A background network diagram consisting of numerous interconnected nodes of varying sizes and colors (teal, light blue, and white) connected by thin grey lines. Some nodes are highlighted with larger, semi-transparent circles.

Communicating about Tdap vaccines

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The Evidence Collective



THE EVIDENCE COLLECTIVE

30+ Subject Matter Specialists · 11B+ Reach over last year · 10M+ Combined Social Followers

**Putting evidence in the hands of trusted people
with communication grounded in curiosity and empathy**

Increase Speed

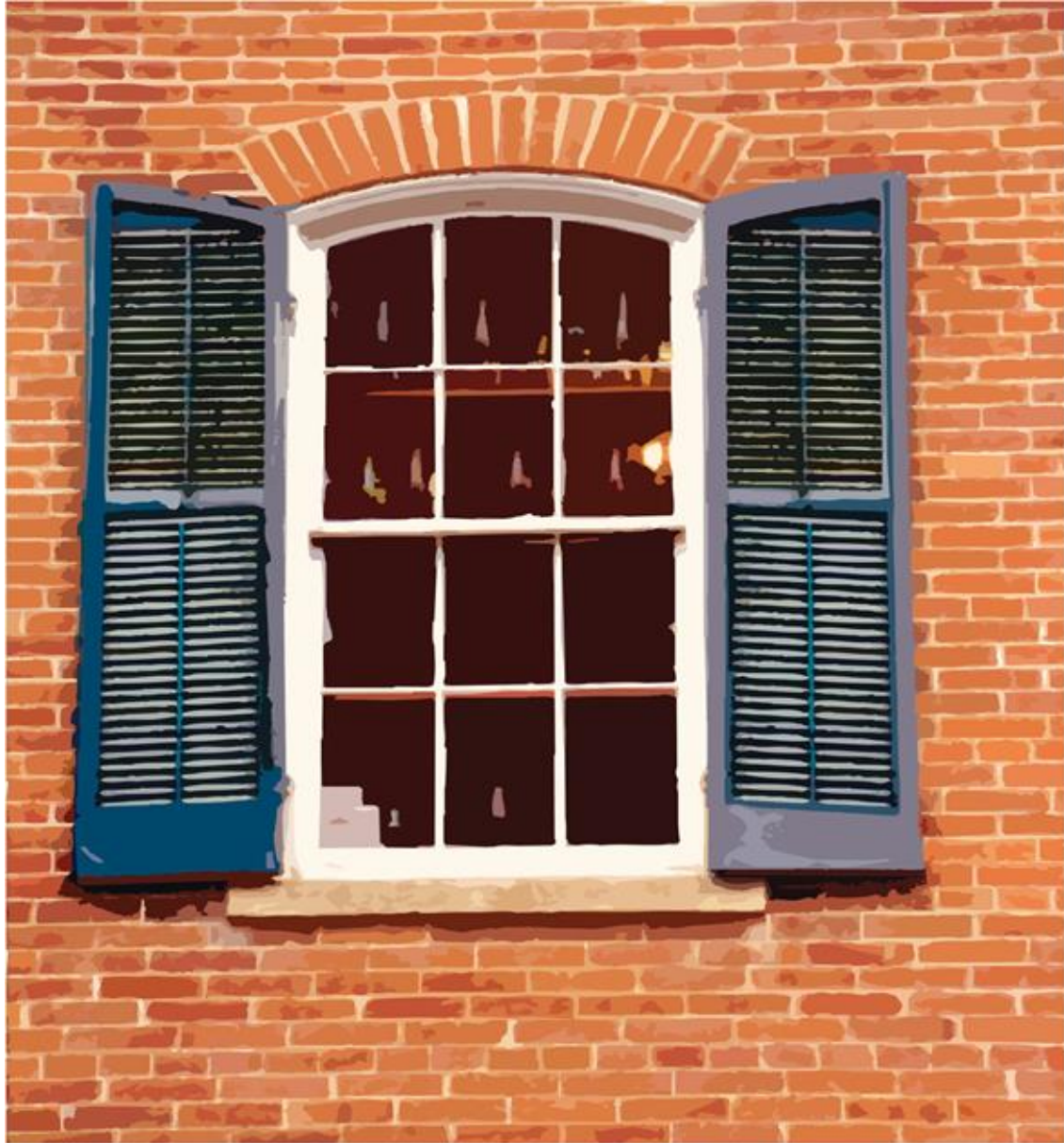
Rapid-response evidence briefs on emerging public health topics to equip trusted messengers.

Improve Coordination

Experts and creators working in silos produce fragmented, confusing messages. We coordinate across disciplines to speak with one clear voice.

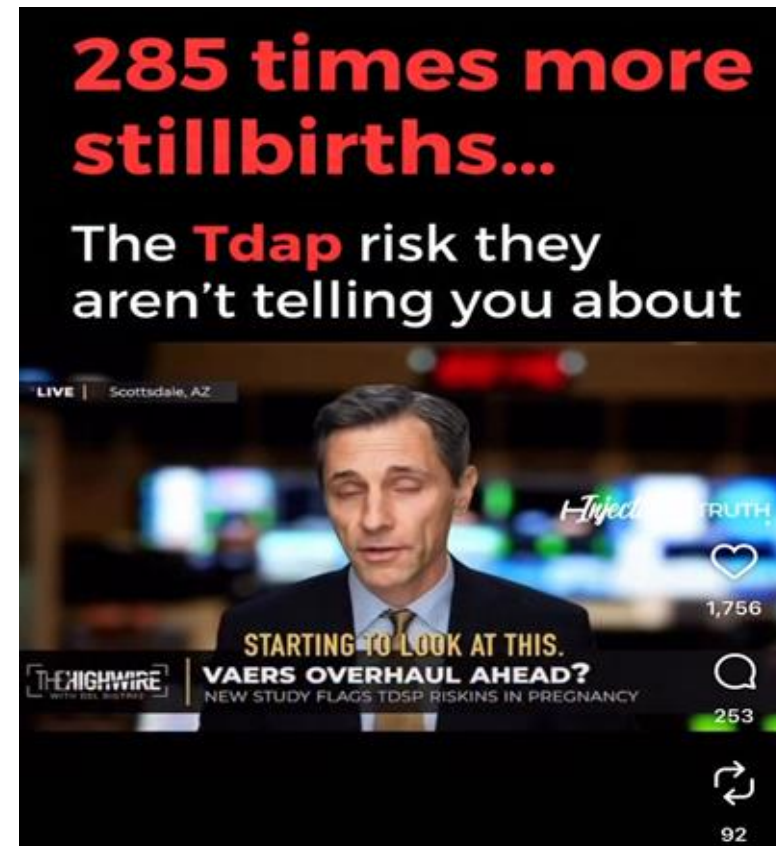
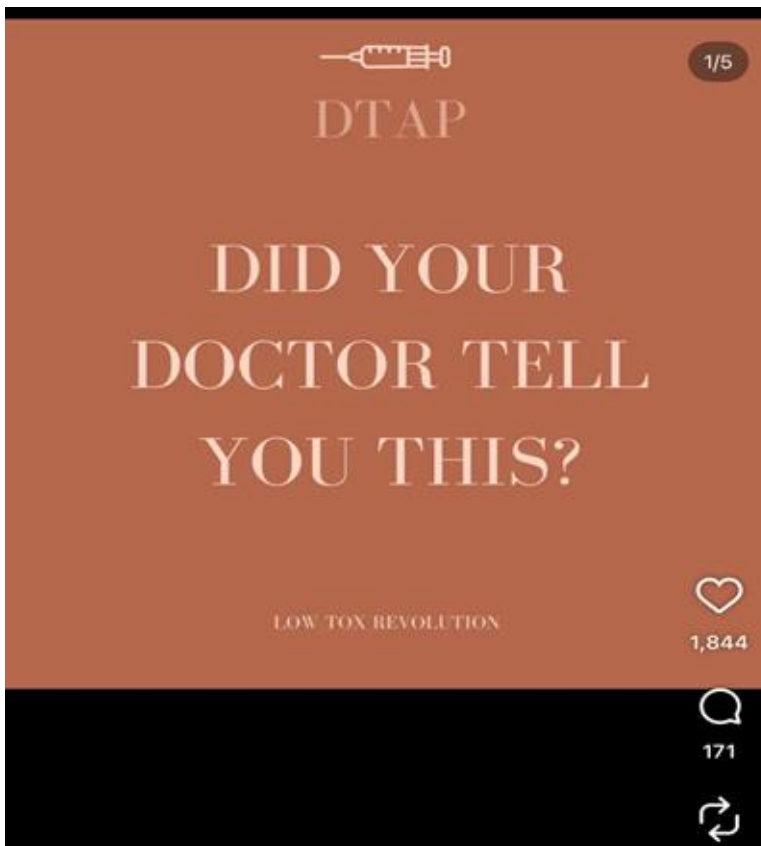
Break Echo Chambers

The communities most impacted by false information don't always engage with institutions. We convene other trusted voices to reach them.



Pregnancy is a
"window of
persuasion"

Pregnancy is a time where people can encounter vaccine misinformation — and stories are weaponized to spread fear.



The burden of scrutiny

Pregnant people face intense scrutiny over every choice — what to eat, what to drink, what medication to take, whether to vaccinate. Every decision feels high-stakes and deeply personal.

Guilt is already present

Before we say a word, many birthing people already feel guilty.

Pregnancy is a time where people are told to watch everything they put into their bodies.



The world has many opinions

Don't eat that. Don't drink that. You should exercise more.
You shouldn't exercise that much.

The Social World

Family, friends, social media, and strangers all offer opinions on what mothers “should” do in. Often these “shoulds” contradict.

Medicine + Science

Even trusted sources can sometimes send mixed signals.

Guidelines change.

Recommendations can feel like just more noise.

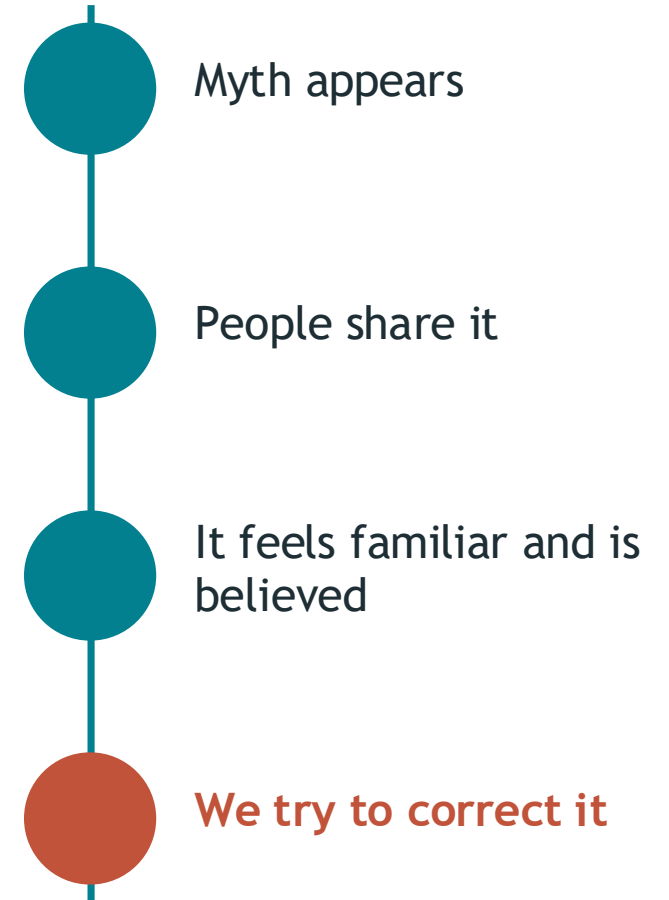


Why Debunking Is an Uphill Battle

Repeating a myth can reinforce it.

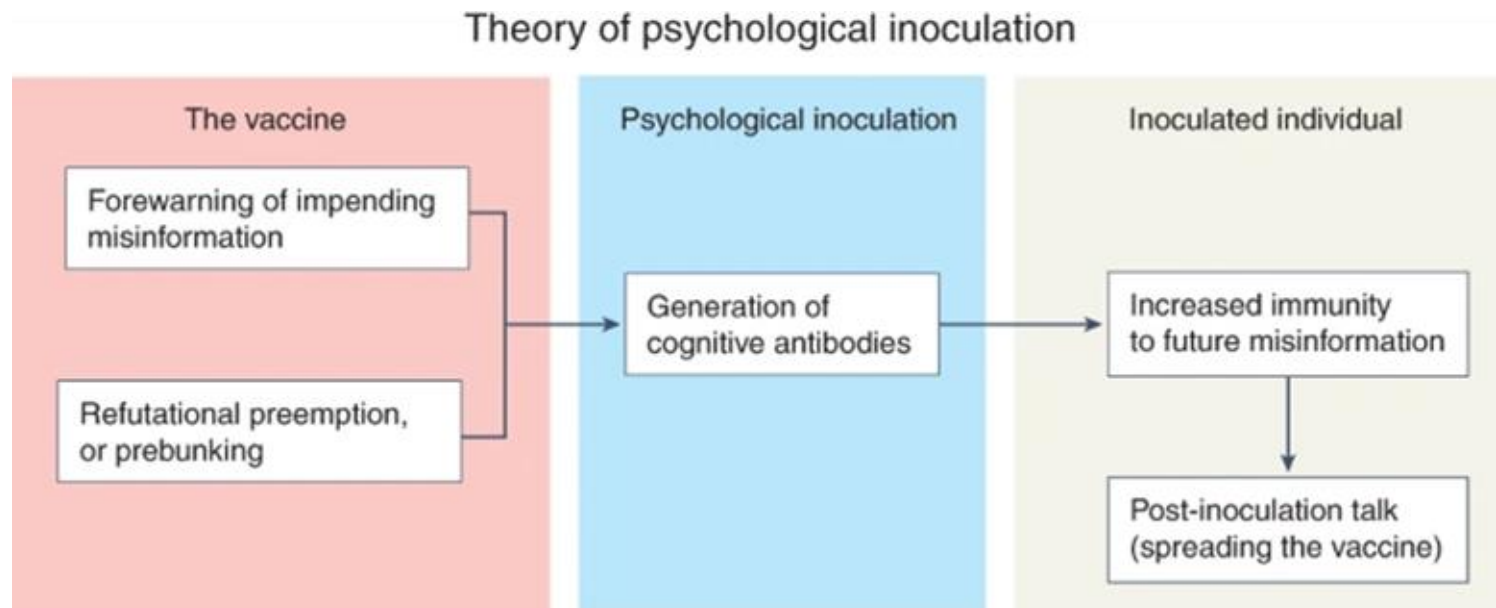
The brain processes familiar information as true. The more we hear something, the more we are likely to believe it.

By the time we're correcting false information, many people have already seen it and may believe it.



Immunizing against misinformation

- Inoculation theory/ “pre-bunking”
- Helps people become less susceptible to misinformation over time.
- This requires advance preparation
 - *E.g. Getting articles and other communications into the hands of people in that window of persuasion early in pregnancy.*



Using stories to help data resonate



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Whooping Cough (Pertussis)



Dylan

Dylan caught whooping cough in elementary school and dealt with a debilitating cough for a year.



Elijah

Elijah was a healthy baby, until he caught whooping cough and ended up in the hospital for four weeks.



Callie

Callie was her parents' miracle baby, until she contracted whooping cough in the hospital.



Words that can be misunderstood & alternatives

*Source: Kristen Panthagani, MD, PhD.
You Can Know Things.*

Word / Phrase	What people hear	What should be used instead
Works	"This will fully stop the bad thing from happening."	"Reduces risk," "lowers the chance," "makes severe outcomes much less likely."
Effective	Guaranteed protection. I won't get sick.	"Highly protective," "provides strong protection against severe disease," "works by reducing risk of complications."
Immunity	"A force field that prevents infection."	"Immune protection," "immune response," "trained immune system."
Prevents	"This will never happen."	"Reduces the likelihood," "helps prevent," "lowers transmission risk."
Safe	"Zero risk, nothing can go wrong."	"benefits greatly outweigh risks," "well-studied safety history," "safer than diseases they prevent."

Sensitive Topics Require Intentional Framing

Avoid: Blaming, shaming and deficit framing

Use: Systems framing and opportunity

Examples of topics that require extra care:

- Infant mortality
- Maternal mortality
- Vaccination

Framing Disparities Responsibly

How you frame disparities can change whether audiences hear blame, biology or systemic issues

Risky framing: *“Some pregnant people don’t get Tdap during pregnancy.”*

- Many audiences hear lack of caring, poor decision making, individual responsibility

Better framing: How we talk about vaccine uptake matters. Focusing only on individual behavior can overlook the roles of healthcare systems, communication, access, and trust in shaping decisions during pregnancy.

Communicating Uncertainty Without Losing

Too **Trust** much hedging:

- *“Additional studies are needed before conclusions can be drawn.”*
- Public hears: “They don’t know anything” or “There is something they’re not telling us”

Build trust with clarity:

- *We know pregnancy decisions can feel really stressful.*
- *Tdap vaccine studies in millions of pregnancies across many countries have shown that it’s benefits outweigh risks and helps protect the baby from whooping cough during the first months of life.*

What this means for communications

- **Lead with acknowledgment.**
 - Acknowledge early in the piece that there's a lot of noise out there and it can be hard to navigate
- **Avoid language** that implies the person “should have known” or is behind.
- **Frame Tdap as empowerment:**
 - “One shot during pregnancy gives your baby protection from day one” vs. “unvaccinated infants are at risk”.

What this means for communications

- **Don't focus on the number of vaccines in pregnancy.**
 - Lead with what each vaccine does.
- **Be clear about uncertainty:**
 - Give them the evidence, including the limitations.
- **People trust people:**
 - Center on children and families, not institutions or science with a capital S. Avoid leading with “science,” “AAP,” “CDC,” “physicians,” or even “vaccines” and instead lead with people.



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Common Communication Failure Points

“The pertussis hospitalization rate among infants was 24.7 per 100,000.”

Over reliance on rates

Per 100,000 means nothing to most people.

Instead: *“Every year, babies in our state are hospitalized with whooping cough before they are old enough to be fully protected by their own vaccines. Tdap during pregnancy helps protect babies during those first vulnerable months.”*

No denominator context

Numbers are given without comparison feel abstract. Include trend, peer-state comparisons or expectations.

Instead: *“More pregnant people are getting Tdap during pregnancy than before. But nearly 4 in 10 still do not get it. This vaccine helps protect babies from whooping cough in the first few months after birth.”*

Common Communication Failure Points

Leading with uncertainty	Assuming Shared Priorities
<p>Lead with what is known, add nuance.</p> <p>Don't hedge before you've even made your point.</p> <p><i>"Tdap during pregnancy helps protect babies from whooping cough after birth. Studies show its benefits outweigh risks. Like all vaccines, it continues to be monitored for safety."</i></p>	<p>What matters to one pregnant person may not matter to another. Some want information about safety. Others timing. Or how the vaccine protects their baby.</p> <p>Good communication starts with understanding what matters to those you're communicating to.</p>