


Milania A 

Mr. Henderson

Crush the Curve Essay Contest

10 May 2021

### Crush the Coronavirus Curve: Dare to Hope For the Future

The world will never be the same. After the start of the Coronavirus, it seems this fact is constantly repeated, constantly rising to mind and heart. Regardless of our age, gender, race, and social status, COVID-19 has affected each individual in unpredicted and life-altering ways. It seems things may never go back to normal, but as the COVID vaccine is distributed and becomes more readily available, people are starting to dare to hope for the future. However, statistics show that in Idaho, “34% of the state has received at least one dose,” and only, “26% of Idaho's population has been fully vaccinated,” (USAFacts). While this is commendable, it’s also proof there is still so much more to be done to ensure the safety of Idahos’ citizens. Idaho’s vaccinated population, both single dose and fully vaccinated, is significantly less than other states around it (USAFacts). Many things can be done to correct this issue, both within the state-wide and individual level. The key to “crushing the curve”? Accessible information. When accessible information is defined, analyzed, and incorporated in both public and online education for all people, including minority groups, the greater the chance of slowing the spread of COVID-19 becomes.

Accessible information is understood as “information provided in formats that allow every user and learner to access content ‘on an equal basis with others’” (UNCRPD). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, news of outbreaks and epidemics was common on the news. For example, the 2014-2016 and 2018 Ebola epidemic was heavily reported on the news. Today, Coronavirus

is at the heart of news, podcasts, and social media. It is evident everywhere we look. If someone wants to stay informed, the information available is often overwhelming, or even contradictory. Accessible information is the only way to counteract misinformation. The more people who are properly informed of the gravity of this pandemic, the more people will take steps to prevent the contraction and spread of this deadly virus.

The source and content of information depend on age groups, as well as language and ethnicity. For example, Robert H. Shmerlin, the Senior Faculty Editor of Harvard Health Publishing comments on the importance of wearing masks: “Experts estimate we can save hundreds of thousands of lives and considerably boost the chances of controlling the pandemic if we all commit to wearing a mask (...)”(Shmerling). The information is important, true, but it is not easily understandable by all. Much of what makes information accessible is how it is explained, and that means more than word choice. Everyone is afraid, or at least concerned about the global pandemic. Grave and honest information must be available, otherwise, no one will take the threat seriously. At the same time, that doesn’t mean the news has to be devoid of hope. There must always be a sense of patience, positivity, and kindness if humanity expects anything to improve.

A second aspect to consider is the kind of information necessary to make a difference. Of course, the simple steps to prevention and protection: wearing face masks/coverings, washing your hands for twenty seconds or more, and maintaining a safe social distance. In more recent months, however, a new challenge has arisen: how to present Covid vaccine information. Because varying, polarized opinions surround vaccines, it’s important to remember that what one person sees as harmless, might scare the living daylights out of someone else. As a community, state, nation, and planet, respecting the decisions of others can make all the difference. Before

making a decision, every person and family should be encouraged to research true and unbiased data.

The FDA has set a wonderful example to be learned from. Their “COVID-19 Educational Resource” page presents enormous amounts of data for those who need it, and it is done interactively, through podcasts, videos, and articles. Also, the official website of the state of Idaho heads the first page with where to find information on Covid developments and how to get vaccinated. The site is clean, easy to see and understand. The page is even offered in six commonly spoken languages in the area. There are many ways of making these excellent resources even more accessible including, implementing different media types, such as videos for adults and children, spreading information actively through social media, on TV and even on the radio stations by means of PSA’s (Public Service Announcements). These are effective methods to spread the vaccine message while also keeping people encouraged and focused on the positive. Vaccination information should also be provided to the 35,740 deaf citizens (“Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing”), 41,207 blind citizens in Idaho (“Idaho | American Foundation for the Blind”), and their wonderful caretakers.

This leads to another lesser highlighted yet incredibly important aspect of health. The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that, as of October 2020, 34.6% of Idaho’s adult population had reported continuous symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. 21.9% of that population had an unmet need for counseling and/or therapy. Mental health plays an important role in physical soundness. Physical and mental health should not be thought of as separate but as two gears in a machine that have to work together. If one gets rusty or damaged, the other will follow close behind. Having accessible information for teens and adults can help prevent or improve anxiety and/or depressive disorders. Circulating easily accessible and reasonably priced therapy or

counseling resources on the official website of Idaho, social media, and even through schools can contribute greatly to the protection of both mental and physical health of Idaho's citizens. Say all of this is done. Information is presented in a simple, easy to understand and hopeful way...now what?

The third and final step is education. Educating the public plays a key role in making a difference. This can be done in a few different ways. Schools both online and public play a paramount role in this aspect. Students should learn about COVID-19 correctly. Much of what kids know about the virus comes from their parents and the news. While this is important, teachers should also educate students on how to keep themselves safe while giving them a positive view of both the present and the future to come. Educating the citizens of tomorrow helps slow the spread of this pandemic's effects in Idaho; it also helps prepare them, in case a pandemic of this magnitude ever occurs again.

Adults and senior citizens may be taking this the hardest. Virtual and public outreach programs can help educate and "explain the data." With questions arising about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines, it would be wise to take the time to show them what scientists and research currently understands before encouraging them to make a decision. A big way to educate both students and adults would be by presenting the information in fun, engaging, and educational videos. These videos could even be modified to appeal to members of the deaf or blind community, as well as the many minority groups in Idaho. This might be one of the most influential things Idaho can do for its citizens: appeal to minority groups.

The Idaho Department of Labor reports: "Diversity in Idaho has also been growing, with Idaho's minority groups rising from just 3 percent in 1990 to more than 8 percent projected in 2024" ("Idaho Multicultural Buying Power: Spring 2021"). Idaho's Hispanic population alone is

supposed to reach a whopping 14% of Idaho's population in 2024. Catering to the Hispanic, Asian, Black, and multi-racial citizens of Idaho can be as simple as providing accurate, easy-to-access information in the language they are most comfortable with. Providing health care workers who speak their language can help ease their worries as well. This is especially true of refugees and immigrants new to Idaho. In addition to adapting to a new home, new people, and a new language, it's possible refugees and immigrants may need to adapt to new ideas of health and sanitation. Perhaps supplies and resources are more readily available here, than where they have moved from. Outreach programs, some for children and some for adults, can help inform them of what they can do to keep themselves, their families, and others around them safe.

It has been a burdensome year. As 2021 reaches its midpoint, the need for hope has peaked. We want to be free of this pandemic. We want to hold and hug our loved ones once again. We want to see our friends and watch business become stable. Maybe go to a movie or visit the grocery store without the looming, backbreaking pressure of "what if?" If we ever wish to see this day, we must all contribute. The steps to recovery are simple. They begin with accessibility. Whether it be through the web, social media, school, or virtual outreach programs, having appealing and easy-to-understand information is essential to slowing the spread of COVID-19. For a knowledgeable population, this information should focus on health management, ways to protect mental and physical health, and the most current data surrounding Covid vaccinations. Although it may take more time and resources, this information should be interactive and engage all ages, genders, the deaf and blind, as well as a growing minority population. Educating the public may take time but will without a doubt be worth it. Above all, it must be hopeful. Someday soon, daring to hope for the future will not be an intimidating, elusive activity. It will be filled with intention, ambition, and purpose. Hope is the heart of change. We

are all in this together, and only together with hope as our power can we crush the curve of coronavirus once and for all.

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