

CONFRONTING HEALTH MISINFORMATION IN A COVID-19 WORLD

As trusted health care counselors and America's primary eye health care providers, American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are in a unique position to provide accurate and meaningful information to patients. With the continued spike in COVID-19 cases due to the Delta variant and the stall in vaccinations, the U.S. Surgeon General called on doctors of optometry and all health care providers to proactively educate Americans about how to access and identify accurate information and work with their providers to make informed health care decisions.

To support this effort and help patients in your communities, following are some recommendations on engaging your patients in a discussion regarding their health, identifying accurate health information and making informed health decisions regarding COVID-19, vaccination and other health care needs.

HOW DOCTORS OF OPTOMETRY CAN TAKE ACTION



Proactively engage with patients and the public on factual health information. Take the time to understand each patient's knowledge, beliefs, and values. Listen with empathy, and when possible, correct misinformation in personalized ways.

When addressing health concerns, consider using less technical language that is accessible to all patients. Find opportunities to promote patient health literacy on a regular basis.

Rather than expecting patients to raise concerns without prompting, health care providers can invite conversations about potential misinformation. For example, inviting patients to share what may be affecting their beliefs with an open-ended question (e.g., "What have you already heard or learned about the COVID-19 vaccine?") could open useful conversational space.



Promote accurate and evidence-based sources, including CDC information, with other doctors and paraoptometric staff in the office. Provide clear expectations for how teams communicate with patients. Some clear points that are important to

communicate are:

- [COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective.](#)
- [Every American age 12 and older is eligible to get a COVID-19 vaccination at no cost.](#)
- It is important to [revisit the CDC for the latest information and safety recommendations](#), including mask usage, as they are changing while the rates of infection and vaccination fluctuate. [In July 2021, the CDC updated mask guidance](#) recommending vaccinated adults wear masks in certain indoor environments.



Partner with community groups and other local organizations to prevent and address health misinformation. Reach out and connect with community members

to develop localized public health messages in ways that account for patients' diverse needs, concerns, backgrounds, and experiences.



Use technology and media platforms to share accurate health information with the public.

Empower patients with referrals to sources of evidence-based

health information to meet their individual needs for self-education. Patient educational materials should include information about trusted resources, such as medical studies, departments of public health, respected medical organizations, articles, and/or peer-reviewed papers to help counter misinformation.

- There are several organizations providing research-based guidance, including:
 - [CDC's vaccines safety site](#)
 - [The Immunization Action Coalition FAQ](#)
 - [University of California San Francisco's Evaluating Health Information](#)

For additional background, visit [SurgeonGeneral.gov](https://www.surgeongeneral.gov).

