

Health Literacy and COVID-19 Vaccination

Health literacy is what allows someone to obtain, meaningfully process, and understand health-related information so that they can make informed decisions about their health. Health literacy encompasses a range of skills and competencies. These different domains all interact and influence overall understanding of health-related content.

When speaking about COVID-19 and the available vaccines, it may be helpful to keep the following types of literacy in mind (the below list is not comprehensive of all literacy types). Consider the ways in which each may influence participant understanding of the overall conversation.

Fundamental Literacy: The ability to read and write at a particular grade level

Tips:

- Replace common scientific and medical terms with clear and simple language (refer to the “common terms” tip sheet in this toolkit for support)
- Ensure the text on your slides is minimal and written at a 4th – 6th grade reading level
- Consider how questions or comments that are typed into the chat box will also be addressed verbally, to ensure access for participants who may not be able to read the chat box content

Scientific Literacy: Knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts and processes, including but not limited to anatomy, physiology, and disease

Tips:

- Identify ahead of time which concepts are foundational to understanding key points, such as how viruses are transmitted, and practice explaining them in clear and simple ways
- Develop analogies for more complex processes, such as the creation of antibodies
- When using images, consider how familiar participants will be with the basic concept being visualized (for example, the commonly used image of mRNA vaccine interaction with human cells and the creation of spike proteins is often depicting a process that most people are unfamiliar with)

Media Literacy: The ability to access and identify different types of media and to critically evaluate the quality and content of their messaging

Tips:

- Address the prevalence of misinformation online and the challenges that can arise in determining not only what is factual, but what is up-to-date information
- Offer specific examples of reputable sources where participants can find high-quality information (don't tell folks to “google it”!)

Technological Literacy: The ability to use computers and related technology

Tips:

- Guide participants through any key online processes you reference, such as checking eligibility and looking up appointment availability via different websites (screen share navigation, and click through links and tabs in real time)
- In addition to providing website addresses, provide QR codes when possible and explain how they are used (demonstrate if possible)

Civic Literacy: The ability to become aware of public issues, navigate societal systems, and exercise and advocate for one's rights

Tips:

- Be as specific as possible when speaking about eligible groups and who qualifies for vaccination
- Encourage participants to become advocates for family and community members who may be unsure of how to access the vaccines