BUILDING BRIDGES | A Practical Communications Tool for Acknowledging Tough Questions and Building Trust

Since the start of the pandemic, what we've known about COVID-19 has continued to evolve, but all research points clearly to the benefits of vaccination, masking, and testing.

Public health communicators can play a vital role in saving lives and keeping people healthy by focusing on the most necessary, important, and factual information available.

Bridging Statements: Getting Back to the Core Message

Bridging is a tool that can help you answer questions in a way that corrects misinformation and conveys your most important fact-based messaging. Bridges are phrases that help you acknowledge the question, briefly respond, and then convey what you want people to know. Here are some examples of bridging statements:

This is an evolving issue, but what is clear right now is...

I'm hearing that question a lot, and what I want people to take away is...

I understand your concern, but what we do know is...

I understand that this has been challenging, but what it really comes back to is...

Core Messages about COVID-19 Prevention

The best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 is to get vaccinated and boosted when eligible. The vaccines are safe, free, widely available, and highly effective at preventing severe disease. Most of the hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19 are unvaccinated people.

In addition to getting vaccinated and boosted, we have additional tools to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as wearing a well-fitting mask in indoor public settings, staying home if you are sick, and getting tested if you have symptoms.

As we learn more about COVID-19 and its variants, we update our guidance accordingly. Basing our recommendations on the latest data and science is the best and safest way to respond to an evolving virus.

I've heard Omicron is mild, does that mean I can stop worrying about getting sick?

A: *This is an evolving issue, but what is clear right now is* that the highest level of protection comes from being fully vaccinated and boosted. What we know about the Omicron variant continues to evolve, but we're still seeing the virus cause severe disease and death, mostly in unvaccinated people. The best thing to do is get vaccinated and boosted if eligible, continue to wear masks, and stay home and get tested if you are feeling sick.

I know lots of people who are vaccinated and boosted, and they got COVID-19 anyway—do the vaccines even work?

A: *I'm hearing that question a lot, and what I want people to take away is,* YES, the vaccines work. While no vaccine provides 100% immunity, the COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in protecting you from becoming severely ill, ending up in the hospital, or dying from COVID-19—and getting a booster strengthens that protection further. Everyone should get vaccinated and boosted as a way to protect the health of all in our community.

First public health officials said no masks, then cloth masks, then double up on masks—and now respirators? It's clear that masks don't work so why should I bother?

A: *I understand your concern, but what we do know is* that wearing masks, especially well-fitting masks in indoor public settings, has been proven to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The guidance on masks has changed because the virus has changed. The Omicron variant is even more infectious than earlier variants, so the CDC now recommends using a more protective mask. In areas where transmission is substantial, everyone, regardless of vaccination status, should continue to wear a mask to stay healthy and help prevent the spread of the virus.

I'm tired of taking precautions against COVID-19—isn't it time we move on and go back to our normal lives?

A: *I understand that this has been challenging, but what it really comes back to is* that as we move past the spread of this disease, we must continue to take precautions like vaccination, mask wearing and testing to keep ourselves and others safe and healthy.

Public Health Communications COLLABORATIVE