

Communication Guidelines Important factors for health communication in Europe

Resource: **Communication Guidelines – Important factors for health communication in Europe**

Objective: This summary contains general health crisis communication strategies and recommendations for communicating with various stakeholders during a health crisis. The summary is extracted from our current knowledge regarding health crisis communication.

Health risk communication recommendations

Communication efforts and content differ during the different crisis phases:

- pre-crisis: communicate risk messages, warnings, preparations through communication and education campaigns targeted to the public and the response community
- initial event: communicate uncertainty reduction messages, self-efficiency, reassurance through rapid communication to the general public and to affected groups
- maintenance: ongoing uncertainty reduction, self-efficiency enhancement and reassurance through communication to the general public and to affected groups
- resolution: updates regarding resolution, discussions about causes and new risks through public communication campaigns directed towards the general public and affected groups
- evaluation: discussions of adequacy of response, consensus about lessons and new understandings of risks addressed to agencies and the response community

General recommendations

- Be clear when and if you are facing a health crisis or health emergency
- Be prepared: Crisis management does not start with a crisis, but needs good preparation
- Evaluate: Crisis management does not stop with a crisis, but needs to evaluate past actions in order to improve future actions
- Emphasize and improve crisis communication taking into account all communications between stakeholders who are most directly involved in dealing with or are affected by threat(s) that can harm human health
- Crisis communication efforts start long before a crisis occurs and must continue after the direct threat is over
- Establish good stakeholder relationships in order to stabilize reputation and trustworthiness.
- The main priority of health crisis communication is to warn people and inform them about possible harms and measures to prevent them
- Meet the needs of the media: establish long-term relationships, tell the truth, be accessible and respect deadlines
- Engage professional communicators who are used to translate scientific knowledge about a health crisis into comprehensive, but simple and accurate information
- Offer well prepared press releases that fit the individual needs of each kind of media
- Provide messages that are simple, timely, accurate, relevant, credible and consistent



Use the appropriate language following these 13 rules:

1. Do not assume
2. Keep language simple and plain
3. Keep it short
4. Cover one idea in a sentence
5. Use paragraphs
6. Use double space
7. Be honest and transparent
8. Do not shy away from uncertainty
9. Say only what is necessary
10. Be precise and accurate
11. Use positive statements
12. Use positive verbs
13. Express empathy

Use social media following these 12 rules:

1. Make strategic choices and understand the level of effort
2. Go where people are
3. Adopt low-risk tools first
4. Make sure messages are science-based
5. Create portable content
6. Facilitate viral information sharing
7. Encourage participation
8. Leverage networks
9. Provide multiple formats
10. Consider mobile technologies
11. Set realistic goals
12. Learn from metrics and evaluate your efforts

