

Syllabus - Covering the COVID-19 vaccine: What journalists need to know

In this four-week course, attendees will review how vaccines were achieved against Covid-19, examine the efficacy of the different vaccine formulas, analyze plans for distributing the vaccines, and investigate the complexity of overcoming both vaccine hesitancy and mis- and disinformation. Participants will learn from scientific experts, other journalists, and staff from international agencies such as the World Health Organization regarding key things to know to begin or continue covering the vaccine campaign, and will come away with an extensive menu of tips and recommendations for doing their own stories, no matter their experience or beats. The course will provide journalists with tools to dispel disinformation, misinformation and myths created around the COVID-19 vaccines.

Who is this course for?

After a year, the COVID-19 pandemic remains the biggest story in the world; it contains every beat in the newsroom. Thus this course should appeal to journalists with a wide array of experience, from science and medical journalists accustomed to covering infectious diseases to generalists for whom clinical trials and vaccine production and distribution are new territory.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, attendees should be able to:

- Integrate knowledge from many sources to understand the achievement of COVID-19 vaccines;
- Evaluate data from the vaccine clinical trials and understand claims of efficacy and effectiveness;
- Identify sources of data and information regarding plans for vaccine distribution internationally and in their home countries;
- Understand the perils of vaccine hesitancy and anti-vaccine advocacy and distinguish between them; and identify the rise of misinformation and disinformation around the COVID-19 vaccines;
- Design a plan for covering the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, applying the local context of their newsrooms and political systems;
- Participate in a worldwide community of journalists covering COVID-19 vaccination, in order to share insights and practical experience.

Tools/Applications Required

This course only requires you to have access to an Internet connection and a web browser.

How the course works

First of all, note that this is an asynchronous course. That means there are no live events scheduled at specific times. You can log in to the course and complete activities throughout the week at your own pace, at the times and on the days that are most convenient for you.

Despite its asynchronous nature, there are still structures in place for the duration of the course.

The material is organized into four weekly modules. Each module will be taught by renowned health and science journalist [Maryn McKenna](#), with help from assistant instructors in four languages: Federico Kukso in Spanish, André Biernath in Portuguese, and Yves Sciama in French. The course will cover different topics through instructional videos, video interviews with guest speakers, presentations, readings and discussion forums. There will be a quiz each week to test the knowledge you've gained through the course materials. The weekly quizzes, and weekly participation in the discussion forums, are the basic requirements for earning a certificate of participation at the end of the course.

This course is very flexible, and if you are behind with the materials, you have the entire length of the course to complete them. We do recommend you complete each of the following before the end of each week so you don't fall behind:

- Video lectures
- Readings and handouts/exercises
- Participation in the discussion forums
- Quizzes covering concepts from video lectures and/or readings

The course is divided into four weekly modules:

Introduction Module:

This module will provide an overview of the course and the topic, some initial readings, and includes this syllabus, a promo video and a welcome video explaining what students will learn week to week.

Module 1 - Vaccines are here: Now what?

This module will cover the different vaccines that have been licensed to date around the world, and the many candidate vaccines still in the pipeline, explaining how their underlying technologies differ. We will review clinical trial data and identify sources of information regarding the vaccines, and explain the different logistical challenges of delivering them.

Module 2 - When will vaccines arrive?

This module will examine how vaccine delivery has unfolded in the countries that have already begun vaccination, and will explore predictions for when other countries will receive their own vaccines. It will scrutinize the risk of “vaccine nationalism” and hoarding as well as explain international plans to ensure that developing-economy countries receive their fair share.

Module 3 - How can we trust the vaccines?

This module will distinguish between vaccine hesitancy and anti-vaccination activism and discuss the reasonable concerns of minority groups and nations who in the past have been victimized by unethical research practices. It will examine the rise of misinformation and weaponized disinformation against the vaccines and explore resources for debunking false claims and encouraging trust.

Module 4 - After vaccination, what is the future?

This module will examine predictions for how long it will take to achieve population immunity and to what degree societies will need to persist with masks and social distancing. It

will examine the risks of emerging viral variants and explore what ongoing response will be needed if SARS CoV-2 becomes an endemic infection.