How to communicate during different phases of health crisis

Resource:	**Better Practices – How to communicate during different phases of health crisis**
	The following summary is meant to remind the reader of the key health risk communication phases. The text contains key information on how to manage health crisis communication at each phase of the crisis progression.
Objective:	In Europe, health crisis management planning is highly fragmented and health crisis communication is generally discussed only briefly in existing crisis management plans and guidelines.
	Health crisis communication can be defined as all (risk-related) communications between those stakeholders who are most directly involved to deal with, or are affected by, threat(s) that can harm human health, regardless of whether these threats are slowly or rapidly emerging.

Communication before during and after a health crisis

The model that has come to dominate the response to health crisis events, especially in the USA, is called Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) and is being used by health managers extensively. The Health crisis communication strategies and recommendations provided below are based on this document.

CERC is based on a five level crisis model: pre-crisis (I), initial event (II), maintenance (III), resolution (IV) and evaluation (V) (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Different communication strategies are employed depending on the crisis level attained.

I. Pre-crisis (Risk Messages; Warnings; Preparations)

Initiate communication and education campaigns targeted to both the public and the response community to   facilitate:

- Monitoring and recognition of emerging risks
- General public understanding of risk
- Public preparation for the possibility of an adverse event
- Changes in behaviour to reduce the likelihood of harm (self-efficiency)
- Specific warning messages regarding some eminent threat
- Alliances and cooperation with agencies, organizations and groups
- Development of consensual recommendations by experts and first responders
- Message development and testing for subsequent stages

II. Initial Event (Uncertainty Reduction; Self-efficiency; Reassurance)

Rapid communication to the general public and to affected groups seeking to establish …

- Empathy, reassurance, and reduction of the emotional turmoil
- Designated crisis/agency spokespersons and formal channels and methods of communication
- General and broad-based understanding of the crisis circumstances, consequences and anticipated outcomes based on available information
- Reduction of crisis-related uncertainty
- Specific understanding of emergency management and medical community responses
- Understanding of self-efficiency and personal response activities (how/where to get more information)

III. Maintenance (Ongoing Uncertainty Reduction; Self-efficiency Reassurance)

Communication to the general public and to affected groups seeking to facilitate …

- More accurate public understandings of ongoing risks
- Understanding of background factors and issues
- Broad-based support and cooperation with response and recovery efforts
- Feedback from affected publics and correction of any misunderstandings/rumours
- Ongoing explanation and reiteration of self-efficiency and personal response activities (how/where to get more information) mentioned in Stage II.
- Informed decision making by the public based on understanding of risks/benefits

IV. Resolution (Updates Regarding Resolution; Discussions about Causes and New Risks/New Understandings of Risk)

Public communication and campaigns directed toward the general public and affected groups seeking to …

- Inform and persuade about ongoing clean-up, remediation, recovery and rebuilding efforts
- Facilitate broad-based, honest, and open discussion and resolution of issues regarding cause, blame, responsibility and adequacy of response.
- Improve/create public understanding of new risks and new understandings of risk, as well as new risk avoidance behaviours and response procedures
- Promote the activities and capabilities of agencies and organizations to reinforce positive corporate identity and image

V. Evaluation (Discussions of Adequacy of Response; Consensus about Lessons and New Understandings of Risks)

Communication directed toward agencies and the response community to …

- Evaluate and assess responses, including communication effectiveness
- Document, formalize and communicate lessons learned
- Determine specific actions to improve crisis communication and crisis response capability
- Create linkages to pre-crisis activities (Stage I)

References: Reynolds, B. & Seeger, M. W. (2005). Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication as an Integrative ; Model. Journal of Health Communication, 10(1), 43-55.