

Promoting Awareness of Congenital CMV: One Message May Not Fit All

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Introduction

About 1 out of every 200 babies in the U.S. is born with congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV). It is the most common infectious cause of birth defects and a leading contributor to non-genetic sensorineural hearing loss and developmental disabilities in childhood. Despite its significance, public awareness of CMV and its potential impacts remains low, with only 20% of women in Minnesota reporting prior knowledge of the virus.¹

This lack of awareness is particularly concerning given that congenital CMV disproportionately impacts babies born to people of color. Thus, there is a critical need for culturally and linguistically appropriate messaging to promote CMV awareness and risk reduction knowledge within diverse communities.

Objectives

- To develop CMV-focused awareness and education messaging that is culturally and linguistically meaningful to diverse groups of Minnesotans.
- To identify the communication channels that culturally and linguistically diverse groups of Minnesotans prefer for receiving CMV-focused awareness and education messaging.

Methods and Sample

The Minnesota Department of Health partnered with a local public relations and strategic communications company to recruit, engage, and message test with individuals from diverse communities. From May to June 2023, surveys and focused interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of Minnesota residents. Engagement was especially focused on reaching Hmong, Somali, and Latine women.

34 people participated in the surveys and focused interviews:

- 71% of participants identified as persons of color.
- 68% of participants were parents.
- 77% of participants were ages 18 to 44.

Results

Three main communication tones resonated with different audiences:

Inclusive, Evocative, Surprising

- Prompts curiosity and expresses the commonality of CMV

Empowering, Motivational, Informative

- Encourages conversation and demonstrates how families and communities can take control of their own health

Straightforward, Assertive, Proactive, Preventative

- Understandable, clear-cut, and easily digestible for all communities

- All participants preferred communications with the same mood: *Informative and Encouraging*.
- There was no difference in preferred messaging or suggested platforms based on geography.

Other recommendations:

- Use “people-centric” visuals that look like the people within the key community.
- Utilize infographics to make statistics easily digestible and eye-catching.
- While educating individuals and communities, direct them to additional resources.
- Partner with grassroots organizations and trusted local and community leaders.

| | Hmong | Somali | Latine | Mainstream* |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Suggested Platforms | Digital media Print materials from healthcare providers | Digital media Social media | Social media Print materials at local community centers | Social and digital media Print materials from healthcare providers |
| Preferred Tone | Straightforward, Assertive, Proactive, Preventative | Empowering, Motivational, Informative | Inclusive, Evocative, Surprising | Straightforward, assertive, proactive, preventative |
| Suggested Headlines | You Can Lower Your Chances Reduce the Risk | Health Starts at Home Embrace Your Power | The Hidden Connection The Silent Link | Diminish the Danger Rise Above Risks |
| Messaging Examples | Reduce the Risk of CMV: Kiss your baby’s forehead instead of their cheek. Don’t share food or drinks with children. | 1 out of every 5 babies born with CMV will develop long-term health problems. 1 out of every 200 babies is born with cCMV. | Congenital CMV can cause long-term health concerns in babies. Anyone, at any age, can contract CMV. | Reduce the Risk of CMV: Wash hands after playtime. Kiss your baby’s forehead instead of their cheek. |

* “Mainstream” is the term used to refer to Minnesotans who did not identify as Hmong, Somali, or Latine.

1. Tastad KJ, Schleiss MR, Lammert SM, Basta NE. (2019). Awareness of congenital cytomegalovirus and acceptance of maternal and newborn screening. *PLoS ONE* 14(8): e0221725. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0221725>



Conclusion

- All Minnesotans across race, class, and geography want and deserve to know of health concerns that could potentially affect themselves or their families.
- The most impactful way to expand awareness of congenital CMV and encourage risk reduction practices is through understandable and information-based messaging that is straightforward, eye-catching, and does not use scare tactics.
- Preferred messaging tone and headlines differed between key audiences.

Next Steps:

- Create visual design, incorporate preferred messaging, choose communication channels, and purchase ad placement.
- Ongoing evaluation of the awareness campaign.

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