# Topic 6.9: Trusted Messengers, the Media, and the Pandemic

By the summer of 2021, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by people and state governments had produced two starkly different Americas: One with high rates of vaccinations and low rates of infections; the other with low rates of vaccinations and high and rising rates of infections, especially from the new Delta Variant and its variant, Delta Plus.

While two-thirds of adults in west coast and northeastern states had been vaccinated by July 2021, in other locations, particularly in the south, less than half the population had received even one dose of the vaccine.
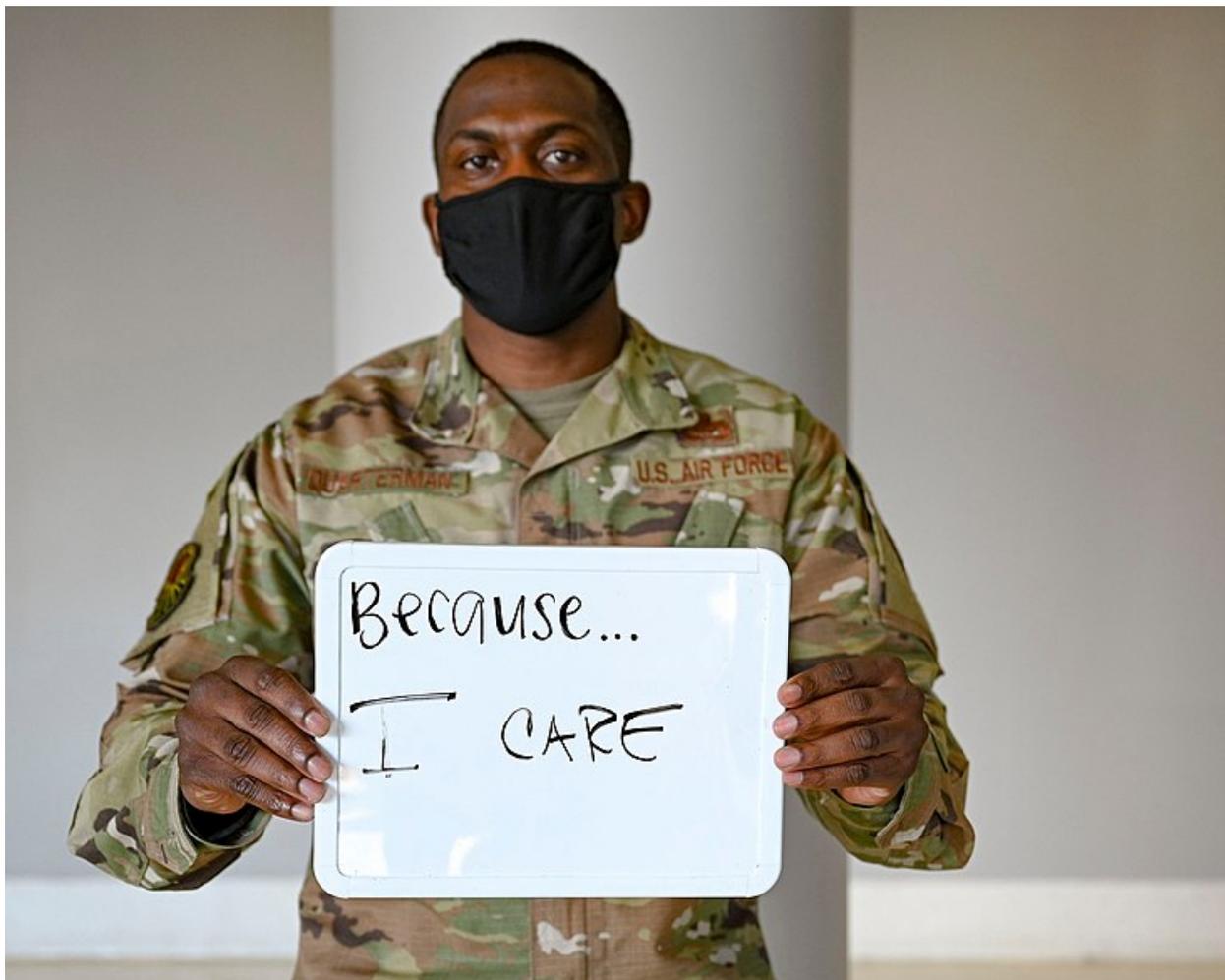
MSgt Joseph Quarterman shares why he is getting a COVID-19 vaccine | Public Domain

By August 2021, 99.2% of all U.S. COVID-19 deaths were among unvaccinated people. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called it "a pandemic of the unvaccinated" ([Andone & Holcombe, 2021, para. 2](#)).

Vaccination for COVID-19 is a complex problem in U.S. democracy. Many people believe it is a personal choice whether or not to get vaccinated. While governments and businesses can issue **vaccine mandates** to protect public health and to establish safe workplaces for workers and customers, a mandate is not the same as forcing someone to be vaccinated. No government - local, state, or federal - can force a person to be vaccinated; the police cannot arrest someone who is not vaccinated and then make them get the vaccine.

Instead, businesses, governments, and organizations can prevent an unvaccinated individual from using their services or working for them. For example, an unvaccinated student cannot attend the University of Massachusetts Amherst or some 600 other colleges starting fall 2021. Similarly, an unvaccinated person may not be able to board a cruise ship or continue to work in a hospital. However, every organization issuing a vaccine mandate must allow for medical or religious exemptions.

⟲ **Joe Biden Retweeted**

President Biden ✓ @POTUS · Jul 14   · · ·
⚑ United States government official

Thanks for stopping by, Olivia, and for using your voice to urge young people to get vaccinated. If we all do our part and get the COVID-19 vaccine, we can defeat this virus once and for all. Let's do this.

💬 5.4K   ⟲ 18.3K   ♡ 182K   ⬆

Tweet from @POTUS account

Since the power of governments to compel vaccination is limited, public health officials, including Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the chief

medical advisor to the President, began emphasizing **trusted messengers** as a way to combat the spread of COVID-19 by increasing vaccinations among unvaccinated groups. A trusted media messenger is a person or organization that people respect, believe, and will follow its recommendations. In July, the 18-year-old actress and singer Olivia Rodrigo joined the President to urge young people (at the time only 42% of those 18 to 24 were fully vaccinated) to get their shots.

People do listen to someone they trust, including family members, friends, local community leaders, pastors or priests, celebrities, doctors, and even television or radio personalities. But there is no single source of trusted information about the virus and vaccinations whose advice most people will follow.

Who are your trusted messengers about the pandemic?

In this activity, you will examine the media messages of different individuals and organizations in your school and community to assess how they are seeking to influence people's thinking and behaviors. Then, you will propose ways to deliver trusted messages to young people.

Activity 1: Analyze Pandemic Media Messengers in Your Community

- Conduct an online survey of classmates and peers in your school about their trusted media messengers. Who do they listen to on social media, television, and the radio? Who do they trust for information about the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Select two of these media messengers to analyze.
    - What strategies do they use to influence readers and viewers?
    - What language do they use?
    - How do they captivate attention?
    - Who is their audience? How do you know this?
    - How effective do you think their approaches are? Why?
- **Design [an interactive graphic organizer](#)** to showcase your findings.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Analyze Pandemic Media Messengers in Your Community](#) by Carly Erickson, Brady Buckman, & Emma Stankiewicz

Activity 2: Propose Ways to Deliver Trusted Messages to Young People

"In the COVID-19 pandemic vaccine push, no one is speaking Gen Z's language," [declared Nicholas Florko (2021)](#). Nationwide, perhaps as many as 25% of young people ages 18 to 24 are vaccine reluctant. What media strategies might help them change their minds?

- Rate the potential effectiveness of the following youth-centered messaging ideas:
    - Text messaging alerts
    - Vaccine messages at concerts

- TikTok videos
- Pinterest boards filled with credible resources
- Ask Me Anything discussion on Reddit
- Messages from Instagram influencers
- Interactive infographics
- Snapchat stories
- Free swag (e.g., shirts, hats, pens, bags)
- Posters placed around school and at restaurants where young people hangout
- Promotions (e.g., free month of Spotify, virtual hangout with Taylor Swift) or coupons (e.g., free pizza)
- Community competition (e.g., competing against a neighboring town/neighborhood for most vaccinations)
- Then, **design a trusted messenger strategy** that would convince teens to get the COVID-19 vaccine.
  - Who are the trusted messengers for your approach?
  - Why will your proposed approach reach young people?

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Rate the Potential Effectiveness of the Following Youth-Centered Messaging Ideas](#) by Carly Erickson, Brady Buckman, & Emma Stankiewicz

Additional Resources

- [Local 'Trusted Messengers' Key To Boosting COVID Vaccinations, Surgeon General Says](#)
- [UNCOVER: COVID-19, Vaccinations, Face Masks, and *Jacobson v. Massachusetts* (1905)](#)

Connecting to the eBook

[Building Democracy for All: COVID-19 Vaccinations, Face Masks, and the Jacobson v. Massachusetts (1905) Court Case](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
  - *Contrast the responsibilities of government at the federal, state and local levels.* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) **[8.T6.7]**
- [ISTE Standards](#)
  - Knowledge Constructor
    - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
    - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.
    - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
  - Creative Communicator
    - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
    - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
    - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
  - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
  - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
  - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
  - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8
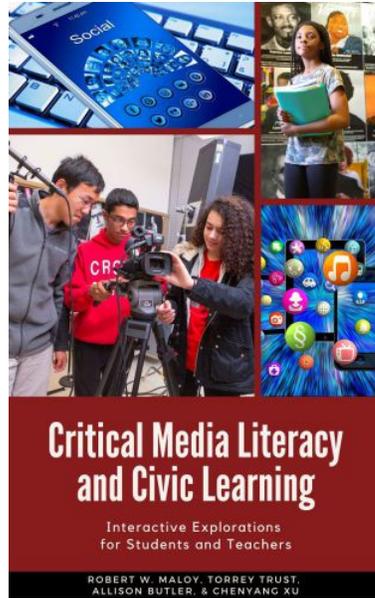
Maloy, R. W., Trust, T., , & Xu, C. (2021). *Critical Media Literacy and Civic Learning*. Equity Press. https://equitypress.org/mediaandciviclearning