



Health literacy strategies for advocacy

NHC health literacy training 2
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Why does health literacy matter for advocacy work?

Raising health literacy means raising self-efficacy. If people get the right information and understand it, they are more likely to get involved.

Tailor your message to your purpose and audience

- Use language and visuals that represent your intended audience
- Consider creating different versions for your different audiences
- For social media posts, use the platform your audience uses

2 versions of a CDC document about COVID-19:

What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

If you are sick with COVID-19 or suspect you are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, follow the steps below to help prevent the disease from spreading to people in your home and community.

Stay home except to get medical care
You should restrict activities outside your home, except for getting medical care. Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.

Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home
People: As much as possible, you should stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available.
Animals: Do not handle pets or other animals while sick. See COVID-19 and Animals for more information.

Call ahead before visiting your doctor
If you have a medical appointment, call the healthcare provider and tell them that you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the healthcare provider's office take steps to keep other people from getting infected or exposed.

Wear a facemask
You should wear a facemask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) or pets and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. If you are not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live with you should not stay in the same room with you, or they should wear a facemask if they enter your room.

Cover your coughs and sneezes
Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can; immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.

Avoid sharing personal household items
You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home. After using these items, they should be washed thoroughly with soap and water.

Clean your hands often
Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.


Clean all "high-touch" surfaces every day
High touch surfaces include counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables. Also, clean any surfaces that may have blood, stool, or body fluids on them. Use a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the label instructions. Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.

Monitor your symptoms
Seek prompt medical attention if your illness is worsening (e.g., difficulty breathing). Before seeking care, call your healthcare provider and tell them that you have, or are being evaluated for, COVID-19. Put on a facemask before you enter the facility. These steps will help the healthcare provider's office to keep other people in the office or waiting room from getting infected or exposed.

Ask your healthcare provider to call the local or state health department. Persons who are placed under active monitoring or facilitated self-monitoring should follow instructions provided by their local health department or occupational health professionals, as appropriate.

If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that you have, or are being evaluated for COVID-19. If possible, put on a facemask before emergency medical services arrive.











Discontinuing home isolation
Patients with confirmed COVID-19 should remain under home isolation precautions until the risk of secondary transmission to others is thought to be low. The decision to discontinue home isolation precautions should be made on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.


 For more information: www.cdc.gov/COVID19

Heavier text with more detail

10 things you can do to manage your COVID-19 symptoms at home

If you have possible or confirmed COVID-19:

- Stay home** from work and school. And stay away from other public places. If you must go out, avoid using any kind of public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis. 
- Monitor your symptoms** carefully. If your symptoms get worse, call your healthcare provider immediately. 
- Get rest and stay hydrated.** 
- If you have a medical appointment, **call the healthcare provider** ahead of time and tell them that you have or may have COVID-19. 
- For medical emergencies, call 911 and notify the **dispatch personnel** that you have or may have COVID-19. 
- Cover your cough and sneezes.** 
- Wash your hands often** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. 
- As much as possible, **stay in a specific room and away from other people** in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available. If you need to be around other people in or outside of the home, wear a facemask. 
- Avoid sharing personal items** with other people in your household, like dishes, towels, and bedding. 
- Clean all surfaces** that are touched often, like counters, tabletops, and doorknobs. Use household cleaning sprays or wipes according to the label instructions. 

 cdc.gov/coronavirus

Less text with visuals that add appeal

Structure materials for easy scanning

- Think of questions your readers might ask about your topic – those can become your headings
- In the body text, answer the question posed in the heading – each heading + body text is a “chunk” of information that presents 1 idea
- Use bullet points for lists of 3-5 items

Create content that resonates with your audience

- Combine facts with human interest, such as to:
 - Tell stories or use quotes that relate the experiences of people who represent your intended audience
 - Create videos to engage and inform different types of learners

Design materials to support understanding

- Use 20-30% white space per page
- Use a clear font in 12-point size for body text
- Use color to highlight important information and make your material more appealing
- Use meaningful visuals – mostly people and faces

Motivate your audience to become advocates

Clearly state the issue – that’s your main message

- Be concise – stick to your main topic
- Make it relatable – show how the issue affects your audience
- Make it actionable – give specifics about what you want people to do

Give your audience the tools they need to act

To make it easy for people to get involved and take action, use:

- Links or fillable forms
- Talking points, a script, or text to copy
- Resources to learn more and contact information in case they have questions

What is diabetes, and how do I know if I have it?

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a life-long disease where your blood sugar (glucose) is too high because your body cannot make or use insulin the way it should. Insulin is a hormone the body makes that helps turn sugar from the food you eat into energy. When your body doesn't make insulin or use insulin the way it should, too much sugar stays in your blood.

There are 3 main types of diabetes:

- ➔ **Type 1 diabetes**
Your body does not make insulin – it usually starts when you are a child or young adult
- ➔ **Type 2 diabetes**
Your body makes insulin, but does not use insulin the way it should – it is the most common type of diabetes in adults, and more children have been getting it due to a rise in childhood obesity
- ➔ **Gestational diabetes**
High blood sugar in pregnant women – it usually goes away after pregnancy ends, but may raise the mother's or baby's chances of getting type 2 diabetes later in life

What are the symptoms of diabetes?

Symptoms of diabetes include:

- Feeling more thirsty or hungry than usual
- Urinating (peeing) more than usual
- Feeling very tired
- Getting annoyed easily
- Blurry vision
- Losing weight without trying to (for type 1 diabetes only)

If you have any of these symptoms, call Casa de Salud right away to schedule an appointment: 314-977-1250

Resources

Use online health literacy resources

- CDC Health Literacy Research on Patient Engagement
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/researchevaluate/patient-engage.html>
- CDC Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication
https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Health_Equity.html
- CDC Health Literacy Resources
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/learn/resources.html>
- Usability.gov
<https://www.usability.gov/>

Use a health literacy or plain language thesaurus

- CDC's Everyday Words for Public Health Communication
<https://www.cdc.gov/other/pdf/everydaywordsforpublichealthcommunication.pdf>
- Health Research for Action's Plain Language Word List
<https://multco.us/file/46697/download>

Health literacy cheat sheet

Use this cheat sheet to see if your material follows the main principles of health literacy.

Purpose and audience

Make your purpose and intended audience clear at first glance to help build trust with your readers.

Purpose

Think about your purpose. What is your topic? Are you trying to educate, motivate, or change attitudes or behaviors? Describe your purpose as specifically as you can:

Audience

Think about your audience. Keep them in mind as you develop the material: their age, gender, ethnicity, reading level, and cultural beliefs. What questions might they have? Describe your intended audience as specifically as you can:

- State or imply the purpose in the title.
- Add a table of contents if material is 4 pages or longer.
- State or imply the audience in the title.
- Match visuals to the audience's physical appearance and life experience.
- Test your material with 3-5 people in your audience to see if it meets their needs.

Structure

Structure your material so readers can easily find what they need.

- Place the content in this order:
 - Most important information first – the core message or what patients **need** to know to take action
 - Supporting info second
 - Background info last – history or data

- Include only “need to know” not “nice to know” information, such as prevalence data.
- Stick to 1 main message supported by 3-5 points that tie directly to your purpose. Write short sentences (15 words or fewer) and paragraphs (3-5 sentences).
- Delete extra words that muddy sentences, such as “Please be advised...”
- Place related items together – make sure the same point doesn't appear in multiple places (one exception is action steps, which are okay to summarize or repeat).
- Use headings that accurately represent the content that follows.
- Write headings that put the reader in an active role: “Ways to keep your heart healthy” instead of “Cardiovascular health.”

Content

- Make your words and numbers easier to understand by saying what you mean and nothing more.
- Replace jargon (complex words) with common words when possible.
- If you need to use a complex word that can't be replaced, define it in the text: “Foot doctor, called a podiatrist.”
- Write sentences in active voice so the subject performs the action: “The boy took his medicine” instead of “The medicine was taken by the boy.”
- Use a conversational style. Try 1st person questions in headings and 2nd person answers in the body text.
- Use consistent terms rather than varying them. If you choose “doctor,” stick with it throughout the material.

Behaviors

- Clearly tell your readers what you want them to do.
- Make the desired actions clear by highlighting and concretely explaining behaviors.
- If actions should be done in a certain order, put them in a numbered list.
- Engage readers with interactive elements such as a checklist, quiz, or a place where they can write notes

Design

- Make your material appealing and easy to read through clear layout and graphics.
- Make it easy to read:
 - Include 20%-30% white space
 - Break content into chunks
 - Make headings distinct from body copy with more space above than below through bolding or using a different font
 - Left-align the text
 - Use dark text on a light background
- Aim for a line length of 3-5 inches.
- Limit bulleted lists to 2-7 items.

Graphics

- Choose graphics that are highly related to the purpose and that describe action steps – consider picture-based instructions to describe a process.
- Use clear graphics:
 - Simple black and white line drawings
 - No distracting backgrounds
 - Explain through captions
- Use simple tables with around 3 rows and 3 columns.

Fonts

- Use clear fonts:
 - Sans serif
 - 12-point or larger
 - Use **bold** to highlight an important word or phrase
- Avoid ALL CAPS, underlining, *italics*, and novelty fonts

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2013). ***CDC Clear communication index: a tool for developing and assessing CDC public communication products***, <http://www.cdc.gov/ccindex/>

Doak, C., Doak, L., & Root, J. (1996). ***Teaching patients with low literacy skills*** (2nd ed.). Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott.