

Lessons Learned

Stop HPV – get vaccinated

A Danish information campaign that aimed to rebuild trust in HPV vaccination and increase vaccination coverage by focusing on cancer prevention and engaging in a dialogue with mothers.



Background

In May 2017, the Danish Health Authority, the Danish Cancer Society, and the Danish Medical Association launched the information campaign "Stop HPV - Stop Cervical Cancer" (later renamed "Stop HPV - Get Vaccinated" as boys were also recommended HPV vaccination). This initiative aimed to disseminate nuanced and evidence-based information about HPV vaccination and increase vaccination rates, which had significantly declined due to negative media coverage and subsequent widespread parental concerns about side effects.

Since the launch of the information campaign, there has been a substantial increase in the number of girls being HPV vaccinated each year. Since boys were included in the HPV vaccination programme in 2019, the uptake among boys has also been high. Today the vaccine uptake is almost 90 % for both girls and boys.

The information campaign has played a crucial role in increasing trust and uptake of HPV vaccination. The foundation of the campaign was a well-developed and thoroughly tested communication strategy, focusing on communication and dialogue with hesitant parents.

When building a strong information campaign, it is always important to consider whether other important partners that the parents trust share your agenda. A strong partnership with aligned messages can improve your impact in the media, among parents and other stakeholders.

In this document, lessons learned from the information campaign are described for future inspiration.

Drawing up a communication strategy and designing your campaign

Before designing an information campaign in terms of look, style, content, main messages etc. it is extremely valuable to allocate resources for a thorough analysis of who to target, which channels to use, what information to provide to them and which tone and style to use.

Often, using different methods and a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods is probably most valuable depending on time, resources, etc.

Focus groups help you get more in-depth knowledge about your target group's knowledge and attitudes

and give you insights into the factors that influence parents' decision-making concerning HPV vaccination. Surveys can quantify your qualitative findings and tell you how common and widespread they are in the population.

Examples of valuable insights gained from pre-campaign analysis in Denmark:

- Mothers were the primary decision-makers concerning HPV vaccination of daughters.
- Mothers of girls around 12 (which is the recommended age of HPV vaccination) were very active on social media.
- Parents who were hesitant toward HPV vaccination had lower levels of knowledge than parents whose daughters were vaccinated, e.g. about the effectiveness of HPV vaccination and the possible side effects.
- Mothers had great confidence in their general practitioner guidance on HPV vaccination.
- Identification of messages with high impact on the target group in terms of responding to their worries and doubts.

Based on the findings in the analysis, we targeted the information campaign at hesitant mothers and chose Facebook as the primary platform. This allowed us to enter an open dialogue with mothers who were hesitant and had questions. Our hope was to reduce their hesitancy by understanding and acknowledging them and answering their questions.

We found it important to be:

- *transparent* in the communication of our recommendations and how we reached the conclusion that HPV vaccination is safe and effective
- *accessible* and willing to answer questions from parents, media and critics
- *humble* and accept that not everyone agree.

Mother's main worry was about vaccine safety. Therefore, a proactive press effort was necessary prior to launching the campaign. We decided to re-focus the overall narrative on the important purpose of the HPV vaccination program: to prevent cervical cancer among women.

We specifically chose not to solely communicate numbers and statistics but to communicate to both the heart and the brain by sharing personal stories. Women and their relatives told their stories about life with cervical cancer. We followed up with facts about the incidence of HPV infection in the population, how you get infected with HPV, and the risk of side effects vs. the risk of cervical cancer.

A network of stakeholders can support your campaign

Early in the planning process of the information campaign, we identified stakeholders who supported the official recommendation of HPV vaccination and invited them to join a network. This gave the campaign credibility and helped disseminate the main message that HPV vaccination is safe and effective.

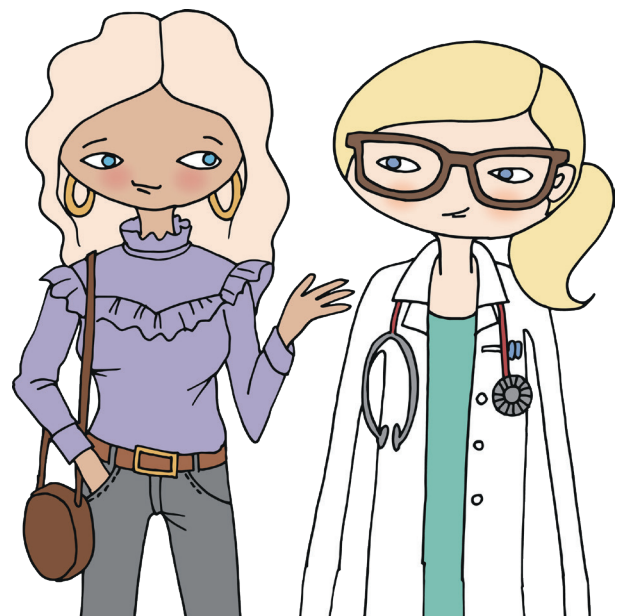
Stakeholders were for instance medical associations, NGOs, and patient associations. Their logos appeared on campaign materials and members of the network distributed the campaign messages on their respective websites and other platforms.

Examples of how to involve and interact with your network:

- Invite stakeholders for meetings to receive feedback on campaign material.
- Ask members for advice, e.g. what kind of materials would be useful for them, what specific information and answers are needed in the material for them to feel prepared for dialogues with both hesitant parents and media.
- Send out frequent newsletters with updates of new campaign materials, vaccination coverages and other information relevant to them that motivate them to continue involvement in the information campaign.

5 tips about planning and carrying out your campaign:

1. Learn as much as possible about the target group and design your information campaign based on the findings. Remember to evaluate the design with feedback from the target group.
2. Also based on your findings, create a list of key messages that impact your target group and are important for you to keep repeating as part of the campaign.
3. Involve relevant stakeholders early in the process to get valuable inputs from the very start on the design of your information campaign, messages and to help disseminate both.
4. Learn how and where your target group seek information. Be diverse in relation to how and what you communicate, the channels you choose to communicate your messages and use both personal stories and hardcore facts to supplement each other.
5. Define and monitor key point indicators, e.g. hesitancy and knowledge among parents, to help you evaluate your campaign effort.



Using social media: Facebook

A comprehensive social media strategy using 'heart-brain communication' proved useful in the Danish campaign for HPV vaccination. The main strategy was to bring back focus on preventing HPV related cancer and putting faces on the statistics. A social media strategy requires careful planning prior to the launch of the campaign. Allocating sufficient resources for community management and experienced staff in content analysis is essential as well as using evaluation results to guide the creation of new content. Personal stories are effective in creating positive dialogues on Facebook. However, it also remains important to provide fact-based information to parents to enable information decision making about HPV vaccination.

Solely using scientific evidence in your argumentation and one-way communication is not enough when helping parents to make an informed decision. Using Facebook as the main platform in the information campaign was valuable in terms of creating dialogues with parents who were hesitant towards HPV vaccination.

On Facebook, the Danish campaign created a space for parents to get in touch with the Danish health authorities in an easy way, ask questions and clear up potential misunderstandings about HPV vaccination. The parents were very concerned and the Facebook community greeted them with understanding, curiosity and personal answers. Content with personal stories counterbalanced the negative stories about side effects^{1,2}.

5 tips about communication about HPV vaccination on Facebook:

1. Get to know your target group and prepare answers in advance for the most frequently asked questions.
2. Make community management guidelines e.g.:
 - Adapt language to social media. Factual, evidence based answers delivered with humor, acknowledgement, love, appreciation and use of emojis.
 - Use personalized answers. Avoid copy-paste.
 - Not all comments need to be answered. If another user supports your key messages and answer with correct and relevant information, it can be more trustworthy than answers from the community manager.
3. Allocate resources for community management. In the Danish campaign every day a student spend four hours monitoring the Facebook-page from 9 AM to 9 PM. The team of 3 to 5 students were studying either in the field of communications or health studies and was trained in facts about HPV as well as community management. Every day a more experienced employer was on call if the students needed guidance.
4. Use a mix of personal stories and scientific content (heart-brain communication).
5. Be curious and personal in the answers and remember that you are not only answering the one questioner but everybody else reading the thread. Mindful focus on the silent reader help to answer very critical questions or rude comments.

¹ Loft, L. H., E. A. Pedersen, S. U. Jacobsen, B. Soborg, and J. Bigaard. Using Facebook to Increase Coverage of HPV Vaccination among Danish Girls: An Assessment of a Danish Social Media Campaign. *Vaccine*, 2020. DOI: 10.1016/j.vaccine.2020.04.032

² Pedersen, E. A., L. H. Loft, S. U. Jacobsen, B. Søborg, and J. Bigaard. Strategic Health Communication on Social Media: Insights from a Danish Social Media Campaign to Address HPV Vaccination Hesitancy. *Vaccine*, 2020. DOI: 10.1016/j.vaccine.2020.05.061

Examples of content on the 'Stop HPV - get vaccinated' Facebook page

A 27-year old woman diagnosed with cervical cancer tells about the consequences of her treatment including that she is unable to conceive.



A mother tells why her son is HPV vaccinated. She has had cervical cancer and encourages other parents to get their children HPV vaccinated and hopefully avoid disease.



"Did you know that every third parent does not know that HPV vaccination is free of charge for boys?"

Press

The information campaign used the press proactivity when hesitancy towards the health authorities' recommendations arose among citizens or when media stories in general became one-sided and biased.

Working actively with the press and collaborating with the media contributed to changing the narrative about HPV vaccination. Press releases throughout the campaign period ensured that parents got new scientific results and correct information about the present evidence of side-effects after HPV vaccination in both national and local media (press, web, television and radio). News articles provided more in-depth information and created identification and emotions through personal stories from other parents who have chosen to HPV vaccinate their children or from women with cervical cancer.

5 tips about working with the press:

1. Proactively suggest stories to relevant media and prepare experts who have already agreed to be spokespeople.
2. Think broadly in terms of which media might be relevant for your stories and messages. Help these media come up with angles that are specific for their target groups.
3. Have a list of persons who are ready to be cited in articles, e.g. women with cervical cancer or parents who decided to vaccinate their children. It will ease the job of writing a story for journalists.
4. Invite journalists to a meeting/workshop on how to read and convey scientific literature and how to be critical.
5. Actively disseminate positive stories about rising vaccination coverage, the effects of vaccination or other facts related to your subject.

Examples of press releases in the Danish campaign

- "More girls are getting vaccinated against HPV"
- "40.000 girls got vaccinated against HPV in 2018"
- "HPV vaccination are now free of charge for boys"
- "26 year old Louise got cervical cancer and recommends HPV vaccination"



Local anchoring of the campaign

Activating volunteers is one way to address HPV vaccination hesitancy in the local communities. Local anchoring through involvement of volunteers from the Danish Cancer Society (DCS) made national campaign activities possible and contributed to spread the campaign messages further into the local communities. The DCS are privileged to work together with hundreds of volunteers organized in local units in the 98 municipalities in Denmark. Volunteers know their local community and are able to provide local activities enabling face-to-face dialogues about HPV vaccination to support parents in making an informed decision about the vaccination.

Local activities are a good way to work with inequality in vaccination coverage because it can be carried out in areas with low vaccination coverage. The local insights of volunteers help to reach people that may otherwise be difficult to reach with other communication strategies. For example, volunteers can reach out to people of ethnic minority groups where vaccination coverage tend to be lower.

Volunteers often have high credibility through their personal commitment in their local communities and great skills in empathic communication. This empowers dialogues about HPV vaccination with hesitant parents. Face-to-face dialogues are effective in addressing vaccine hesitancy because they provide an understanding of the target group's concerns and help build up trust in vaccination^{3,4}.

³ Jarrett C., Wilson R., O'Leary M., Eckersberger E., and Larson H.J., Strategies for addressing vaccine hesitancy - A systematic review. *Vaccine*, 2015. 33(34): p. 4180-90. DOI: 10.1016/j.vaccine.2015.04.040.

⁴ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Communication on immunisation - building trust. 2012, ECDC.

Examples of local activities:

- Local information meetings for parents with a medical doctor that presents facts about HPV vaccination and leaving room for parents to pose questions directly.
- Information stands at pharmacies where volunteers distribute information material about HPV vaccination to initiate dialogues with the customers.
- Available and visible information material about HPV vaccination in pharmacies, general practices, schools or other relevant cooperators.
- Information activities at local events e.g. small festivals, markets, etc.
- Local press can be used to present personal stories from the community combined with campaign messages about HPV vaccination.

5 tips about local anchoring:

1. Be present with information materials about HPV vaccination where the target group is.
2. Be available for face-to-face dialogues to support parents in making informed decisions about HPV vaccination.
3. Use community partnerships e.g. pharmacies, local NGOs, schools, etc. to create spaces for face-to-face dialogues.
4. Develop easy read information materials as pamphlets about HPV vaccination for distribution among the target group.
5. Develop a Q&A with the most common questions on HPV vaccination to make sure volunteers or others non-experts feel prepared to meet the target group.



BLIV VACCINERET