

Good information practices for vaccine safety web sites

(Reference from World Health Organization Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety)

The criteria in the list established following this request fall into four categories:

1. Essential criteria i.e. with respect to credibility

Credibility (Mandatory criteria)

1.1 Mission of site

- Purpose of the website stated.
- Intended audience defined.
- If the website provides a mission statement, the content of the website matches the statement.

1.2 Disclosure of ownership/source

- Organization name and/or logo appear on every page. Contact information (mailing address and/or email address) should be provided, but need not be posted on every page. Every page should link to the contact page or the home page.
- Qualifications of organization or individual website owner should be obvious, including type of organization, e.g. government, non-profit, academic. The website should disclose individual's affiliations and alliances and disclose any relationship that might influence the content of the site.
- Websites should list the name and affiliation of each member of the Editorial Board, Advisory Board, or Board of Directors. If an organization does not have a board, they should at least include information regarding the site content policy and/or editorial policy.

1.3 Transparency of sponsorship

- Websites should use one or more of the methods listed below to describe the manner in which they address the issue of sponsorship or funding.
 - a. Disclosure of all sources of funding for organization/website or funding of persons involved in the development and review of web content. Describe the role of the funding source.
 - b. Disclosure of any relevant personal or financial associations that might be considered a potential conflict of interest.

c. If advertising is a source of funding, this should be clearly stated and a brief description of the website's advertising policy should be included.

- If the website includes third-party content and/or advertising, the website should indicate whether it has control over this material. The website should also include a disclaimer stating that displaying this extra content does not imply endorsement. If ad space is sold, the website should specify how it uses funds from these marketing activities.

- The website may sell materials if they align with the website's content. Content intended to promote or sell products or services should be clearly distinguished from the educational and scientific content.

1.4 Accountability to users

- Users should be able to contact the owner of the website to report any technical issues, such as broken links, or to provide feedback. Multiple methods of contacting the owner of the website (e-mail address, electronic form, postal address) should be provided, but need not be posted on every page. This information should be easily accessible from any page of the site, e.g. include link to the contact information in the footer or menu bar of every page or link back to the homepage.

- Owner or representative should respond to user feedback in a timely and appropriate manner. Websites should include a statement indicating that comments are welcome, but that volume may prevent a speedy reply.

- Websites offering interactive exchanges (e.g., chat room, 'medical' or similar advice in response to questions/comments) should provide information about the moderator or clinician's expertise and affiliations. Websites should disclose how comments will be moderated.

1.5 Data protection and privacy

- Websites should display a privacy statement or confidentiality policy that describes how the organization treats private or semi-private information such as e-mail addresses and telephone numbers if collected. Sites should not collect, use, or share personal data without the user's specific affirmative consent. Users should be informed of use of cookies and any use of data they provide.

- Websites should take reasonable steps to protect personal data (if collected) from unauthorized access.

1.6 Responsible partnering

- VSN members are encouraged to partner with or link to other websites with the same high standards.

- Websites should indicate when users are leaving the home site by using an external link icon, a disclaimer statement, or by opening a new window.

2. Important criteria i.e. with respect to content

Content, quality and quantity (Mandatory criteria)

- Websites should provide a clear statement of the source for scientific, medical and health information, including author's name, affiliations and any potential conflicts of interest the authors may have related to the content.
- The date of last review or update should be clearly indicated on each webpage. The website should be updated as new information becomes available.
- The website should include a statement of the procedure used for selection of site content, including a guarantee of the independence of the editorial process, the names and affiliations of the Editorial Board, and any review process.
- Writing on the website should be professional, with proper grammar, spelling, and composition. Language should be clear, easy to read, and appropriate for intended users.
- Hypertext links to other resources should be carefully selected and their content accurate, current, and credible.
- Websites should promote good immunization practices and include all reasonable sides of controversial issues in a fair way.

3. Practical criteria i.e. with respect to accessibility

- The website should be consistently available.
- Consider using responsive web design to allow for adaptability to mobile devices and other technologies.
- A streaming format for audio and video files, ideally embedded in the page, is recommended.
- The website should look professional and pleasing and should keep in mind the special accessibility issues of many potential users, such as the visually impaired.
 - a. The design of the site should be consistent in terms of the use of logos, icons, color, and fonts.
 - b. The site should not have large and unnecessary graphics.
 - c. Text font, size, and colour should be readable and standard throughout the website.
- If content is available as a PDF (“camera-ready”) or other document type, the website should include information on how to download the file and instructions (and a link) for obtaining the necessary software to do so.
- When files are available for download, the file size should be displayed.
- Print-friendly buttons should be used on each page, so that information can easily be printed. The website should be readable without the need to download too much content.

- 'Share' buttons should be included to encourage readers to disseminate content via social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Email, YouTube etc.)
- Websites should allow users to easily access the home page from any of its pages. The back button should be functional and/or each page should have a link back to the homepage.
- Links should be checked regularly to ensure that users are directed to the site or page they expect to visit. Any broken links should be fixed.
- Website should be structured and follow a logical hierarchy for ease of navigation. The site should offer aids to finding information, such as a site map, internal search engine, or index.
- Most materials should be available for use in the public domain, with only limited content copyrighted, e.g. materials that require purchase. Information on the legality of further use or distribution of materials, e.g. use of creative commons license, should be clearly indicated.

4. Desired criteria i.e. with respect to design

- **Logical organization:** The design of the site should allow users to progress logically through the information and access information in an orderly manner.
- **Ease of navigation:** Are there aids to finding information such as a site map, index, help function, frequently-asked questions page, and/or internal search engine? Users should be able to easily move between pages without getting lost.
- **Consistent plan:** The site should be internally consistent in terms of design, including use of logos and icons, colour, fonts, page layout, etc.
- **Professional presentation:** The overall look of the site should be professional and aesthetically pleasing.