

Getting to "YES" for Routine Vaccines

American Lung Association.

A Toolkit to Increase Vaccine Confidence for Rural Communities in Kentucky



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Getting to "YES" for Routine Vaccinations. It begins with leaders like you.

Rural communities are at increased risk for severe illness from infectious respiratory diseases like influenza, RSV and COVID-19. This is due to several factors such as high rates of chronic illness, less access to healthcare, low health literacy, lack of credible information and more. Yet rural communities are less likely to receive vaccinations to help protect against these diseases.

Infectious respiratory diseases are easily spread from person to person and can affect anyone. Some individuals are at higher risk for serious illness than others. Vaccinations help the body build immunity to a particular virus and are the most effective form of protection. A healthy individual may get sick from an infectious respiratory disease and experience only mild symptoms but can still spread these diseases to high-risk individuals. It is important that all individuals, not just those at high risk for serious illness, take steps to help prevent infectious respiratory diseases.

How to Use This Guide

This toolkit was developed with insight from healthcare organizations, health departments, rural health clinics, and other rural-serving organizations in south-central Kentucky to assist community leaders in addressing barriers to care.

Inside you will find recommendations, tips, guidelines, tools and resources to help you:

- Educate community members on their risk for infectious respiratory diseases like influenza, RSV and COVID-19.
- Make effective recommendations for infectious respiratory disease vaccinations.
- Examine common vaccination hesitancies impacting community members and combat misinformation.
- Have meaningful conversations about lung health, lung disease and the importance of vaccinations.
- Explore and address social determinants of health that pose barriers to care for rural community members.

Who Should Use This Guide

Healthcare organizations and community leaders play a crucial role as trusted messengers for rural community members and are essential in educating individuals in rural Kentucky about infectious respiratory diseases.

Linking Leaders with Trusted Messengers

Trusted messengers are individuals that community members depend on as a trusted source of accurate information and guidance. They offer unique opportunities to address health disparities among underserved populations and serve as a critical link between public health leaders and community leaders. Getting individuals in rural Kentucky to vaccinate requires the involvement of leaders, including:

Leaders across communities:

- Physicians
- Nurses
- · Allied health professionals
- Healthcare administrators/front desk
- Pharmacists
- Public health professionals
- Community outreach specialists/community health workers
- Patient advocates/patient navigators
- Medical directors

Rural community leaders:

- · School personnel
- Social workers
- Health educators
- Librarians
- Agricultural leaders
- First responders
- Faith leaders
- Senior center directors
- Food bank coordinators
- Community organization leaders





Introduction: Rural Health and Health Equity

Health Equity

Health equity is the opportunity for everyone to reach their full health potential, regardless of their social, economic or environmental circumstances.² Despite efforts to reduce and eliminate health disparities within underserved communities, they persist.

The American Lung Association prioritizes addressing health inequities in populations disproportionately impacted by lung disease, including rural communities. Infectious respiratory illnesses such as influenza, RSV and COVID-19 place a large burden on rural communities in Kentucky.

Why are rural communities in Kentucky at increased risk?

Access to healthcare is impacted by long travel distances to healthcare services and physician shortages.

 In 2022, 69 counties in Kentucky had less than 10 primary care physicians in the area, ranking the state 40th in the nation. Only 25.2% of primary care physicians in Kentucky worked in rural counties, and 8 counties had 0 primary care physicians in the area.³

Higher rates of chronic illness in Kentucky reveal that:

- 17% of adults were living with three or more chronic health conditions, ranking Kentucky 49th in the nation.⁴
- KY has the highest incidence of COPD in the country, that is one in every 10 residents.5
- 11.7% of adults have asthma (ranked 43rd in the nation).⁶
- 14.8% of adults reported having diabetes, ranking 45th in the nation.⁷
- 12.4% of adults reported having cardiovascular disease such as coronary heart disease, heart attack or stroke.⁸

Lower vaccination rates in rural and underserved communities reflect that individuals were less likely to receive vaccinations for infectious respiratory diseases, and over 40% of Kentucky's population lives in rural areas. In the state of Kentucky:

- 10.6% of adults aged 18+ received an updated 2023-24 COVID-19 vaccine as of February 2024.¹⁰
- 40.1% of everyone aged 6 months and older received a flu vaccine during the 2022-2023 virus season (ranked 48th in the nation).¹¹
- 11.6% of adults aged 60 and older received an RSV vaccine as of February 2024.¹²

Vaccination Disparities Among Populations in Kentucky

In 2022, of those living in Kentucky, only:

- 34.5% of non-Hispanic Black adults, and
- 38.7% of Hispanic adults (all races) received a flu vaccine in the past 12 months compared to:
- 44.7% of white adults.^{13,14}



Did you Know?

All of the webpage content available on <u>Lung.org</u> can be translated into nine languages? You can also find infectious respiratory disease resources in Spanish on the last page of this toolkit.

Visit the Kentucky <u>Respiratory Disease Dashboard</u> for updates on emergency department visits, hospital admissions and deaths for influenza, RSV, and COVID-19.



Infectious Respiratory Disease Education

Most infectious respiratory diseases are spread from person to person through close contact with an infected person. Respiratory droplets containing the virus or bacteria can spread from talking, sneezing or coughing and can also live on frequently touched surfaces like doorknobs or countertops. Learn more about respiratory diseases, how they spread, treatment and prevention at Lung.org/viruses.

Talk with community members about these three common respiratory viruses and their available vaccinations:



Influenza (seasonal flu)

Lung.org/flu

The flu is a respiratory infection caused by flu viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and in some cases, may lead to hospitalization or death.

Symptoms can be similar to the common cold, but typically appear suddenly, and can last longer and feel worse.



Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

Lung.org/RSV

RSV is a very common virus that can infect people of all ages. Nearly all children will contract RSV by age two.

In older children and healthy adults, RSV causes mostly mild, cold-like symptoms. But for adults at high risk, it can lead to hospitalization or even death.



COVID-19

Lung.org/COVID19

COVID-19 spreads through the air when an infected person breathes out small respiratory droplets and another person breathes them in. COVID-19 can be spread even when a person does not have symptoms.

COVID-19 variants are changing constantly which allows the virus to spread more easily.

Preventing Infectious Respiratory Diseases

There are daily actions that individuals can take to help protect themselves, their family, and their community against severe illness from influenza, RSV and COVID-19. Prevention strategies include:

- Keep up to date on immunizations.
- Wash hands with soap frequently or using hand sanitizer containing 60% alcohol.
- · Clean frequently touched surfaces.
- Decrease the amount of virus in the indoor air by opening windows to bring outdoor air in or filtering the air inside.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or an elbow.
- Stay home while sick.
- Wear a mask and distance from others.
- Get tested when sick.
 - Testing may be available at a healthcare provider's office, local health centers, health departments or pharmacies.



Scan the QR codes to learn more about risk factors specific to each disease:

Influenza



RSV



COVID-19



Pneumonia



Risk Factors for Severe Illness

While anybody can become infected with influenza, RSV or COVID-19, some people are at increased risk for severe illness, complications, hospitalization or even death from these diseases. Common risk factors include:

- Adults aged 65 and older
- Children younger than 5 years old, especially children younger than 2
- Individuals that are pregnant (influenza and COVID-19)
- Individuals of any age that have:
 - Chronic lung conditions like asthma or COPD
 - o Other medical conditions like diabetes or heart disease
 - A weakened immune system due to diseases or medications that suppress the immune system.¹⁵

Asthma, COPD, diabetes, heart disease, obesity or other chronic conditions are considered **underlying health conditions**, meaning they require continuous medical attention and put people at higher risk for severe illness.

Impact of Asthma and COPD

Infectious respiratory diseases can be more serious for individuals living with asthma or COPD. Both asthma and COPD make it harder for oxygen to flow through the lung's airways, which makes it difficult to breathe. Infectious respiratory diseases can cause additional inflammation of the airway. When someone with asthma or COPD gets sick with influenza, RSV or COVID-19, the symptoms of their chronic lung disease can worsen such as shortness of breath, coughing or even triggering asthma or COPD exacerbations. Is, 19

Individuals living with <u>asthma</u> and <u>COPD</u> are also at increased risk of developing <u>pneumonia</u> as a complication of getting sick from the flu, RSV or COVID-19.²⁰ Pneumonia causes the lungs' air sacs to become inflamed and fill up with fluid or pus, which can make it hard for the oxygen you breathe to get into your bloodstream.²¹

Recovering from an infectious respiratory disease is different for everyone and depends on several factors including severity of infection, age, and overall health status. Recovery from a serious infection can take weeks or even months, which can be longer than what community members are expecting. Learn more with the American Lung Association's video: Recovering from a Serious Lung Infection.

NEW Resource! Download the Lung Association's <u>Asthma, Flu and You</u> resource to learn more about asthma and influenza.

How Vaccines Work

Immunity From Vaccinations

When someone is infected with a respiratory virus, the immune system is stimulated to produce proteins such as cytokines, t-cells and antibodies that help fight against the virus. A vaccine stimulates the immune system so that the body produces the same antibodies that it would make if someone were exposed to the real disease. It helps the body learn to recognize and fight an invasion of a particular virus.²²

To stimulate the immune system, vaccinations contain weakened or dead versions of the virus (live ingredients) or other harmless ingredients that mimic or derive from the virus and trick the immune system into fighting back (inactive ingredients).²²

Staying Up to Date on Vaccinations

When someone receives a vaccination against a particular virus, they build immunity to that virus for some time. However, immunity fades over time. This is why it is recommended to receive updated vaccinations for some diseases like the seasonal flu.

Additionally, new strains of infectious respiratory diseases are emerging constantly. While this has been seen with COVID-19 strains including Delta, Omicron and others, this same process happens with all infectious respiratory diseases including the flu and RSV. Vaccinations are adapted over time to include protection against new strains. This is why it's important for individuals to stay up-to-date on recommended vaccinations.

Resources to Learn More

- American Lung Association's <u>Infectious Respiratory Disease Basics</u> A free, interactive, online learning module designed to help individuals understand infectious respiratory diseases and, when applicable, the vaccinations available to help prevent them.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Respiratory Virus Guidance A
 streamlined approach outlining actions individuals can take to help protect themselves and
 others from infectious respiratory disease (includes downloadable graphic).
- American Lung Assoication's Vaccines Prevent Respiratory Diseases video
- CDC's Explaining how Vaccines Work website
- World Health Organization (WHO)'s How do Vaccines Work? website

Current Vaccination Guidelines

Vaccination guidelines change frequently as new data and products become available. Immunity from vaccinations also weakens over time, especially for older adults and individuals with weakened immune systems. Because of this, vaccination recommendations may differ.

Please refer to the CDC's <u>Adult Immunization Schedule</u> and <u>Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule</u> for up-to-date guidelines for influenza, RSV, COVID-19 and other vaccinations.



Recap and TALKING POINTS: Infectious Respiratory Disease and Vaccination

- Viruses like the flu, RSV, and COVID-19 are easily spread from person to person.
- It is important to stay up-to-date on recommended vaccinations to protect against serious illness and/or complications.
- Vaccines are updated to help protect against new strains or versions of a virus that are causing people to get sick.
- The protection someone gets from a vaccine can decrease over time, so we sometimes need
 to get additional doses of a vaccine to increase the protection again (like with a yearly flu
 shot, or updated COVID-19 vaccine).
- Some people are at higher risk of getting seriously sick from respiratory viruses which can lead to complications (like pneumonia), hospitalization or even death.
- Everyone can take steps to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses to help protect those who are at higher risk for serious illness and themselves.
- All available vaccines go through a research process to prove that they are safe and work to help prevent serious illness from the virus they are meant to protect against.

Addressing Mis- and Disinformation

Community Voices, Common Themes

Circulating misinformation and disinformation about vaccinations is a key driver of vaccine hesitancy in rural communities of south-central Kentucky. As a healthcare provider, community leader and trusted messenger, you can help combat misinformation by presenting facts and information from credible sources such as the CDC or the American Lung Association.

The following pages of this toolkit reflect themes gathered from the American Lung Association's community organization assessment that was conducted in south-central Kentucky to gain feedback on vaccination beliefs, hesitancies, barriers, motivators and communication strategies.

Tips for combatting misinformation about vaccinations:

- Address common misconceptions without repeating them. Common misconceptions circulating in south-central Kentucky include:
 - o Vaccines contain harmful ingredients.
 - o People can get the disease from the vaccination.
 - Vaccines are a political movement.
 - o Vaccines don't protect against illness.
 - o It is better to get immunity from the disease itself.
- Share the facts about vaccinations:
 - Vaccines are proven safe they do not contain harmful ingredients or cause disease. They
 are tested through a lengthy process overseen by the FDA.
 - Vaccines are proven effective they are scientifically proven to stimulate the body's immune response system so that it is prepared to fight off a virus.
 - o It is better to gain immunity from vaccinations It is riskier to gain natural immunity by getting sick than it is to get vaccinated. A severe COVID-19 infection, for example, could cause hospitalization and even Long COVID.
- Share information from credible sources like the CDC, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), or the American Lung Association. Some references include:
 - o CDC resources:
 - Types of Immunity
 - What's in Vaccines
 - How Vaccines are Developed and Approved
 - o HHS resources:
 - Vaccine Types
 - □ Vaccines & the Immune System
 - Lung Association resources:
 - □ Vaccines Prevent Respiratory Diseases video
 - Lung.org/vaccines

What Motivates Rural Community Members in Southern Kentucky to Receive Vaccinations?

Community leaders can tailor their vaccination education messaging by incorporating motivators that are specific to the community.

Examples of messaging that incorporates some of these motivators:

- Young children and older adults in your family are at higher risk for complications or hospitalization from respiratory viruses like the flu and RSV.
- Vaccinations are the best way to protect yourself and your family against serious illness this virus season.
- There are steps you can take to help protect yourself and your loved ones from serious illness including washing your hands, cleaning frequently touched surfaces and receiving your recommended vaccinations.
- Certain adults living with underlying medical conditions like COPD, asthma or heart disease are at higher risk for serious illness from viruses like the flu, RSV and COVID-19.
- Nearly 95% of adults aged 60+ in the United States have at least one chronic medical condition.²³ If you're around older adults in your family or community, and you become infected with a respiratory virus, you could spread it to them. Getting vaccinated helps to prevent you from spreading diseases to others that are at high risk for serious illness.
- Getting sick with a respiratory virus like the flu, RSV or COVID-19 can cause you or a loved one to become very sick and miss days of work or school. Getting vaccinated can help keep you and your family members at work and enjoying the activities you love.
- It's normal to have questions about vaccinations. Talk to your healthcare provider about vaccination recommendations for your family.
- Choosing to get vaccinated is a personal decision.

The Motivators

1. FAMILY

Keeping ones family safe and healthy. Preventing severe illness in kids and older adults is especially motivating.

2. HEALTH

Keeping oneself healthy.

3. TALK

Meaningful conversations with healthcare providers strongly influence the decision to get vaccinated.

4. WORK

Not missing days at work or school.

5. TRUST

Engaging in factual, credible conversations with trusted messengers like faith leaders.

American Lung Association's Lung HelpLine

The Lung HelpLine is a free resource available to healthcare organizations and community members to speak with licensed professionals about lung health and lung disease. Community members can call or chat the Lung HelpLine with questions about infectious respiratory diseases and the vaccines available to help prevent them.



Lung.org/helpline
1-800-LUNGUSA

How to Have a Meaningful Conversation

The communication methods listed in the rest of this guide will help educators learn more about community members' vaccine knowledge and beliefs while combatting misinformation and incorporating motivational messages in a supportive way.

First Step! Before starting a conversation with a community member about vaccinations, it's important to first ask them permission to discuss the topic. It's beneficial for community members to know that they have a choice in learning about or receiving vaccinations. For example, "If it is okay with you, I would like to spend a few minutes talking about infectious respiratory disease vaccines recommended for you and your family."

Explore and share these communication strategies to have meaningful conversations with community members:

SHARE Approach for Making a Strong Recommendation

SHARE the reasons why a particular vaccination is right for an individual.

HIGHLIGHT positive experiences with vaccinations (personal or local, recognizable community members).

ADDRESS patient questions and concerns.

REMIND patients that vaccinations help protect them and their family members from serious illness and complications.

EXPLAIN the potential consequences of getting seriously ill from an infectious respiratory disease such as worsening of a chronic medical condition, hospitalization, decrease in quality of life, or even death.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) to Explore Reasons for Change

Open ended questions draw out a person's experiences, perspectives and ideas.

Example: "On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to get vaccinated?"

Affirmations help build someone's confidence in their ability to make a decision.

Example: "You are doing your best to make a good decision."

Reflective listening includes repeating, rephrasing or offering a deeper guess to fully understand what a person is saying.

Example: "When we discussed how likely you are to get vaccinated, you ranked a 4 out of 10. Why a 4? Why not lower?"

Summarizing ensures shared understanding.

Example: "Let's go over what we just talked about."

Reference the CDC's <u>conversation guide for recommending vaccinations</u> for more tips and communication strategies.





Transtheoretical Model of Change - stages of individual health behavior change.



Pre-contemplation - "I don't need to worry about serious illness."



Contemplation - "I am interested in learning how to prevent serious illness."



Preparation – "I would like to talk about vaccinations recommended for me."



Action - "I would like to schedule an appointment to get vaccinated."



Maintenance – "I have received my vaccination and intend to encourage my family members to get vaccinated."

Most people don't make decisions about their health overnight or in a linear fashion. It will most likely require ongoing conversations to move through the stages of change. If someone is not ready to receive a vaccination but is willing to learn more or take other steps to prevent severe illness, that is still a successful conversation.

Connecting with Community Members

Organizations serving rural areas of southern Kentucky gave feedback on messages that resonate with communities that they serve. When communicating with individuals who may be hesitant about receiving vaccinations, these may be beneficial to incorporate:

- Stories of local, recognizable people (especially any person at high risk for severe illness) who
 did not receive vaccinations for an infectious respiratory disease and suffered from serious
 illness, complications, hospitalization or death. This will help to combat the circulation of
 misinformation that infectious respiratory diseases aren't serious and that vaccines cause these
 negative outcomes.
- 2. The importance of all family members to receive appropriate vaccinations (ex. influenza, COVID-19, and Tdap) to protect young children and older adults in the family, as they are at higher risk for severe illness from infectious respiratory diseases.
 - a. RSV vaccinations are recommended for individuals who are 32-36 weeks pregnant during RSV season (September – January) to help prevent RSV in babies. Learn more about RSV prevention options for babies.

Stories are Powerful

Storytelling is a powerful way to share facts about vaccinations while providing an emotional, honest experience that resonates with rural community members.

"I am a proud Kentuckian. I am also a healthcare provider and a mom. My son has a chronic disease. I make sure to keep him up to date with his recommended vaccinations to protect my son from a life-threatening emergency. I talk to my patients about what vaccinations are recommended for their family. I am not their mom, but I care just as much."

Kimberly, Nurse Mt. Vernon, Kentucky



Gaining Trust with Community Members

Many individuals do see information about the importance of vaccinations but need reassurance or reminders from trusted messengers, such as healthcare organizations or other community leaders. Tips for gaining trust with communities include:

- Be empathetic to diverse and underserved populations in the area.
- Be representative of the local community by learning from them.
- Keep promises and set clear expectations.
- Be dependable, honest and respectful.
- Communicate clearly and frequently, practice active listening and ask questions.
- Provide knowledgeable and credible information.

The Ripple Effect

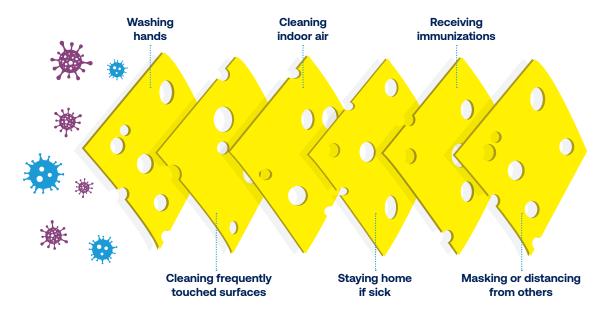
Cultivating relationships with community-based organizations can have a ripple effect in broadening information about vaccinations. These organizations are deeply rooted in the communities they serve and have a daily presence that communities rely on for credible information.

IMPORTANT! Do not be a source of misinformation. Community leaders who do not know an answer to a tough question should be honest and direct individuals to someone more qualified such as a local healthcare provider or the American Lung Association's Lung HelpLine to discuss the health topic or a credible source of information if needed.

Getting Vaccinated is a Personal Choice

When discussing infectious respiratory diseases and vaccinations with concerned community members, be mindful that not everyone will be open to vaccination, and that's okay.

Utilize the Swiss Cheese Model to present vaccinations as the most effective option to help protect against severe illness, but not the only option. The diagram below shows several layers of infectious disease prevention using slices of Swiss cheese, with holes in different locations. This model illustrates how each layer of prevention provides more protection against severe illness.



Barriers to Care

Organizations in southern Kentucky also provided insight on social determinants of health and barriers to care that impact rural communities in the region. The top barriers and tips for addressing them include:

1. Low health literacy

- a. Use plain language.
- Utilize printed resources and handouts resources created specifically for rural communities in southern Kentucky can be found at the end of this guide and housed at <u>Lung.org/</u> vaccinate-rural-ky.
- c. Ask the individual to summarize the conversation to ensure information was translated in the intended way.
- d. Utilize models or demonstrations when talking about lung disease.
- e. Encourage questions.

2. Availability of credible information

- Take time to know and understand the facts about infectious respiratory disease and available vaccines.
- b. Practice effective communication strategies so that education can be provided in a supportive way when speaking with community members.
- c. Build an inventory of resources from credible organizations like the CDC or the American Lung Association.
 - i. This toolkit and the included educational materials are great resources to keep on hand. In addition to healthcare organizations, make sure that all community leaders, educators or other professionals that might have the opportunity to discuss health-related decisions with community members have access to this toolkit.

3. Lack of transportation and healthcare coverage

a. Local resources:

- Kentucky Community Action Partnerships (CAPKY) transportation (at some locations) and healthcare coverage assistance including access to <u>Kynect</u> services (Medicaid and CHIP).
- ii. <u>Kentucky State Health Insurance Assistance Program</u> (SHIP) provides information, counseling and assistance to seniors and individuals who are disabled.
- iii. Medicaid Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Services

b. American Lung Association Resources:

- Access to Healthcare (factsheet)
- ii. Enrolling in Quality and Affordable Healthcare Coverage (website)
- iii. Health Insurance Marketplaces 101 (website)
- iv. Respiratory Immunization Coverage (factsheet)
- v. Lung HelpLine (call service and website, more information on the next page)

Lung Association Resources

Lung HelpLine

The Lung HelpLine is staffed with licensed registered nurses, respiratory therapists, certified tobacco treatment specialists and other healthcare professionals. The knowledgeable staff has a wide range of experience in the healthcare industry and is available to answer lung-health related questions and connect individuals with the resources they need. The Lung HelpLine can answer questions about topics including but not limited to:

- Infectious respiratory diseases such as influenza, RSV, COVID-19, pneumococcal pneumonia and their vaccinations
- High-risk conditions for severe illness
- Chronic lung diseases such as asthma and COPD
- Tobacco cessation
- Access to transportation
- Available healthcare coverage options
- Where to schedule vaccination appointments

Community members or healthcare organizations can contact the Lung HelpLine at:

- 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872 and press 2 to speak with someone live)
- Submit a question online

Virus Season Resources for Rural Areas in Southern Kentucky

The American Lung Association has created resources tailored to rural communities of southern Kentucky for healthcare organizations and community leaders to use when discussing influenza, RSV and COVID-19 with community members.







Download

Download

Hang these posters in waiting rooms or lobbies!

Print and share this factsheet with community members as a resource to take home.



Download

Print and share this handout about disease prevention for community members to take home.



Download

Utilize this handout within your organization to help combat misinformation.



Watch HERE

Show this educational video in your waiting room, lobby or on social media!



Download social image 1



Download social image 2

Help share education about the importance of vaccination this respiratory virus season by using our social media toolkit. Download here.

Spanish Resources

- Spanish influenza resource hub
- · Spanish RSV resource hub
- Spanish COVID-19 resource hub
- Spanish pneumonia resource hub
- Understanding Respiratory Viruses video
- <u>Vaccines Prevent Respiratory Diseases</u>
 video
- Antivirals Treat Respiratory Diseases video

Additional Resources

- COVID-19 Vaccination Field Guide
 Addendum: Rural Considerations
 for Vaccine Confidence and Uptake
 Strategies (CDC)
- Practical Playbook for Addressing Health Misinformation (Johns Hopkins)
- How to Conduct a Rapid Community
 Assessment (CDC)

Find all downloadable resources and references for this toolkit on our website at Lung.org/vaccinate-rural-ky or scan the QR code.



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