



Vaccines, Public Health, and the Media



Marion Ceraso, MHS, MA

Associate Professor of Practice
School of Social and Behavioral Health Sciences
College of Public Health and Human Sciences
Oregon State University



Oregon State University
College of Public Health
and Human Sciences

Question for the Viewers



In your work, how much direct engagement do you have with the news media (i.e., TV, radio, online)?

- A. High level
- B. Moderate level
- C. Low level
- D. Other (please type in chat)

The Media and the Role of Message Framing



Principles of Framing Vaccine Coverage



Strategies for Improving Media Coverage



The Media and the Role of Message Framing



Eyes on the Prize

Overall goal: Achieving healthier populations through **improved immunization rates**.



The Three P's

Three primary audiences:



Parents and families: Can ensure their children get all required vaccines; can advocate to policymakers for health-protecting vaccine policies.



Professionals and other gatekeepers: May be trusted sources in community.



Policymakers: Can advance health-protecting vaccine policies.

Defining the Media



Traditional media

Television
Radio
Newspapers



In-person

Family
Friends/Colleagues
Healthcare providers
Constituents



Online media

Internet searches
Social media

Framing Matters

Framing plays an essential role in media storytelling. So, what is it?

Frames: Guides that help people decide where to focus attention and interpret what they see. Frames help us understand, evaluate, and describe information.

- Multiple elements organize meaning
- How we think about vaccines and vaccine policy depends on framing

Principles of Framing Vaccine Coverage



Visual Framing of Vaccination



The Trap of the False Balance

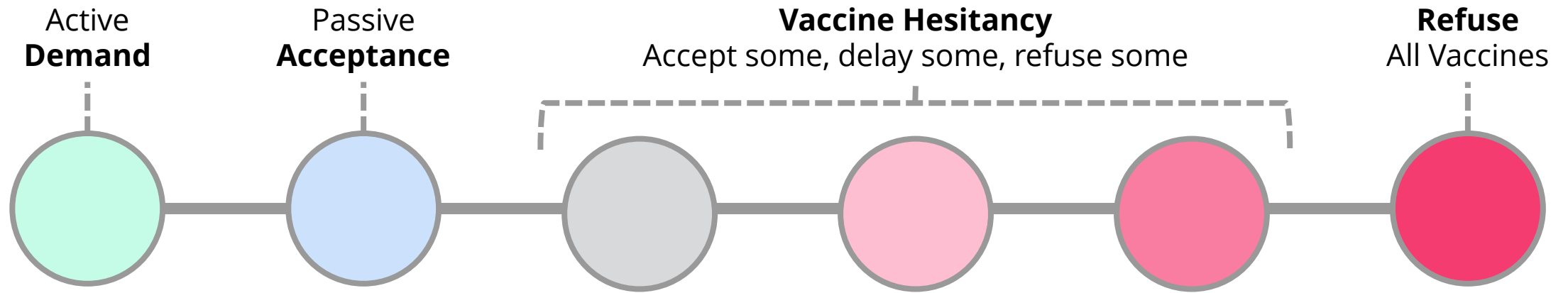
What are the effects of a false balance in media coverage?

When media frames
**focus on the reason
vaccines are needed**,
vaccination rates rise
in response.

When media frames
**highlight vaccine opposition,
conflict and controversy**,
conspiracy beliefs can
increase, driving down
support for vaccines.



Polarizing Depictions of the Continuum



Vaccine Hesitancy: A delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines, despite available services. Is complex and context-specific, varying across time, place, and vaccine.

The “Myths and Facts” Paradox



CDC Director Robert Redfield
Image courtesy CDC

“Vaccines are **safe**.

Vaccines **do not cause autism**.

Vaccine-preventable diseases are dangerous.”

Statement from CDC Director Robert Redfield

Sources:

Nyhan B, et al., *Pediatrics*, 2014; <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2019/04/29/hhs-officials-highlight-safety-and-effectiveness-of-vaccines.html>

Lakoff: George Lakoff (2010) Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment, *Environmental Communication*, 4:1, 70-81, DOI: [10.1080/17524030903529749](https://doi.org/10.1080/17524030903529749)

Individual v. Population Health Stories

Tendency to focus on stories about individuals or episodic events rather than tell broad systems stories

- Loss of historical, systems-level perspective
- Invisibility of public health as a system
- Limited information on contextual factors driving health and illness



The Social Dilemma



- Bots and trolls promote *both pro- and anti-vaccine messages*
- Algorithms create hard and fast divides by channeling fragmented realities
- Spokespersons and leaders amplify misinformation when they are the source of anti-science rhetoric

Sources:

Weaponized Health Communication: Twitter Bots and Russian Trolls Amplify the Vaccine Debate; AM J Public Health. 2018, October; 108 (10): 1378 – 1384. 10.2105/AJPH.2018.304567

Center for Humane Technology: <https://www.humanetech.com/>

Strategies for Improving Media Coverage



Question for the Viewers



Do you agree with the following statement?

"In my agency, we have identified specific strategies or resources for engaging the media effectively."

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. I'm not sure

NOTE: If you answered **"Yes"**, please share your strategies or resources in the chat box.

Framing Recommendations

Empathy
Shared values
Visuals and messengers
Population health focus



Traditional media



In-person



Online media

Examples: Modeling Empathy

"On vaccines, I understand the science, so if I offend you: good!"

vs.

"There's a lot of misinformation about vaccines online and among parenting groups. We help you sort out what's credible and what's not."

"I do want people to understand that testing on Thursday so you can party on Saturday: That doesn't work. It's not effective and you really are in some ways wasting a valuable resource."

vs.

"We understand that this is hard and that social connection is important for health, so we will support you in gathering more safely."

Examples: Appealing to Values

Ingenuity

- “Help is coming, and it’s coming soon.....When we get both of those things together — vaccine and public health measures — **that would really be a game changer.**”
- “I want every child to have the opportunity to grow up...**we can do that, we have the technology.**”

Sources:

Fauci, A. Marketwatch, 2020: <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/help-is-coming-and-its-coming-soon-dr-fauci-outlines-when-covid-19-vaccination-will-be-available-to-all-americans-2020-11-12>
More US Children Not Vaccinated against Any Disease, CBS News: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/more-us-children-not-vaccinated-against-any-disease/>

Examples: Appealing to Values

Purity

- Vaccines can boost your child's **natural** defenses against disease and keep them **pure** of infections."

Liberty

- "When you take **personal control** of your child's health you can help *your child and others* **be free** to live a happy and healthy life."
- "We Oregonians cherish our **independent spirit**. But we also care deeply about the people in our **community**. Vaccines can protect your family and your community."

Sources:

Sun LH, Washington Post: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2017/12/04/anti-vaccine-parents-have-very-different-moral-values/>

Oregon Immunization Program, Oregon Health Authority <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/preventionwellness/vaccinesimmunization/gettingimmunized/pages/non-medical-exemption.aspx>

Messengers

“Amid history of mistreatment, doctors struggle to sell Black Americans on coronavirus vaccine”



Dr. Gary Gibbons, Director
National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

*“Trusted messengers”
provide “accurate, credible,
authentic messages.”*

— Dr. Gary Gibbons

Visuals to Increase Vaccine Confidence

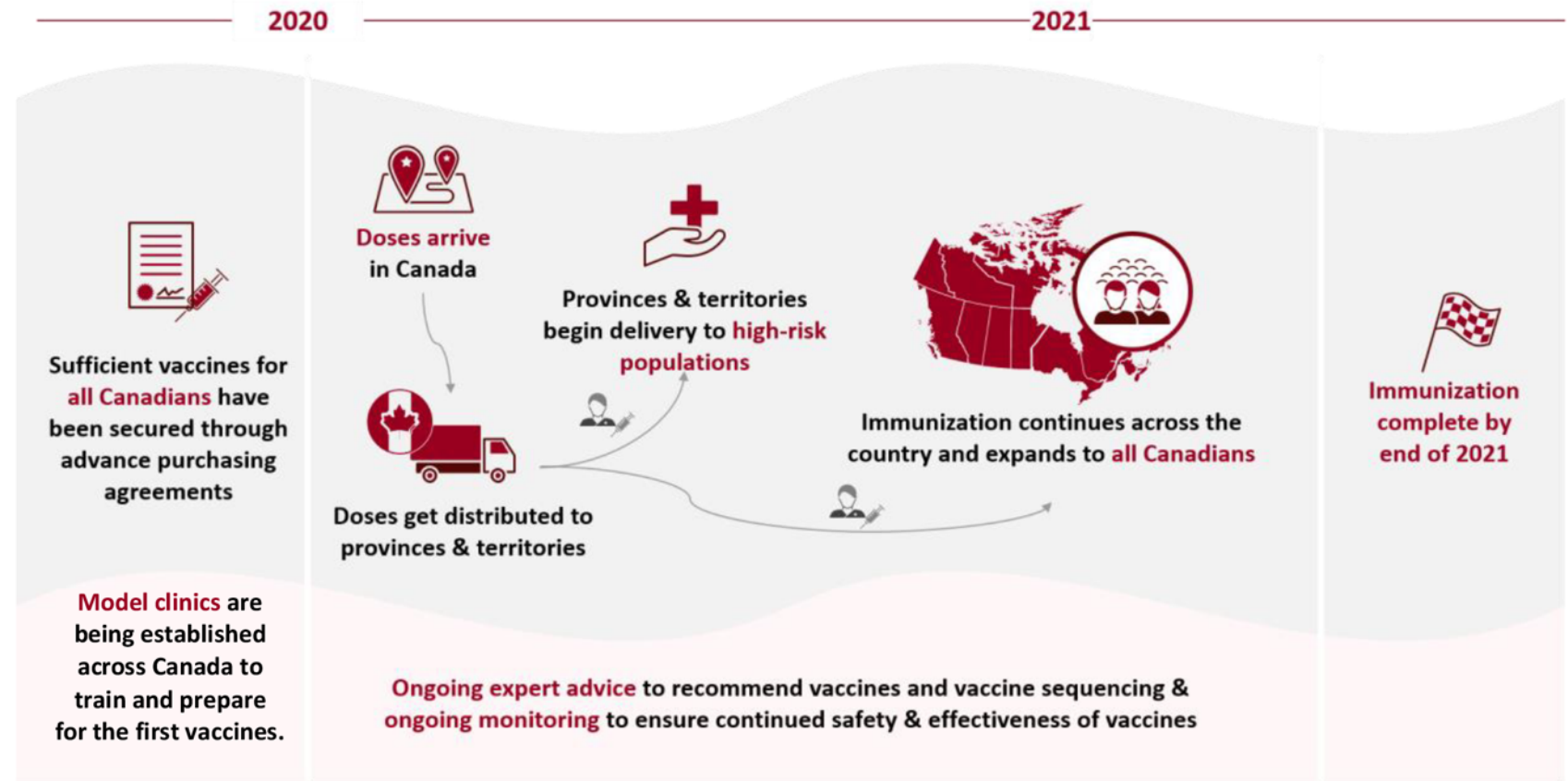


Visuals should aim to reduce fear and anxiety around vaccines, communicating **factual information**:



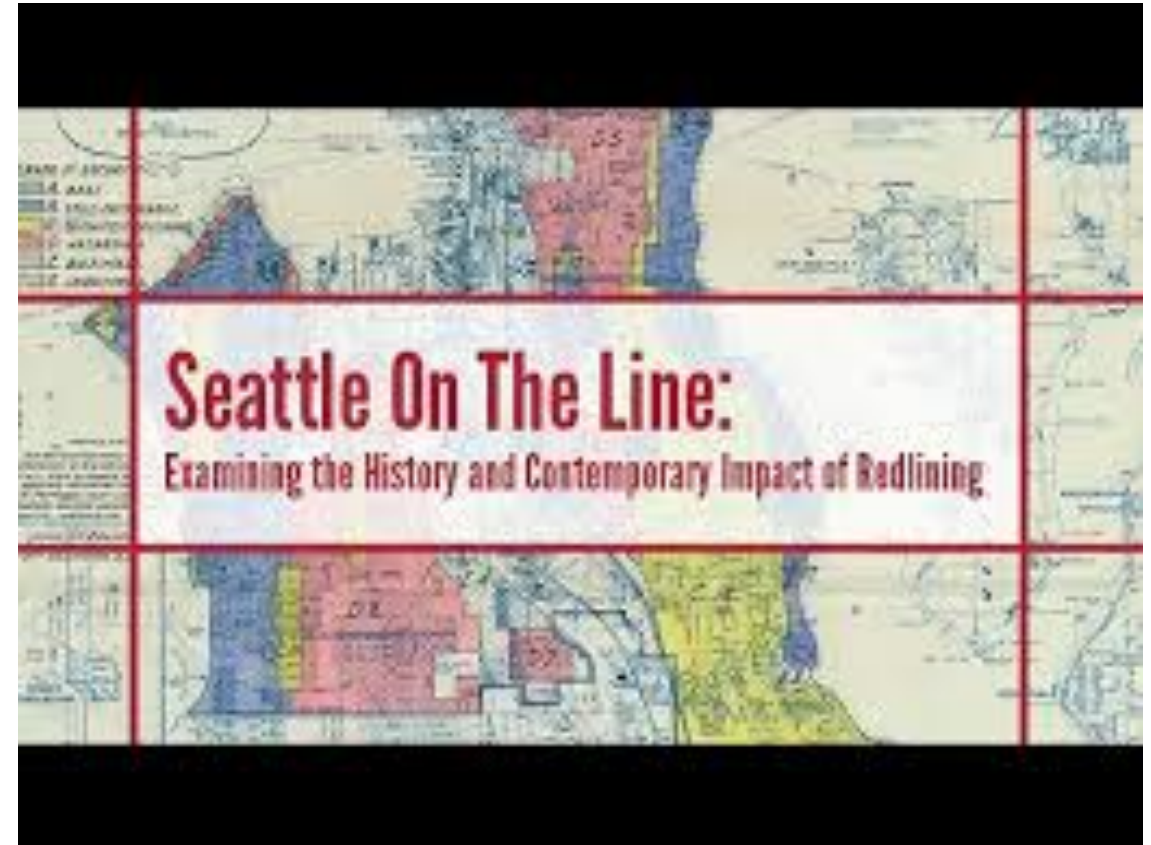
Visual Framing of Vaccination

Graphic produced by the Public Health Agency of Canada to communicate national immunization roll-out plan visually:



Telling Population Health Stories

- Historical, systems-level perspective stories
- Ensure the work of the public health system is visible
- Engage with journalists on reporting on the contextual factors driving health and illness



Research and Practice Questions

- How can public health **more effectively collaborate** with the media to improve coverage of vaccine-related issues?
- What type of research is needed to better understand what **increases or undermines** vaccine confidence and uptake?
- What are **meaningful reforms of social media** (and traditional media) that can prevent the “filter bubbles” that drive divisiveness, and should public health be in those discussions?
- How might **improved reporting** help increase visibility, salience and support of the public health system?

QUESTIONS?

To ask a question, please click the



icon in the Zoom toolbar to open your Q&A Pod.

A Chat with Marion Ceraso



Allene Mares



Marion Ceraso

Resources

- **The Frameworks Institute**
<https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/>
- **Oregon Health Authority**
Vaccine Education Module
<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/preventionwellness/vaccinesimmunization/gettingimmunized/pages/non-medical-exemption.aspx>
- **Communicating about the COVID-19 vaccines: Guidance and sample messages for public health practitioners**
Berkeley Media Studies Group report
<http://www.bmsg.org/resources/publications/communicating-covid-19-vaccines-guidance-and-sample-messages-for-public-health-practitioners/>
- **Center for Humane Technology**
<https://humanetech.com>
- **The Social Dilemma**
<https://www.thesocialdilemma.com/>
- **Boost Oregon**
<http://www.boostoregon.org/>
- **Vaccine Confidence Project**
<https://www.vaccineconfidence.org/>