



COVID-19 Vaccines: Audience Insights & Messaging Guidance for Rural Communities

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This resource has been developed in partnership with:

Center for
Rural Strategies



RURAL ASSEMBLY
BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE NATION



Introduction

On May 21, 2021, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that COVID-19 vaccination coverage is significantly lower in rural counties (38.9%) than in urban counties (45.7%). According to analysis by The Daily Yonder, the gap between urban and rural counties has been getting bigger. Despite having higher rates of severe COVID-19-related morbidity and mortality, rural residents are also less likely to say they are planning or considering getting vaccinated.

Vaccines are essential to protect rural residents and stop the spread of COVID-19 in rural communities, which have larger shares of older residents, higher rates of chronic illness and other factors that put people at increased risk of death and severe illness from COVID-19. Access to care can be less reliable as many rural hospitals have closed. Rural residents face additional barriers

to vaccination, including needing to travel long distances to clinics and pharmacies and less internet access to schedule appointments. They may have questions about vaccine safety and may have a “wait and see” attitude about getting vaccinated.

Rural employers can help increase vaccination rates in rural communities by providing accurate information about vaccine safety and making it easier for workers to get vaccinated. Understanding rural residents’ perspectives and concerns about vaccines can help business leaders respond to employee questions and share vaccine facts effectively, with empathy, so workers can make informed vaccine decisions for themselves and their families.

If you want more information and support, be sure to SIGN UP to receive our latest free resources, updates and event invitations. Or, visit us at: healthaction.org.

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

RURAL ATTITUDES ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINES

About six in ten rural residents (compared to less than half of urban and suburban residents) say getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is a personal choice.

Three in ten rural residents say they will either “definitely not” get vaccinated or will only do so if required.

When asked to say in their own words the main reason why they don’t want to get vaccinated, rural residents in the “definitely not” group cite a range of concerns.

The most frequently mentioned reason (19%) is feeling that the vaccines are too new or that there is not enough information about the long-term effects.

About one in ten cite general distrust of the vaccine (12%), dislike of vaccines in general (9%), don’t believe the vaccine is effective against COVID-19 (8%), or report that they either generally don’t need it (3%) or don’t need it because they already had COVID-19 (5%).

BELIEFS ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINES

Rural residents are less likely to view the pandemic as a serious threat either to the country or their families. More than four in ten rural residents (44%) say they think the news has “generally exaggerated” the seriousness of coronavirus.

Rural residents (40%) are also less likely to say they are worried about themselves or their family members getting sick from COVID-19 compared to urban (54%) and suburban residents (49%).





MESSAGING CONSIDERATIONS

Sharing facts about vaccine safety and efficacy are key. Sharing your personal story can also help.

More than half of those in the “wait and see” group say they would be more likely to get vaccinated after hearing that the vaccines are nearly 100% effective at preventing hospitalization and death from COVID-19 or hearing that scientists have been working on the technology used in the new COVID-19 vaccines for 20 years.

For some who have not yet been vaccinated, seeing someone they know get vaccinated without major complications has made them more comfortable, they said, with the idea of being vaccinated themselves.

Vaccine safety, the speed at which vaccines were developed and the unknown long-term side effects can cause concern. More detail about safety and vaccine development can help.

Emphasize freedom and free choice; keep politics out of it.

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine is a personal decision, and people want to keep politics out of it.

Avoid the idea that getting vaccinated is the “right thing to do” or explicitly telling people what to do. Share your story of getting vaccinated and why you came to that decision. Keep the focus on getting the facts to make an informed decision.

Avoid mentioning “moments missed” or “getting back to life/normal” as it does not resonate with rural audiences.

EFFECTIVE MESSENGERS

For many rural Americans, politicians and the media are ineffective messengers for encouraging COVID-19 vaccines. The most trusted messengers include doctors and other healthcare providers, business leaders, and family and friends.

For help to find and prepare effective messengers, you can use the following resources:

- [Tips for finding and preparing expert speakers](#)
- [Key messages for employees and workers](#)
- [How physicians can build trust in COVID-19 vaccines](#)

SUGGESTED MESSAGES

I decided to get vaccinated, but getting the vaccine is each person's own decision. You deserve the facts to make an informed decision that's right for you.

Many Americans still have questions about the COVID-19 vaccines and that's ok. Talk to your doctor to get the facts that will help you make a decision that's right for you

These vaccines are undergoing the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history.

- Scientists have been working on this technology for 30 years.
- Clinical trials began over a year ago with more participants than most other vaccines.
- The speed of the vaccines' development was a result of cutting red tape and bureaucracy, not cutting corners or bypassing any safety precautions.

COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths have been higher per-population in small towns than in larger cities. Fortunately, the vaccines are nearly 100% effective at decreasing the chance of hospitalization and death due to COVID-19 —and you can easily get one, free of charge, to help protect your family, friends and our community.

We need to help local businesses keep workers safe—and help keep our economy open. Retail employees interact with the public every day. COVID-19 could quarantine an entire staff and shut down operations. Getting vaccinated can help you protect yourself—and others—from getting sick.

We've always pulled together for the benefit of our community. If you're not worried about getting COVID-19, get vaccinated to protect your neighbors, coworkers and visitors to our community. Let's show the rest of the country how we take care of our own.

Over 90 percent of doctors who have been offered the vaccine have taken it.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Health Action Alliance's [digital resource hub](#) contains our full suite of tools, resources and upcoming events. Below are select tools and partner resources that may be helpful for businesses operating in rural areas:

RESOURCES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

[Small Business Guide to COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

[Small Business Checklist](#)

[Conversation Guide for Small Business Owners](#)

[Sample Email to Staff](#)

Handout: [Vaccine One-Pager for Employees](#)

Handout: [Vaccine FAQs for Employees](#)

Handout: [COVID-19 Vaccines: Myths & Facts](#)

GENERAL BUSINESS RESOURCES

[Quick Start Guide: Preparing Your Company for COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

[Communications Guidance for Businesses](#)

[Key Messages for Employees](#)

[Audience Insights & Messaging Guidance for Black, Hispanic, American Indian and Alaska Native Communities](#)

[Resources for Diversity Professionals and Employee Resource Group Leaders](#)

[Responding to Sensitive Issues and Questions](#)

[Tips for Finding and Preparing a COVID-19 Expert Speaker](#)

[Resources for Dealing with Pandemic-Related Stress & Anxiety](#)

[Sample Donation / Support Email to Local Health Department](#)

[Resources in Spanish](#)

PARTNER RESOURCES

Ad Council: [NEW] [Rural Audience Toolkit](#)

Ad Council/COVID Collaborative: [It's Up to You](#) campaign

American Farm Bureau Federation: [Vaccine Resources for Farmers, Ranchers and Small Businesses](#)

CDC: [Reaching Rural and Remote Essential Workers with COVID Vaccination](#)

de Beaumont Foundation: [Changing the COVID Conversation](#)

KFF: [COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor- Rural America](#)

National Association of Manufacturers: ["This is Our Shot" Campaign](#)

National League of Cities + Health Action Alliance: [Quick Start Guide: Preparing Your City Workforce for COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

National Rural Health Association + COVID Collaborative + Ad Council: [NEW] [Vaccine Talking Points for Rural Leaders and other tools](#)

Rural Assembly: [COVID-19 vaccination resources](#)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: [Rural Community Toolkit](#)