

Hang a Mask by The Front Door:

10 Risk Communication Strategies to Encourage Protective COVID-19 Behavior Changes



- Health communications can be made more persuasive to promote behavior change. ineffective communication efforts are not simply those unable to change beliefs of behaviors. Rather, they can also be counter productive by making people further dig in their heels by, knowingly performing the undesirable behavior.

1. Use Clear, Consistent, & Transparent Messaging

Messages that provide honest, authoritative information about effectiveness of protective measures, and that trust people to make appropriate decisions have been shown to be effective.

3. Foster a sense of efficacy and avoid fatalism

COVID-19 messaging must inform people about the harm of the virus *with* actionable steps they can take to mitigate their risk of contacting the virus.

2. Avoid highlighting socially undesirable behaviors

Avoid showcasing accounts, images, or videos of undesirable behaviors, such as large crowds not maintain social distancing and not wearing face masks. It may suggest these behaviors are more frequent that they actually are. Instead, normalize that individuals have adopted the desirable behavior

4. Appeal to the Collective Good of One's Community

Suggestions of engaging in protective behavioral changes for the benefit of others has been shown to increase compliance in certain situations.



5. Use Messengers Trusted by the Target Audience

Utilizing trusted and credible messengers increases the persuasiveness of messages. Trusted messengers have been shown to make public health messages more effective in changing behavior during epidemics

7. Link Prevention Behaviors to People's Identities

People are more likely to adopt behavioral changes that reflect their own personal identity and more likely to act in line with group norms when membership in that group is important to a person's identity. Linkage is especially important when the behavior feels difficult and burdensome.

9. Highlight the Growing Prevalence of Behavior Change within the Target Audience When It Occurs

People are more likely to adapt their behaviors to fit better with perceived social norms. Therefore, highlighting a positive trend toward more widespread adoption of a protective behavior can influence change.

6. Tailor the Framing of Messages to the Audience

Segmenting messages to target specific populations is important to address different levels of misinformation, risk, individual choices, and existing beliefs.

8. Highlight Social Disapproval of a Target Audience Member's Failure to Comply when it Occurs

In certain examples, highlighting social disapproval of an undesirable behavior from a target audience member has been found to be effective. Campaigns or PSAs that applaud compliant behavior and show the disapproval of the community at large disapproval of undesirable behavior can be effective at influencing behavior change.

10. Avoid Repeating Misinformation; Even to Debunk It

Pointing out misinformation and efforts to debunk can have unintended consequences of reinforcing false beliefs.



For more information, please see The National Academies of Sciences [*Encouraging Adoption of Protective Behaviors to Mitigate the Spread of COVID-19: Strategies for Behavior Change \(2020\)*](#)



MAPC is here to help! We can assist municipalities and provide technical assistance around communication needs. Please contact Barry Keppard at bkeppard@mapc.org for assistance.



We want to hear from you! What communications strategies have you been implementing to encourage healthy COVID-19 behavior changes? If you have any examples you would like to share, please contact Barry Keppard at bkeppard@mapc.org.