorbidity,” they miss cautionary information that could save their life.¹²

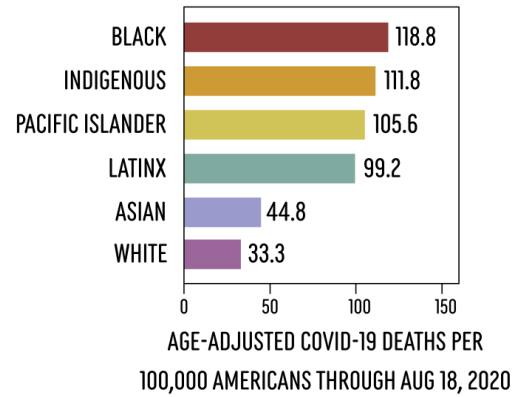
However, health literacy is about more than just educating clients about medical terms. Health literacy involves listening to clients’ concerns. In health care organizations, providers should listen and try to understand why a client may be hesitant to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, and what kind of obstacles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

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.¹⁴

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.¹



In comparison to White, Non-Hispanic individuals,²



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 to¹:



Not have access to testing



Live in high-density areas



Be exposed to pollution

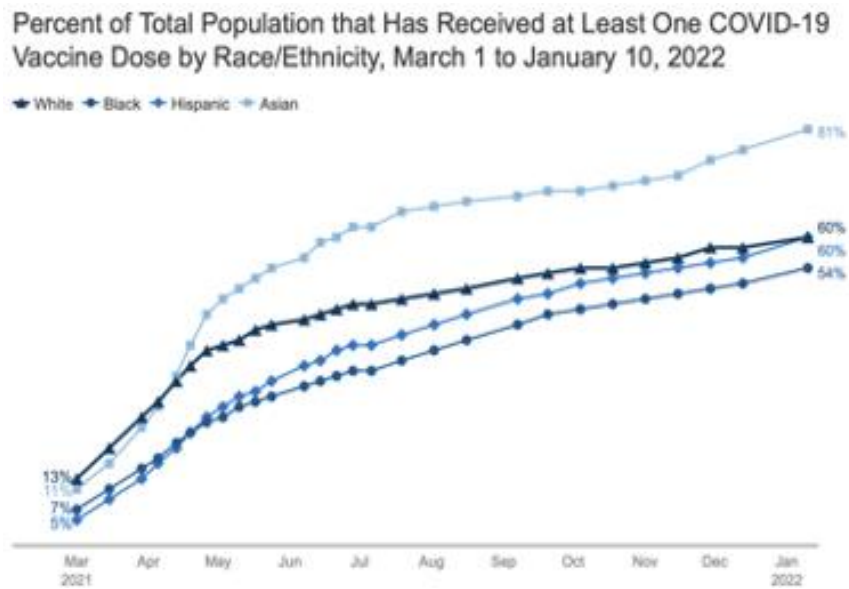


Have a pre-existing condition



Be an essential worker

Even though these communities have been hit harder, **fewer individuals in these communities are being vaccinated against COVID-19³**.



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?

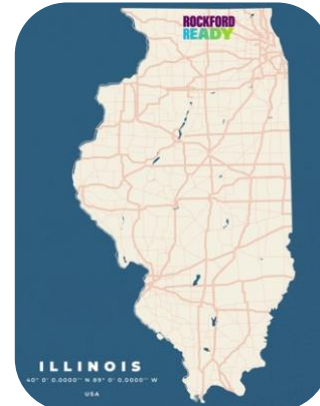
Rockford and Winnebago County

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 county³⁹



The racial/ethnic makeup of Winnebago County is²³:

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

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

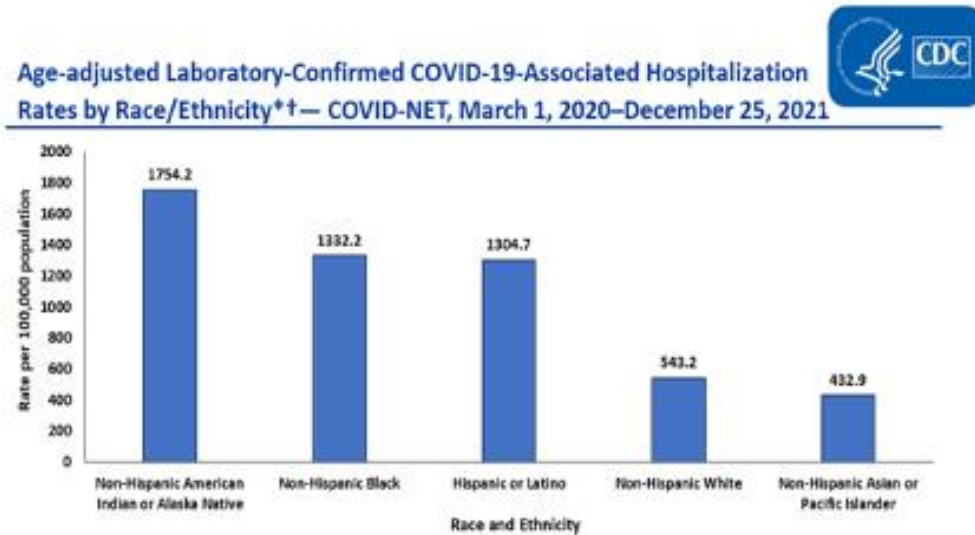
Despite making up only 12% of the population, **24%** of all COVID-19 cases are in Black/African individuals (as of 3/29/21).

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

In the United States

American Indians/Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanics/Latino individuals have **significantly higher COVID-19 associated hospitalization rates**.

Source: [20]

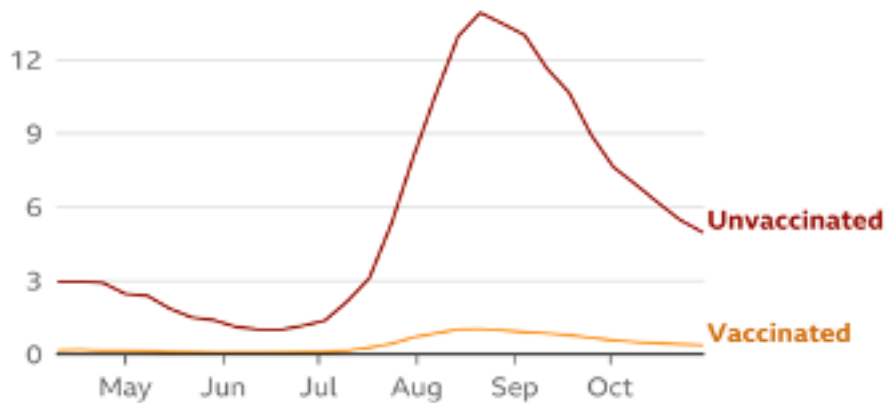


COVID-19-associated **mortality** increases were largest for individuals²²:

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

US Covid deaths by vaccination status

Rate of coronavirus deaths per 100,000 people by week



Data from 25 participating health departments

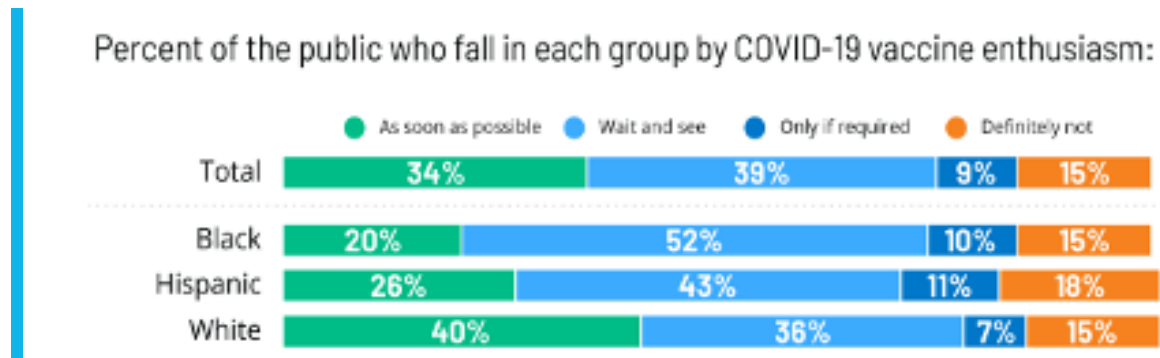
Source: US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 17 Dec



Source: [21]

What are the reasons for vaccine hesitancy?

Although willingness to receive the COVID-19 vaccine has increased across racial/ethnic groups⁶, racial/ethnic disparities in vaccine enthusiasm persist:



Source: [6]

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

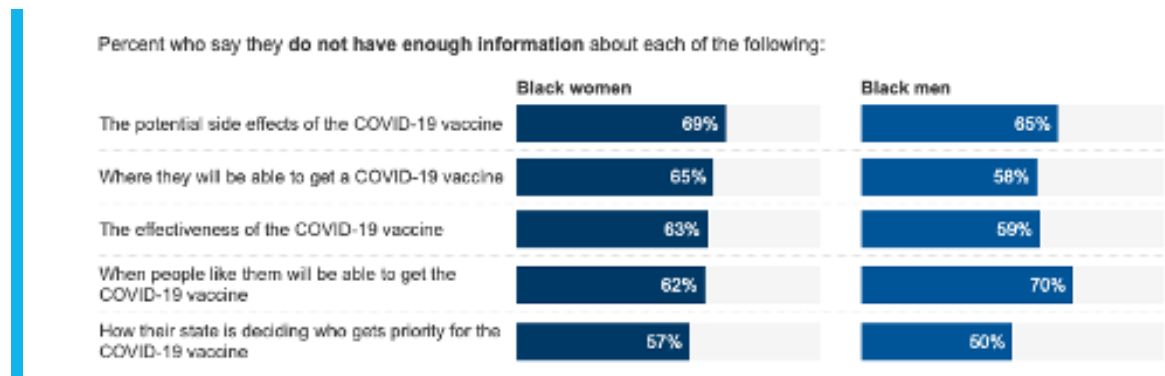
Among Black adults who would “definitely not” or “probably not” get vaccinated, commonly cited reasons are⁶:

- **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 adults⁷:

- **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

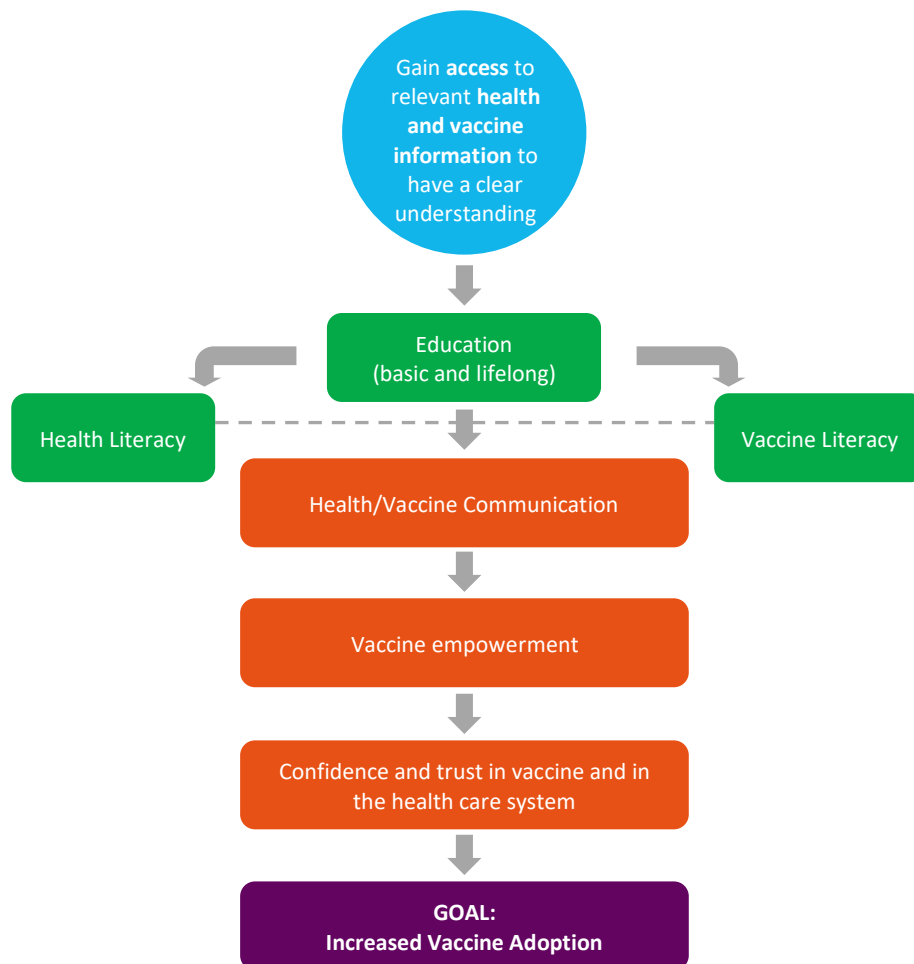
GOAL: To increase the vaccine adoption rate

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:

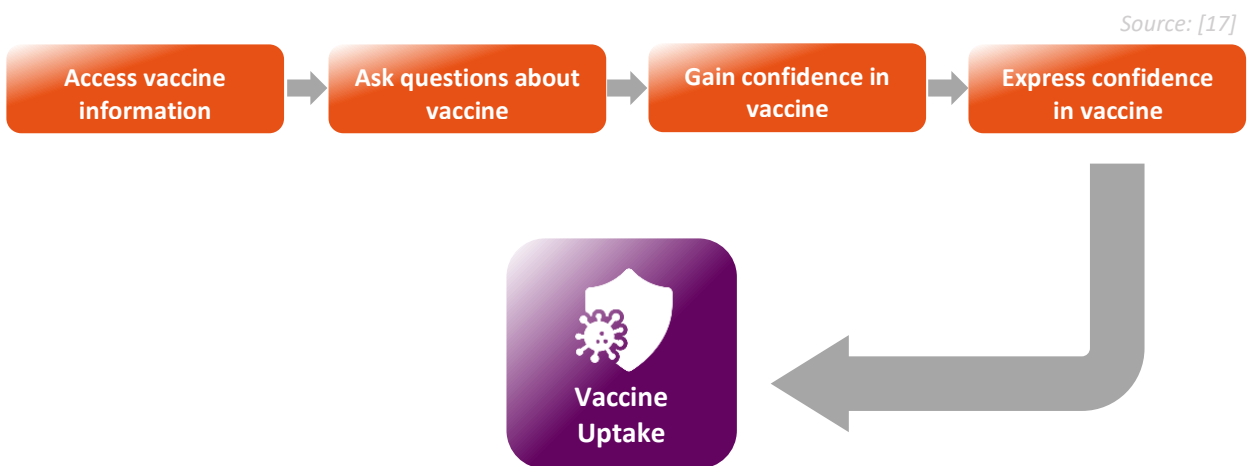
1. Access to vaccine information
2. Understand the information provided
3. Ask questions
4. Express feelings and fears



Steps for Community Organization Health Professionals:

1. Provide culturally relevant and easy-to-understand health information
2. Be a resource for questions and referrals
3. Communicate benefit of preventative health services
4. Provide a site for accessible vaccine administration

These steps allow for the individual to....



Vaccine empowerment depends greatly on service provider —client communication. This communication relies on providers'/educators' vaccine knowledge and communication skills.¹⁷

Clients must:

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

Providers/educators/service providers 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 client's level of understanding
- Reassess the client's comprehension of the information they have been provided

Resources



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.

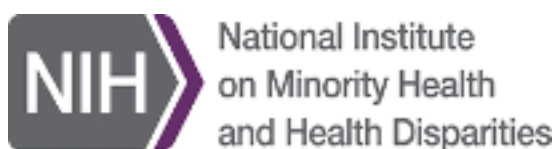


The [How to Be Clear During COVID-19 Cheatsheet](#) is a plain language document that highlights important terms to use to improve patient understanding. For example, instead of saying “novel strain,” say “a new type of virus.”

[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.



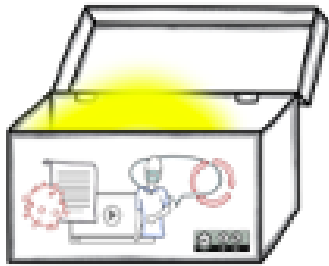
Action for Healthy Kids has partnered with Kaiser Permanente to create a [COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Toolkit](#) to distribute information to districts, schools, and families regarding vaccination against COVID-19. Kaiser Permanente is a trusted source of information that is easy to understand and accessible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



**Office of the
U.S. Surgeon General**

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.

Trustworthy Sources for 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](#)

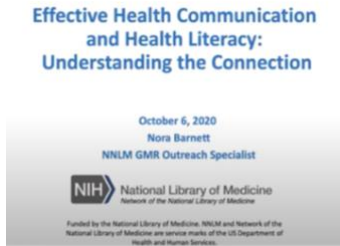


Winnebago County

Health Department

[WCHD – Winnebago County Health Department](#)

Video Resources



[Effective Health Communication and Health Literacy: Understanding the Connection](#)

from the National Library of Medicine



[The Increased Importance of Effective Health Literacy Communications Since COVID-19](#)

from Maximus



[Addressing Health Misinformation through Health Literacy Practices](#)

from The National Academy of Medicine



[Fact Check: 7 Myths About COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

from UChicago Medicine

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

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