

CORRESPONDENCE | 19 March 2024

Language and cultural norms influence vaccine hesitancy

By [Mian Jia](#) 

Your Comment article on cervical cancer ([Nature 626, 30–32; 2024](#)) suggests that, in some cultures, infection with human papillomavirus (HPV) tends to be associated with promiscuity, not disease, and that culturally sensitive communication is key to addressing vaccine hesitancy.

Other factors can also be at play. In Hong Kong, the HPV vaccine is commonly labelled the cervical cancer vaccine, hindering the promotion of gender-neutral vaccination programmes that can reduce the incidence of other cancers and diseases, too ([T. H. Cheung et al. Hum. Vacc. Immunother. 19, 2184605; 2023](#)).

Normative associations vary between cultures and languages. When tackling vaccination hesitancy in multilingual societies, it is helpful to strategically adopt the language that creates more positive associations. Bilingual speakers in Hong Kong, for instance, were more willing to get vaccinated against COVID-19 when information was presented in English, rather than Chinese, because they associate more trust with the former ([J. Geipel et al. Sci. Rep. 12, 253; 2022](#)).

Furthermore, health messages that cater to normative social influences are more effective in cultures that display a higher willingness to adhere to their norms, such as China and Japan ([J. Shi et al. Soc. Sci. Med. 340, 116431; 2024](#)). Elsewhere, health authorities might highlight norm adherence or use other strategies to influence the population.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests.

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