

# Best practices for reporting on vaccines

*Takeaways from [Covering vaccines: Understand the science, be thoughtful about framing](#)*

**In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in vaccine policy, vaccines have become a recurring element of nearly every beat. Reporters who may not specialize in health or science are increasingly being asked to cover vaccine-related stories. Here are four things to keep in mind when covering stories involving vaccine policy or people making personal decisions about vaccination.**

## Avoid false balance.

Don't give disproportional weight to fringe beliefs:

- Ask sources about conclusions that may differ from their own and follow up to determine whether those views are widely held.
- Ask experts who the mainstream voices are, and about their perceptions of scientific consensus on the issue.
- If fringe views are included in a story be sure to characterize them as such, with a critical eye to what, if any, research the view is based on and how that research was formulated and reviewed by peers.

## Include a variety of sources and elevate non-scientist voices.

To reach skeptical audiences, think beyond interviews with experts to also include:

- People whom skeptics might find credible (e.g., members of their political party or religious leaders)
- Individual, non-expert members of the public
- Former skeptics who have changed their viewpoints. Often these individuals are highly trusted by those who are skeptical of vaccines

## Watch out for unintentional viewpoint signals.

Avoid alienating readers who might otherwise find your story compelling:

- Frame stories about people making personal choices about vaccination as vaccine deliberation, not vaccine hesitancy, or anti-vaxx behavior.
- Stay away from inflammatory language (e.g., harsh criticism of unvaccinated individuals or characterization of entire religious or cultural groups as anti-vaxx) and cover vaccine deliberation with empathy for individuals' fear and concerns.
- Ensure the visuals accompanying your story reinforce the story's core message. An image of children looking scared to get a shot conveys a different message than people happily queueing to get vaccinated.

## Consult expert sources.

To get the details of a vaccine-related story right, reach out to a scientist with relevant expertise. Here are some helpful resources and tips on [identifying scientific experts](#):

- Notable researchers with expertise in vaccines and public trust: [David Higgins](#), [Peter Hotez](#), [Matt Motta](#), [Greg Poland](#), [Kawsar R. Talaat](#)
- [SciLine's expert matching service](#)
- World Health Organization experts on global vaccination
- Press offices at your local medical schools or schools of public health
- Academic centers such as:
  - ▶ [Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health](#), University of Maryland
  - ▶ [Vaccine Education Center](#), Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
  - ▶ [Vaccine Integrity Project](#), CIDRAP, University of Minnesota

- ▶ Further reading: [More tips on combating false vaccine information and covering vaccing policy](#).