

Oral Health Public Messaging Campaign: Key Elements

(from the July 8 meeting of the Oral Health Pandemic Response Workgroup)

WHO to target with messaging

- We should target those who are looking for assurance, and offer them assure that it is significantly safer to return to the dental office but be sure the assurance provided is accurate.
- This is a transformational time in many ways and provides us with an opportunity to aim the campaign to those most traditionally underserved within the oral health system, those who are more marginalized now due to COVID. Focus on this from the start.
- Focus on moms – mom-to-mom messaging can be an effective option.
- Dental teams are not sure about best practices for their own protection. The need for communication among providers themselves is also critical.

WHAT to include in the messaging

- Include the scientific piece that addresses how important oral health is to overall health – especially during the pandemic.
- Offer assurance that it is significantly safer to return to the dental office but be sure the assurance provided is accurate.
- Attend to literacy levels and languages.
- Define the subject of the message clearly. Are we talking about rules? Recommendations?
- Are we looking to provide statements that make people feel comfortable going to the dentist? Instill confidence, relieve fear.
- It's a complex message for high-risk folks – safety issues are complex for those most at risk. Emphasize what prevention looks like (healthy mouth, healthy body). Ease them back into care. Include messaging about at-home preventative care and tele-health options.
- Attend to the multi-generational aspects of messaging.
- Emphasize oral health as part of overall health, oral health as being at the forefront of infection control, and how oral health for those with chronic disease is particularly an issue impacting communities of color.
- Use high-level statistics to drive behavioral change.
- Start with the message that oral health care should not be put off as part of overall health. And follow that up with messaging that is not focused on assurances that accessing oral health care is safe, but rather with information about what oral health providers could and should be doing to make it safe so that consumers can make that determination themselves.
- Share the alternatives that dentists use that don't involve using a drill.
- Patient protocol is important, and proper pre-screening of patients is also critical. Emphasize personal responsibility and safety with proper pre-screening for patients.

HOW to implement the messaging, methods to use

- Create a checklist for dental offices that consumers can use to confirm that dental offices have done all they can to ensure patient safety.
- Attend to literacy levels and languages.
- Provide local inserts from trusted messengers.
- Use PSAs. Cable TV providers are required by law to provide PSAs. We can use PSAs to create a nationwide campaign that will not cost us money. They can be customized to the ethnic service provider in each area.
- Reach out to non-dental providers to share the messaging, as well.
- Focus on who is delivering the message. We all know what it's like to be considered an expert. We should all share information with our members so they can share it within their networks of colleagues, family, and friends.
- There are surveys that indicate a range of feelings on the part of the public about how safe they feel about returning to the dental office. A reliable survey is needed.

How members of this group might help

- Consider how we communicate with each different community. We each have different communities within our own stakeholder groups and those groups themselves can tell us what works best. Focus on how each receives information.
- Hazel was involved with HIV/AIDS universal precautions – this could be helpful to us now.
- Leverage group members as spokespersons
- Amplify one another's messaging
- Highlight oral health providers as frontline healthcare workers