

VIRA X NACCHO Competition: FAQs

What is VIRA?

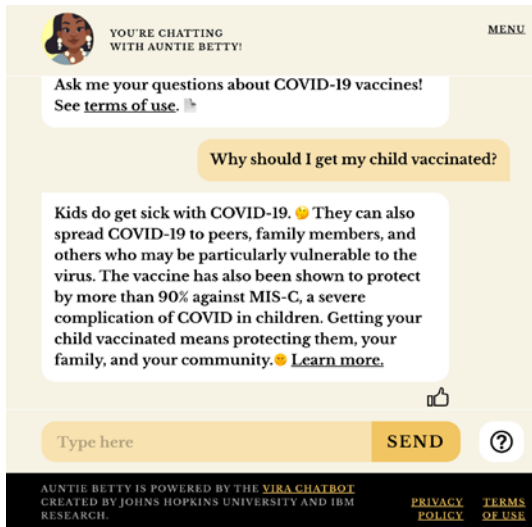
The Vaccine Information Resource Assistant (VaxChat.org) is an artificial intelligence (AI)-based chatbot developed by the Johns Hopkins International Vaccine Access Center that answers hundreds of questions about COVID-19 vaccines. Powered by IBM, VIRA is available in both Spanish and English. VIRA chatbot offers a safe and private space to ask any vaccine question. VIRA is accessible at VaxChat.org and via WhatsApp at 1-410-401-0306.

What is VIRA Local?

This is a new opportunity to create a custom version of VIRA chatbot for large health departments with active health communications reaching large populations including Spanish-speaking community members. Eligible departments include states and large cities with over 500,000 residents. Through VIRA Local, health departments can create their own branded version of the VIRA chatbot with custom colors and other branding elements to ensure the product feels appropriate, authentic, and trusted for local community members. **The deadline to apply to use VIRA Local is September 15, 2022.** Applicants will be considered by completing a short [survey](#) with basic information about their health department. This survey will help us understand how we can partner so that VIRA can best support the communities you serve. ***We are particularly excited to work with departments that propose creative and compelling strategies – please do let us know how you envision promoting VIRA to your community! Spaces are limited, we encourage you to fill out the survey at your earliest convenience!***

As an example, VIRA partnered with the Pamoja Institute to create Auntie Betty X VIRA (auntiebetty.ca). Auntie Betty uses VIRA technology to recognize users' questions expressed in their own words, responding with content tailored to address the concerns of the Black community in Toronto, Canada. VIRA Local partners like Auntie Betty showcase a custom-branded user interface with responses tailored for its target community. VIRA supported Auntie Betty with the technology and content review. Auntie Betty created

a communication campaign including presenting the chatbot at a street festival, inviting families to take photos in a photobooth, and offering photo strips with a link to the AuntieBetty.ca website (see below).



Our jurisdiction serves fewer than 500,000 people. Are we able to use VIRA?

Yes! VIRA can be embedded on web pages to help health departments promote reliable and evidence-based COVID information. By embedding VIRA on your health department website, agencies provide scientifically vetted and constantly updated information for web visitors. In fact, VIRA is now used by health departments in seven states. See the example below from Louisiana.

VIRA is free to use and can be embedded in English or Spanish by adding a short piece of code: `<script id="vaxchat-frame-js" src="https://vaxchat.org/embed"></script>`. VIRA can also be embedded in Spanish by using this code: `<script id="vaxchat-frame-js" src="https://vaxchat.org/es/embed"></script>`.



How long is the review process to request a customized VIRA chatbot?

For organizations seeking to create a VIRA Local product, please submit a request by September 15. We will review applications, request additional information if needed, and communicate our decisions by October 1.

Guidance on vaccines changes a lot—eligibility, boosters, etc. Is VIRA always up to date?

VIRA's team includes science communicators and vaccine scientists at the Johns Hopkins International Vaccine Access Center who continually review the latest evidence and work closely with domestic and international health agencies. We work quickly to adjust VIRA's responses to reflect the dynamic nature of COVID-19 vaccine evidence and policy, with the chatbot's response database updated on a weekly or more frequent basis.

What personnel commitments are required?

VIRA's technology represents an estimated \$2 million in investments from partners. We only ask in return that your team actively integrates the VIRA chatbot link and WhatsApp number as a featured resource with your other COVID-19 resources and that your team promotes VIRA along with related health campaigns (e.g., flu shots) through all media. All jurisdictions can use VIRA on their websites for free. Some jurisdictions using VIRA Local will seek to customize the chatbot's responses for their community by rewriting some of the responses, but this is optional.

One area that requires personnel contributions, for those using VIRA Local, is marketing the chatbot. VIRA Local partners will launch their custom chatbots with a press release, paid media, and commit personnel support over the course of 6 months to ensure adequate community reach. VIRA’s team provides sample social media content including videos and graphics tailored for English- and Spanish-speaking audiences.


What do people ask the chatbot and how is this information used?

When people use VaxChat.org, VIRA on WhatsApp, or an embedded version of the chatbot, for instance on a local health department’s website, VIRA stores user queries. This allows the conduct of statistical analysis to understand the leading vaccine concerns of VIRA’s users and how concerns change over the course of the pandemic. The VIRA data corpus is fully anonymous, disconnected from I.P. address or other identifying information. As an example, the leading questions users asked VIRA in June 2022 were as follows:

- Leading English-languages questions (June, web)
 - Will I get a booster shot?
 - Can children get the vaccine?
 - Will the vaccine make me sterile or infertile?
- Leading Spanish-language questions (June, WhatsApp)
 - I'm concerned the vaccine will make me sick.
 - How do I convince my friends and family to get the vaccine?
 - Will I need a booster shot?

For VIRA Local partners, we will provide social listening data for queries on an agency’s website(s) on a regular (e.g., bimonthly) basis, sorted by English and Spanish-speaking users. Insight quality will depend on the volume of web traffic.

Compare Options — How VIRA Can Help in Your Community

	VIRA Local	Embed VIRA
Cost to Jurisdictions	Free	Free
Eligible Jurisdictions	500,000 or more constituents	Open to all!
What Users See	Fully Custom Design Chatbot for use on one or more websites	
VIRA’s Answers	Custom, co-created with VIRA team	Standard

Social Listening	Custom Bimonthly Reports	Sign up for email updates on national social listening trends at vaxchat.org
Marketing Barter	Partner will launch custom VIRA Local with press release, paid media, commit personnel support (e.g., health educators) for 6 months	Nothing required! Suggest partners make an announcement inviting community members to try VIRA through social media and newsletters.
Tech Support by VIRA	Tech support to launch and maintain	N/A
Example	Auntie Betty	Louisiana's Pediatric Vaccine Champions