

5

Pitching the Media

“Pitching” the Media

Getting reporters and the local media interested in influenza vaccination and NIVW is an important part of increasing public awareness about seasonal flu and the importance of vaccination. Remember that you have a compelling story to tell—one that affects the health and well-being of the entire community. If you develop a strong relationship with a reporter, you will become a resource for influenza-related issues when that reporter does a related story in the future.

There are several ways to pitch the media to cover your issue. Depending on the type of media, you can “pitch” (request) articles, PSAs, calendar items on NIVW, letters to the editor, or op-eds. Your “pitch” can focus on a vaccination drive, drive-through clinic, or other community event.

Timing is important. When sending out information prior to your event, do not send it too early, or it may be discarded or “filed.” On the other hand, do not send information so late that it becomes “old news.” Consider whether the publication is daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly. For daily papers, send information 4-5 days prior. For weekly publications, send information 8-10 days in advance. Contact monthly or quarterly publications to find out their deadlines.

Be Respectful and Prepared

Be cognizant that reporters get hundreds of phone calls, emails, faxes and requests each day which compete for their time and coverage. Remember a few helpful tips when reaching out to the media.

- Contact the news desk to find out about specific deadlines before making your pitch.
- Provide the right information to the right reporters; know their topic areas.
- Ask the reporter or editor how he or she likes to receive information (i.e., by email or fax).
- If a reporter doesn’t call you back right away, don’t take it personally.
- Be responsive if a reporter calls you for information.
- Provide information in the appropriate formats. If it’s a print publication, provide documents. For TV, provide a visual. If it’s radio, provide an interview.
- Don’t offer a spokesperson unless you have one ready and prepared.
- Be prepared with information about the issue and/or event(s).
- Thank the media when they cover your story.

Be Creative

Being creative with your story will help your news stand out from competing news. Below are some helpful tips to help your news stand out.

- Provide a unique angle with supporting data (e.g., the number of local people who remain unvaccinated each year and why, the importance of employers encouraging their workers to get vaccinated to reduce absenteeism, common myths, etc.).
- Tie NIVW activities and your messages to a larger local story.
- Events, such as health fairs or clinics, are good topics for local media because they are visual, and provide opportunities for interviews.
- If one reporter says “no,” move on to the next. A medical/science reporter may not be interested in covering your event, but a lifestyle reporter or community affairs reporter might want to. A political reporter may be interested in covering your activities as an example of government in action, and an education reporter might want to focus on the importance of vaccinating school-age children.
- Be quotable to bring your story to life.
- Write a compelling or provocative subject line to grab a journalist’s attention. Keep in mind that the subject line is the first thing reporters and editors see.

Conclusion

Now that you have the tools, you can begin to develop your own media outreach plans in support of the CDC's Influenza Awareness Campaign. The templates and ideas presented here are designed to be adaptable for your individual organization's use. Use these media components wisely so that they well represent your organization, promote the goals of this campaign in a compelling way, and help build visibility for your individual activities.

Additional resources for your use are listed in Appendix I.