



In the Know: Health literacy news and best practices

October 2020

Health Literacy Month: Health literacy during COVID-19

The fast spread of COVID-19 means people are expected to absorb health information and change their habits very quickly. Health care providers and organizations are working hard to offer simple advice and recommendations. But there is still an overwhelming amount of complex and false health information that patients need to sift through.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, using plain language and other health literacy best practices is more important than ever before. That is why we are recognizing national Health Literacy Month by sharing simple messages and resources you can use to help educate patients and the general public.

The need for health literacy is strong

Here are some helpful messages that demonstrate the strong need for health literacy best practices right now.

- Even before the pandemic, nearly 9 out of 10 Americans struggled to understand health information.
- Because of COVID-19, people are hearing a lot of new health care terms and phrases they may not know.

- The people most at risk for experiencing health disparities are also most at risk for struggling to understand the health care system and health terms.
- It's important that health information is easy to understand so people know how to protect themselves and when they should seek care.
- Using health literacy best practices – like using plain, easy to understand language – helps people understand and act on the health information they receive.

Plain language

There are a lot of new health care terms being used right now. It's critical that health professionals use plain language that patients can understand the first time they hear or read it.

Contact tracing: This is a way to identify people who have or may have been around a person who is sick.

Coronavirus: This is a group of viruses (germs) that cause people to get sick.

COVID-19: This stands for "coronavirus disease of 2019." COVID-19 spreads from person to person.

Isolation: This practice is for people who are sick. It means staying away from people who are not sick.

Pandemic: This means a disease has spread across many countries and continents.

Sanitize: This is a process to reduce the number of germs on a surface that can cause disease.

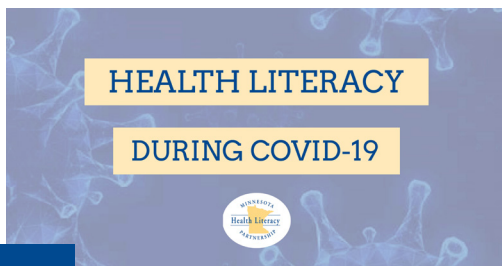
Social distancing: This is staying a safe distance from other people to limit the spread of a disease.

Telehealth, telemedicine or virtual visit: This visit lets you see and talk with a health care provider at another location through a computer or cell phone.

Quarantine: This practice is for people who have or may have been around a person who is sick. It means staying away from other people in case they become sick.

Fact sheet

[You can download a printable, easy-to-share campaign fact sheet here.](#)



HEALTH LITERACY DURING COVID-19 October 2020

The fast spread of COVID-19 means people are expected to absorb health information and change their habits very quickly. Health care providers and organizations are working hard to offer simple advice and recommendations, but there is still an overwhelming amount of complex and false health information that patients need to sift through.

We believe that using plain language and other health literacy best practices is more important than ever before. That is why we are celebrating national Health Literacy Month by sharing simple messages and resources you can use to help educate patients and the general public.

Health literacy best practices are more important than ever

- Even before the pandemic, nearly 9 out of 10 Americans struggled to understand health information.
- Because of COVID-19, people are hearing a lot of new health care terms and phrases they may not know.
- The people most at risk for experiencing health disparities are also most at risk for struggling to understand the health care system and health terms.
- It's important that health information is easy to understand so people know how to protect themselves and when they should seek care.
- Using health literacy best practices – like using plain, easy to understand language – helps people understand and act on the health information they receive.

Use plain language

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Campaign fact sheet

How to know if news is legitimate

The rise of social media and online news means that someone can post an article today with a simple click of a button.

In fact, 85% of U.S. adults now get their news on a mobile device. This is a major shift from even 10 years ago, when television news and newspapers were more popular. Being able to get your news instantly on your phone is convenient, but there are some things that people should be mindful of.

Media literacy is a helpful tool to understand where your news is coming from and if it's true. This is especially helpful right now as theories and fake news about the pandemic run rampant.



Five things to keep in mind

Sometimes it can be hard to tell if a news story is real. Below are five things to consider next time you're not sure.

- 1. THE SOURCE:** Have you heard of this website before? Check out their "About Us" or "Contact" webpages to learn more about the organization.
- 2. THE CONTENT:** Read the full article and compare it to the headline that caught your eye. Oftentimes, unreliable news stories' headlines have little to do with the actual content within the article. This is called clickbait.
- 3. QUOTES:** Are there quotes in the article? Quotes from notable people add an extra layer of authenticity and most likely means that the news you're reading is real!
- 4. QUALITY:** If the writing is sloppy and full of typos, that's a red flag. Most reputable news sources have copy editors that would catch these errors before publication.
- 5. GOOGLE:** When in doubt, Google! Search for the story's topic to see if any other reputable news sources are reporting on it.

[Learn more about media literacy here.](#)

Additional resources

Here is a list of reliable, educational COVID-19 resources you can share with patients, providers and the public.

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:](#) This website has tons of resources that help people understand everything from how to properly wear a mask to when they should get a COVID-19 test.

[Minnesota Department of Health:](#) Access the latest COVID-19 updates for Minnesota, including suggestions for where to get tested and how to slow the spread.

[Worldwide Health Organization:](#) The organization's YouTube channel has many short videos to help people better understand COVID-19.

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