

Insights and Analysis:

As COVID-19 vaccines became widely available in Summer 2021, St. Jude safeguarded its campus through a vaccination requirement for employees. Most employees were vaccinated, but nearly 20% of employees had yet to get vaccinated. The hospital faced the challenge of educating staff members who were understandably uncertain and fearful of the vaccine’s benefits. Leading up to the mandate deadline, the St. Jude communications team partnered with hospital experts in infectious diseases, epidemiology, virology, patient safety, pharmaceutical sciences, immunology, HR, and legal services to plan, develop and execute the Vaccines Bring Us Closer campaign. The team performed environment scanning and collected original, first-hand interview data that helped them identify 4 fundamental areas of vaccine hesitancy and misinformation.

- **Infertility and breastfeeding concerns**

Communications staff worked with clinicians and researchers on the hospital’s COVID-19 response team to learn that many female staff members who were currently pregnant or considering getting pregnant were hesitant about getting the vaccine. Concerns centered around the vaccine’s spike protein preventing embryo implantation or early pregnancy development and concerns about antibodies being transferred through breastmilk.

- **Side effects concerns**

Staff received concerns about side effects through the hospital’s COVID-19 employee questions account—Ask St. Jude. Many employees also shared concerns via conversations with staff members across the institution. They worried about rare side effects such as allergic reactions, inflammation of the heart (myocarditis) and blood clots.

- **Concerns about vaccine production**

Employees echoed the sentiments of vaccine-hesitant individuals nationwide through concerns that the vaccine had been rushed into production and had not gone through the proper trials and safety measures. Our scientific communications team developed an outline of the decades-long production process of mRNA vaccines that served as the basis for story content and accompanying graphics to combat this misinformation.

- **The benefits of vaccination versus natural immunity**

Through conversations with staff members and inquiries to the Ask St. Jude email inbox, we learned that many employees had questions about the debate between natural immunity from COVID-19 versus getting the COVID-19 vaccine. Our communications team of science writers and department communicators created graphics and content that illustrated why COVID-19 vaccination was preferable to contracting the virus.

Planning:

Objectives (to be completed between July 15 and September 9)

- To achieve 97% employee vaccination adherence by mandate deadline (level of achievement: minimum 96%, average 98%, maximum 100%)
- To publish at least 15 pieces of COVID-19 vaccination-related content targeting unvaccinated employees
- To obtain at least 2,000 pageviews on vaccination-related content among employees
- To increase the number of employee conversations with infectious disease experts surrounding vaccine hesitancy as recorded through in-person vaccine event Q&As

Audiences (rank ordered)

1. Unvaccinated employees
2. Employees who have unvaccinated family members

Key Messaging

- Vaccines are safe for pregnancy/fertility/breastfeeding
- Get vaccinated to protect St. Jude patients
- Vaccines reduce risk of hospitalization or death with COVID-19
- Vaccines are safe and effective

Strategic Components

- **Empowering Employees.** Create an environment where employees were encouraged to ask questions and share concerns to increase the likelihood of attitudinal change.

- **Reach Employees Directly and Indirectly.** Meet employees where they are with messaging relevant to them.
- **Confront Misinformation Head On.** Understand what employees are hearing and provide real, scientifically proven information in order to achieve needed attitudinal and behavioral changes.

Execution:

The St. Jude communications team produced education materials that included 9 articles, 7 video testimonials, 7 digital flyers, numerous internal messages, and advertisements for a series of employee vaccination events.

--**Article series:** Using insights gleaned from research and working with St. Jude SMEs, a team of 8 staff writers drafted 9 articles featured in the employee newsletter, which included employees covering the 4 main topics that concerned employees regarding receiving the COVID-19 vaccination. Articles were featured on the intranet's home page each day, shared on the employee app and via Yammer.

--**Video testimonials:** St. Jude writers, videographers and a media producer worked with clinical and operations staff to identify employees willing to share testimonials about why they received the COVID-19 vaccine. Seven employees shared their stories—including pregnant employees, an employee who got the vaccine after losing her father to COVID-19 and an employee who chose to get the vaccine after a COVID-19 diagnosis.

--**Digital flyers:** The team designed 7 flyers featuring employees and their families to illustrate their reasons for vaccination. The flyers were displayed throughout campus on digital signage to reach non-deskbound employees.

--**Graphics:** The team created a series of graphics that included: mRNA vaccination timeline history, the science behind how COVID-19 vaccines work and an illustration of the rising number of COVID-19 cases in Shelby County, Tennessee, due to the Delta variant.

--**Additional internal messages:** Tactics used to educate employees about the safety and efficiency of the vaccines included email announcements, informational handouts and letters at swabbing stations, Yammer posts, memos from the hospital's president and CEO, and pop-up banners that highlighted the vaccination events.

--**FAQs:** The team built an FAQ library on the hospital's existing COVID-19 intranet pages. This included questions informing employees about the safety and efficiency of the vaccines and the vaccine approval process.

--**Digital toolkit for managers:** Communications staff partnered with HR to identify managers/supervisors of non-deskbound employees. Targeted emails were crafted encouraging managers to access a digital vaccination guide. The guide included a checklist, policy information, ways to discuss the importance of vaccination, how to access educational information and how to address vaccine concerns and myths.

--**Barrier Busters:** The team crafted 100-word Barrier Buster educational announcements that ran in the hospital's daily employee informational email—St. Jude Today. Topics included vaccine production, vaccine safety, side effect concerns, immunity versus infection and infertility.

--**Vaccination events:** The communications team worked with experts to provide communications support for 3 employee vaccination events in August 2021. The events allowed employees to choose their vaccine, featured snacks and giveaways, and allowed individuals to ask questions and talk with infectious diseases experts.

Evaluation and Results

Vaccination numbers: Between July 15 and September 9, more than 18% of employees were vaccinated with over 13% of those vaccinations occurring during the month of August, the peak period for the campaign. Over 98% of full-time employees were vaccinated and 1% received an exemption by the hospital's deadline date.

Internal metrics: The 9 articles received more than 3,000 employee page views. The average time on site for each story was over 3 minutes. The article titled "COVID-19 vaccines safe for those worried about fertility, pregnancy and breastfeeding" had more than 1,000 views and ranked internally as the 7th most read article in 2021. The 7 video testimonials had more than 500 combined views on the intranet and Yammer platforms.