Communications Planning for 2021-2022 Flu Season

Serese Marotta
Marotta Consulting, Inc.

2021-2022 Challenges

**COVID-19 Pandemic**
- Increased demand on healthcare systems
- COVID will likely become endemic like flu
- Seasonal & pandemic flu remain a threat
- Flu has been trivialized by comparison to COVID-19
- Reduced immunization rates for other VPDs
- How do we balance communications around COVID and flu?

**Mild 20-21 Flu Season**
- Low flu activity due to pandemic mitigation measures
  - Masks & social distancing
  - Increased hygiene measures like hand washing & disinfecting
  - School closures
  - Reduced travel
  - Viral interference theories
  - How severe will 21-22 flu season be?
  - Cessation of mitigation measures
  - Waning immunity

**Public Perception**
- Comparison of pandemic COVID to seasonal flu
- Increased awareness around public health, but perhaps not around individual roles (herd immunity)
- Increased vaccine hesitancy/curiosity
- New threshold for vaccine effectiveness (COVID vs. flu)
- How can we convince people that flu remains a threat & annual vaccination is still our best tool?
Vaccination Barriers

- Continuum of vaccine acceptance

  - Evidence-based information doesn’t always work
  - People are concerned about liberty (individual rights) and purity (religious or secular)
  - People rely on moral intuitions and make emotionally-based decisions
- Cultural sensitivities (e.g., communities of color)
- Health literacy
- Access issues (locational and financial)
- Risk perception (cost-benefit analysis)

Communications Needs & Opportunities

- Aligned, consistent, transparent messaging across sectors at all levels
- Distribute messages in a timely fashion with an appropriate cadence throughout flu season
- Address people’s convictions (can’t use a one-size-fits-all approach for messaging)
- Include content that addresses specific concerns of target populations (e.g., cultural sensitivities)
- Address friction points (access, reminder/recall systems)
- Use trusted messengers (e.g., HCPs, faith leaders, unbiased spokespeople)
- Share relatable content, storytelling (narrative communication)
- Address vaccine safety, effectiveness, etc. at appropriate health literacy levels
- Actively address mis- and disinformation; be both proactive and reactive
- Reinforce disease burden of flu
- Reinforce importance of vaccination as a public health tool (community immunity)
- Patient empowerment