

Introduction- Communications Guidance

Bad communication practices can lead to negative public health outcomes during a crisis response. Harmful individual and community behaviors, such as panic, can be mitigated with effective emergency risk communication. Strategic communications activities and keeping people informed in a calm manner before, during and after an influenza pandemic can guide the public, the news media, school staff, and families. This should help comply with health measures and aid in a sense of normalcy. Emergency messages will need to be communicated to highly diverse populations.

The Department of Health has an Emergency Communications Toolkit webpage, listing resources to help aid during a disease outbreak, natural disaster, or other public health emergency. It lists templates, checklists, and fact sheets. You will need to customize your materials according to your community.

OSPI also has a Proposed K–12 School Emergency Communications Guidance addresses the essential elements that schools will need to address as a part of their preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts.

The Crisis Communication Life Cycle is taken from the Center for Disease Control Pan Flu Risk Communication Manual. The Crisis Communications life cycle gives guidance on how to communicate during various phases of an emergency. Another useful link is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control's Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication.

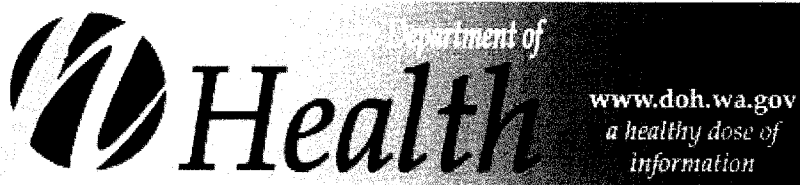
<http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/pdf/CERC-PandemicFlu-OCT07.pdf>

The manual highlights important issues such as:

- providing guidance on how to develop an emergency communications plan
- isolation
- stigmatization
- communication triggering events.

Also included in this section are templates and samples of crisis communications and news releases which can be adapted to suit specific needs.

The Communicating with Special Needs Populations PowerPoint presentation from San Mateo, CA highlights message dissemination and disaster planning. These issues may arise during a crisis and emphasize the need for more planning and collaboration with the community.



Emergency Communications Toolkit

Toolkit Main Page

The resources on this site are intended for public health and emergency response partners only. Resources for the public can be found on our [Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response \(PHEPR\) site](#).

This toolkit was created to help you during a disease outbreak, natural disaster or other public health emergency. These templates, checklists and fact sheets are designed to give you a head start when planning an emergency response.

Resources on this website were developed by the Washington State Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or other trusted federal and local public health partners.

You will need to customize materials with information about your agency or location, and real-time details about the emergency situation.

Always work with your assigned public information staff on communication issues.

First response. These communication resources will help you decide which first steps to take when an emergency, attack or outbreak occurs. These checklists and materials are designed to help you make decisions and establish priorities. Use these resources as part of pre-event planning, and during the chaotic first hours of an emergency.

News releases. These sample draft news releases are designed to help you develop a quick response during the crucial first hours of a crisis. The news release templates must be customized with details specific to your agency and the current situation. Coordinate all news releases with your assigned public information staff and follow your agency's emergency communications procedures.

Emergency Topics. These tools have been developed to help you provide information to the public during a disease outbreak or bioterrorism attack. Included are fact sheets, sample news releases and other information.



Medication centers and patient education. These materials were developed for use in medication centers (points of dispensing - PODs). Customizing resources now will help save valuable time in an emergency. This section includes a fact sheet about medication centers and how the public might use them during an emergency.

Resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- Communicating in the First Hours Web site. Fact sheets, templates, B-roll footage and more resources for use in the first hours of an emergency from the CDC.
- CDC List of Materials. Alphabetical list of diseases and emergencies with Podcasts, scripts, fact sheets and other materials.

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication course. This course was designed for those who will perform crisis and risk communication and media relations in the event of a public health emergency.

Proposed K–12 School Emergency Communications Guidance

K–12 schools in Washington State are challenged by the potential for natural and human-caused emergencies and disasters. State law requires the K–12 public school system to develop and maintain comprehensive safe school plans that address the major safety threats to a school environment, and collaborate with local community safety agencies to develop plans that work for students, staff, parents and community members. This guidance document addresses the essential elements of communication that schools need to address as part of their preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts.

Policy Recommendation

All K–12 schools in Washington State shall adopt policies, procedures and practices that provide for the most effective means of communication when emergencies and disasters impact schools. The elements of a school emergency communications plan includes, but is not limited to:

1. The ability to communicate within the school district to notify, coordinate and authorize actions appropriate to the type of emergency or disaster; and,
2. The ability to communicate with those outside of the school district, to notify emergency management and response agencies, the media, parents, personnel, and the community of the status of the school and the plans to address the immediate situation.

Emergency Communication System Elements

As part of a school district's comprehensive safe schools plan, an annual review should occur to assess the district's capabilities of using a variety of methods to communicate during and after emergencies or disasters. The types of systems available to schools may include:

1. Telephonic notification systems
2. Cell phones
3. E-mail notification systems
4. Text Messaging systems
5. School District Web sites
6. Local community safety agency Web sites
7. Satellite phones
8. Internet-based secure communications systems (e.g., the school mapping system)
9. 800-Mhz two-way radio systems
10. Local two-way radio systems
11. Ares/Races ham radio systems
12. Local radio and television station

Crisis Communication Life Cycle

(from Centers for Disease Control Pan Flu Risk Communication Manual)



Pre-crisis

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be Prepared. • Foster alliances. • Develop consensus recommendations. • Test messages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the event with empathy. • Explain and inform the public, in simplest forms, about the risk. • Establish agency/spokesperson credibility. • Provide emergency courses of action (including how/where to get more information). • Commit to stakeholders and public to continued communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help public more accurately understand its own risks. • Provide background and encompassing information to those who need it. • Gain understanding and support for response and recovery plans. • Listen to stakeholder and audience feedback, and correct misinformation. • Explain emergency recommendations. • Empower risk/benefit decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve appropriate public response in future similar emergencies through education. • Honestly examine problems and mishaps, and then reinforce what worked in the recovery and response efforts. • Persuade the public to support public policy and resource allocation to the problem. • Promote the activities and capabilities of the agency (corporate identity reinforces – internally, too). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate communication plan performance. • Document lessons learned. • Determine specific actions to improve crisis systems or the crisis plan.
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DRAFT TEMPLATE

[Add Logo of Health Jurisdiction]

News Release

For immediate release: December 1, 2008

Contacts: [Contact 1 Name] [Contact 1 Phone]
[Contact 2 Name] [Contact 2 Phone]

[NAME OF HEALTH JURISDICTION] Investigates Unusual Illness

[NAME OF CITY OR LOCATION] — The [NAME OF HEALTH JURISDICTION] is currently investigating an unusual outbreak of an illness affecting more than [ENTER NUMBER] people.

We are working with our public health partners to identify the illness.

Since it is not known if the illness is contagious, residents and visitors are being urged to avoid crowds and public gatherings if possible and to limit their travel. People who must travel should follow-up with a health care provider if they develop symptoms.

The identified symptoms are [LIST OF SYMPTOMS].

Identifying the illness, protecting the public and working to contain this outbreak are our top priorities. Officials are interviewing patients in order to help pinpoint the source of the outbreak. Information will be released as it is confirmed.

For more information and updates, access the [NAME OF HEALTH JURISDICTION] Web site at: [HEALTH JURISDICTION WEB SITE].

DRAFT TEMPLATE

[Add Logo of Health Jurisdiction]

News Release

For immediate release: December 1, 2008

Contacts: [Contact 1 Name] [Contact 1 Phone]
[Contact 2 Name] [Contact 2 Phone]

[NAME OF DISEASE] Outbreak Confirmed in [NAME OF AREA]

[NAME OF CITY OR LOCATION] — The [NAME OF LHJ] has received confirmation that the illness affecting the [NAME OF AREA] area is [NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT].

People who were not in the [NAME OF AREA] have an extremely low chance of exposure to [NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT].

However, people who are experiencing symptoms of [NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT] should report directly to a hospital. Symptoms are [LIST OF SYMPTOMS].

[NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT] is [CONTAGIOUS OR NOT CONTAGIOUS] and [CAN OR CANNOT] be passed on to others. Symptoms of [NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT] typically develop [EXPOSURE or INCUBATION PERIOD].

[NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT] [CAN or CANNOT] be treated with [MEDICINE, VACCINE, ETC.]. [MEDICINE, VACCINE, ETC.] has been distributed to emergency responders and hospital workers to help assure their ability to continue serving the needs of the public. Additional [MEDICINE, VACCINE, ETC.] has been requested from the federal government to treat the general public. We ask that residents and visitors remain in the area so they can receive [MEDICINE, VACCINE, ETC.] as it becomes available.

We are in the process of setting up [MEDICATION or ALTERNATE CARE CENTERS] for the public and will provide information on center locations as soon as possible. Protecting the public and working to contain the outbreak continue to be our top priorities. Every effort is being made to meet the medical needs of the community.

DRAFT TEMPLATE

For more information and updates, access the [NAME OF LHJ] Web site at: [LHJ OR DOH WEB SITE AS APPLICABLE]. We have also opened a toll-free hotline for general information at [PHONE NUMBER].

NOTE: The next press conference will take place later this afternoon in the [PLACE, ROOM].
The time will be announced.

[Add Logo of Health Jurisdiction]

News Release

For immediate release: December 1, 2008

Contacts: [Contact 1 Name] [Contact 1 Phone]
[Contact 2 Name] [Contact 2 Phone]

Health District Opens Medication Centers

[NAME OF CITY OR LOCATION] — The [NAME OF LHJ] has established several medication centers for those exposed or potentially exposed to [NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT].

[MEDICATION CENTERS OR ALTERNATE CARE CENTERS] are located at [LIST CENTER LOCATIONS]. Those who feel they may have been exposed to the [NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT] because they were in [NAME OF AREA] [WHEN?] should report to the nearest [MEDICATION CENTERS OR ALTERNATE CARE CENTERS].

[NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT] is [CONTAGIOUS OR NOT CONTAGIOUS] and [CAN OR CANNOT] be passed on to others. Symptoms of [NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT] typically develop [EXPOSURE or INCUBATION PERIOD].

Symptoms are [LIST OF SYMPTOMS]. **Anyone exhibiting these symptoms should report directly to a hospital.**

At the medication center

- There is a large supply of medication.
- There is no charge.
- Staff will assist you.
- The process is simple.
- No identification is required.
- Make a list with the names, ages, weight, and allergies for each member of your family or household and bring it with you to the medication center.

Do not come to a medication center if you are ill or are showing symptoms of [NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT]. These centers are designed to dispense protective medication only.

We continue to strongly urge people to voluntarily remain in the area so they can receive appropriate medication as defense against the [NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT]. Those receiving medication from another physician, medical facility or [MEDICATION CENTERS OR ALTERNATE CARE CENTERS], should follow all instructions they receive with their prescription.

Public health personnel are working with emergency response partners to investigate this outbreak. Additional resources to meet the needs of the public are being requested from state and federal resources.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have been notified and have distributed information to other states alerting them to the situation. Public health staff and health care providers in other areas should be alert for symptoms of anthrax and should take case histories to determine if their patients were in [NAME OF AREA] area on, or since [WHEN?].

For more information and updates, access the [LHJ OR DOH AS APPLICABLE] Web site at: [WEB SITE ADDRESS]. We have also opened a toll-free hotline for general information at [PHONE NUMBER].

NOTE: The next press conference will take place later this afternoon in the [PLACE, ROOM].
The time will be announced.

DRAFT TEMPLATE

[Add Logo of Health Jurisdiction]

News Release

For immediate release: December 1, 2008

Contacts: [Contact 1 Name] [Contact 1 Phone]
[Contact 2 Name] [Contact 2 Phone]

[NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT] Update—Additional Medication Centers Opened

[NAME OF CITY OR LOCATION] — The [NAME OF LHJ] has opened [ENTER #] additional [MEDICATION or ALTERNATE CARE CENTERS] where the public can receive [TYPE OF CARE OR TREATMENT]. These sites are located at: [CENTER LOCATIONS].

The original sites continue to operate at [CENTER LOCATIONS].

We ask for the public's cooperation at the medication centers. Approximately [ENTER #] people an hour are passing through the centers.

Do not come to the medication center if you are ill or are showing symptoms of anthrax.

These centers are designed to dispense medication only. If you are ill, go to a hospital or alternate care site. Alternate care sites have been opened at [ALTERNATE CARE LOCATIONS].

At the medication center

- There is a large supply of medication.
- There is no charge.
- Staff will assist you.
- The process is simple.
- No identification is required.
- Make a list with the names, ages, weight, and allergies for each member of your family or household and bring it with you to the medication center.

[NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT] is not contagious and cannot be passed on to others.

Symptoms of [NAME OF ILLNESS OR AGENT] typically develop [EXPOSURE or INCUBATION PERIOD]. Symptoms are [LIST OF SYMPTOMS].

DRAFT TEMPLATE

For more information and updates, access the [LHJ OR DOH AS APPLICABLE] Web site at:
[WEB SITE ADDRESS]. We have also opened a toll-free hotline for general information at
[PHONE NUMBER].

[Add Logo of Health Jurisdiction]

News Release

For immediate release: December 1, 2008

Contacts: [Contact 1 Name] [Contact 1 Phone]
[Contact 2 Name] [Contact 2 Phone]

[ILLNESS / AGENT] Update—Additional Medication Centers Opened

[NAME OF CITY OR LOCATION] — The [NAME OF LHJ] has opened [ENTER #] additional medication centers where the public can receive preventive medication. These sites are located at: [LIST MEDICATION CENTERS].

The original sites located at [LIST MEDICATION CENTERS] continue to operate, along with the preventive medication being dispensed at the county checkpoints.

Additional medical personnel have been requested to open up additional sites. The health district is asking for the public's cooperation at the medication centers. Approximately [ENTER #] people an hour are being processed through the centers and there is sufficient medication for county residents and visitors.

At the medication center

- There is a large supply of medication.
- There is no charge.
- Staff will assist you.
- The process is simple.
- No identification is required.

Do not come to the medication center if you are ill. These centers are designed to dispense medication only.

For more information and updates, access the [LHJ OR DOH AS APPLICABLE] Web site at: [WEB SITE ADDRESS].

**Sample Template for
Initial News Release**

The purpose of this initial press statement is to answer the basic questions: who, what, where, when. This statement should also provide whatever guidance is possible at this point, express the association and administration's concern, and detail how further information will be disseminated. If possible, the statement should give phone numbers or contacts for more information or assistance. Please remember that this template is meant only to provide you with guidance. One template will not work for every situation.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: (name of contact)

PHONE: (number of contact)

Date of release: (date)

Headline—Insert your primary message to the public

Dateline (your location)—Two-three sentences describing current situation

Insert quote from an official spokesperson demonstrating leadership and concern for victims.

"

"

Insert actions being taken.

List actions that will be taken.

List information on possible reactions of public and ways citizens can help.

Insert quote from an official spokesperson providing reassurance.

List contact information, ways to get more information, and other resources.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE A:

Health Services will use this type of press release to announce schools remain open

For release (DATE)

Contact: (PIO NAME & NUMBER)

(COUNTY NAME) County schools are open but parents should prepare

(COUNTY NAME) schools remain open despite the pandemic flu outbreak in the county but parents are asked to prepare for possible student dismissals if the virus continues to spread.

School and county health officials are working together to monitor the situation and parents will be updated with any important information.

“At this time, we believe students can safely attend classes and schools will remain open. Our thoughts are with all of our families and children who are affected,” said (LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIAL).

If the pandemic flu continues to spread and more students become ill, health officials say they may need to dismiss students for a period of time. They urged parents to begin planning now for childcare in their home. Health officials say parents can help protect their children and prevent the spread of pandemic flu as they would colds and other flu by taking the following precautions:

- ✓ Teach your children to wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- ✓ Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of the elbow. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- ✓ Teach your children to stay at least three feet from people who are sick.
- ✓ People who are sick should stay home from work or school and avoid other people until they are better.
- ✓

Health officials point out that recommendations may change during the course of a pandemic flu outbreak. For school updates, parents can call the school district's hotline at (HOTLINE NUMBER) or the (COUNTY NAME) Health Departments' Health Emergency Information Line at (PHONE NUMBER).

For more information on pandemic flu, visit (HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONTACT INFORMATION INCLUDING WEBSITE AND HOTLINE NUMBER) or the federal government website at www.pandemicflu.gov.

<http://www.health.state.ny.us>

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE B:

Health Services will use this type of press release to announce student dismissals. A similar press release will be issued when students are allowed to return to school.

For immediate release (DATE)

Contact: (PIO NAME & NUMBER)

Health officials order student dismissals from schools in (COUNTY NAME) County. (COUNTY NAME) County health officials have ordered the dismissal of students from schools as a result of the pandemic flu outbreak in the county.

Students may be dismissed for a period of time - days or even weeks. Because the virus is easily spread from person-to-person, (COUNTY NAME) Health Department has also ordered students and children be dismissed from colleges, day care centers and preschools. Because it is unsafe for large groups of people to gather, health officials warn people to stay away from shopping malls, community centers and other places where germs can be spread.

"We know this is an anxious time for our community and our hearts go out to those who are ill. We are working closely with the schools to deal with the situation and will keep parents updated with any important information," said (LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIAL). According to (LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIAL), the purpose of student dismissals is to limit contact among children to decrease their risk of getting sick and to limit the spread of infection.

Because so many people are sick with the flu, health officials acknowledge that it may be hard to get a doctor's appointment, go to a clinic or even be seen in a hospital emergency room. They provided some tips for residents to care for the sick at home:

- ✓ Have them drink a lot of liquid (juice, water).
- ✓ Keep the sick person as comfortable as possible. Rest is important.
- ✓ For adults with fever, sore throat and muscle aches, use ibuprofen (Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol). Do not use aspirin in children or teenagers; it can cause Reye's syndrome, a life-threatening illness.
- ✓ Keep tissues and a trash bag within reach of the sick person.
- ✓ Be sure everyone in your home washes hands frequently.
- ✓ Keep the people who are sick with the flu away from the people who are not sick.

More information on pandemic flu is available on (HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONTACT INFORMATION INCLUDING WEBSITE AND HOTLINE NUMBER), or the federal government website at www.pandemicflu.gov.

<http://www.health.state.ny.us>

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE C:

Health Services will use this type of press release to announce when school reopens.

For immediate release: (DATE)

Contact: (PIO NAME & NUMBER)

Health officials advise schools may reopen in (COUNTY NAME) County

State and local health officials have advised that the influenza pandemic is under control and students may return to class if they have no flu-like symptoms.

“Because the flu spreads easily from person-to-person, please keep children who have flu-like symptoms at home,” (SCHOOL OFFICIAL) said. “Symptoms include:

fever of more than 100 degrees F. and cough or sore throat. Don’t send sick children to school—they will be excluded from class and sent home.”

Although school is re-opening, there are some people in the community who are still sick, so it is important to continue to practice healthy habits. Wash hands frequently with soap and water. If you are someplace that does not have a sink, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Always read and follow label instructions. Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth. Keep your distance from people who are coughing or sneezing. Try to stay at least three feet away—the length of a yardstick or a little more than arm’s length for most adults.

Health officials say that influenza pandemics sometimes happen in waves. This means more people could become sick in the weeks or months ahead. If more people do get sick, schools may need to close again.

More information on pandemic flu is available on (HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONTACT INFORMATION INCLUDING WEBSITE AND HOTLINE NUMBER), or the federal government website at www.pandemicflu.gov.

<http://www.health.state.ny.us>

SAMPLE KEY MESSAGES FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS:
C - SCHOOLS RE-OPEN

- Health officials have advised us that the influenza pandemic is under control and it is safe to re-open schools.
- Our school will open again on (DATE).
- At that time, students may return to class if they have no flu-like symptoms.
- Because the flu spreads easily from person-to-person, please keep children who have flu-like symptoms at home. Symptoms include: fever of more than 100 degrees F. **and** cough or sore throat.
- Don't send sick children to school—they will be excluded from class and sent home.
- Even though school is re-opening, there are still some people who are still sick. Health officials say that influenza pandemics sometimes happen in waves.
- This means more people could become sick in the weeks or months ahead. If more people do get sick, schools may need to close again.
- We will continue to give you any important information.
- Please also stay informed by paying attention to media reports.

For more information on pandemic flu and prevention, visit (HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONTACT INFORMATION INCLUDING WEBSITE AND HOTLINE NUMBER).

<http://www.health.state.ny.us>

SAMPLE KEY MESSAGES FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS:
B - STUDENT DISMISSALS

- (COUNTY NAME) County health officials have ordered the dismissal of students from schools as a result of the pandemic flu outbreak in our county.
- Students may be dismissed for an extended period of time (for example, up to 6 weeks).
- We know this is a difficult time for our community and our hearts go out to those who are ill. We are working closely with health officials to deal with the situation and will keep parents updated with any important information.
- Because pandemic flu is easily spread from person-to-person, it is unsafe for large groups of people to gather and children should stay home. The purpose of student dismissals is to decrease contact among children in order to decrease their risk of getting sick and to limit the spread of infection.
- During this time, children and adults should stay away from other people and groups, as much as possible. Health officials also advise people should not gather in other locations such as homes, shopping malls, movie theaters or community centers.
- Parents can help protect their children and prevent the spread of pandemic flu as they would colds and other flu by taking the following precautions:
 - ✓ Teach your children to wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
 - ✓ Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of the elbow.
 - ✓ Teach your children to stay at least three feet from people who are sick and stay home from work or school if you are sick.
- Recommendations may change during the course of a flu pandemic. We will make public announcements through the media and parents can contact the school district's hotline at (HOTLINE NUMBER).

For more information on pandemic flu and prevention, visit (HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONTACT INFORMATION INCLUDING WEBSITE AND HOTLINE NUMBER).

<http://www.health.state.ny.us>

SAMPLE KEY MESSAGES FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS:

A - OUTBREAK

- We know this is an anxious time for our community and our hearts go out to those who are ill. We are working closely with local health officials to deal with the situation and will keep parents updated with any important information.
- At this time, under the guidance of the county health department, we believe students can safely attend classes. Our thoughts are with all of our families and children who are affected.
- If pandemic flu continues to spread and more students become ill, health officials may need to dismiss students from schools for an extended period of time (for example, up to 6 weeks).
- The purpose of student dismissals will be to decrease contact among children in order to decrease their risk of getting sick and to limit the spread of infection. If students are dismissed, children should stay at home.
- We urge parents to plan now for the possibility of student dismissals. Arrange day care, and contact your school district for information on learning activities.
- Parents can help protect their children and prevent the spread of pandemic flu as they would colds and other flu by taking the following precautions:
 - ✓ Teach your children to wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
 - ✓ Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of the elbow.
 - ✓ Teach your children to stay away from people who are sick and stay home from work or school if you are sick.
 - ✓ Recommendations may change during the course of a flu pandemic. We will make public announcements through the media and parents can call the school district's hotline at (HOTLINE NUMBER).
- For more information on pandemic flu and prevention, visit (HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONTACT INFORMATION INCLUDING WEBSITE AND HOTLINE NUMBER).

<http://www.health.state.ny.us>

SAMPLE HEALTH OFFICER DECLARATION CLOSING SCHOOLS

To School Officials:

Based on scientific evidence and after consultation with the Office of Public Instruction (COUNTY NAME) County Health Department is ordering all schools to close immediately due to the pandemic flu epidemic in our community.

If you have any questions regarding this declaration, please call (HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONTACT INFORMATION).

Because the virus is spread easily from person-to-person, it is no longer safe for children to attend class. Colleges, day care centers and preschools also have been ordered to close.

Please inform your students' parents and guardians immediately that school facilities will be closed to all activities, including sport and non-academic events, and may remain closed for an extended period of time.

The purpose of closing schools is to decrease contact among children to reduce their risk of getting sick and to limit the spread of infection.

The health department will keep school officials updated as the situation changes. A press release is being issued to inform the public of this declaration.

Thank you,
Sincerely,

(NAME AND SIGNATURE OF HEALTH OFFICER)

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE C:

Health Services will use this type of press release to announce when school reopens.

For immediate release: (DATE)

Contact: (PIO NAME & NUMBER)

Health officials advise schools may reopen in (COUNTY NAME) County

State and local health officials have advised that the influenza pandemic is under control and students may return to class if they have no flu-like symptoms.

“Because the flu spreads easily from person-to-person, please keep children who have flu-like symptoms at home,” (SCHOOL OFFICIAL) said. “Symptoms include:

fever of more than 100 degrees F. and cough or sore throat. Don’t send sick children to school—they will be excluded from class and sent home.”

Although school is re-opening, there are some people in the community who are still sick, so it is important to continue to practice healthy habits. Wash hands frequently with soap and water. If you are someplace that does not have a sink, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Always read and follow label instructions. Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth. Keep your distance from people who are coughing or sneezing. Try to stay at least three feet away—the length of a yardstick or a little more than arm’s length for most adults.

Health officials say that influenza pandemics sometimes happen in waves. This means more people could become sick in the weeks or months ahead. If more people do get sick, schools may need to close again.

More information on pandemic flu is available on (HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONTACT INFORMATION INCLUDING WEBSITE AND HOTLINE NUMBER), or the federal government website at www.pandemicflu.gov.

<http://www.health.state.ny.us>

Leaving No One Behind

Communicating with Special Populations During Public Health Emergencies



Doris Y. Estremera, MPH, CHES
San Mateo County Health Department

Background

- The primary means of communication with the public will be through mainstream media channels such as television, radio and newsprint.
- However, there are members of our community that because of language, cultural, accessibility or other barriers that affect ability to receive *and* act on public health emergency information, cannot be reached effectively through mainstream communication channels.
- For the purposes of risk-communication in San Mateo County, these vulnerable populations have been defined as the following: seniors, the mentally and physically disabled (includes sensory disabilities), the homeless, the undocumented, non-English or limited-English speakers, and rural residents.
- Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) play a very important role in their communities. They have the trust and expertise to communicate with the vulnerable populations they serve.

Survey for Emergency Public Health Information and Vulnerable Populations

Message Dissemination

- Fifty-nine percent of organizations that responded to the survey reported that they were able to deliver messages during a public health emergency. In addition, 41% reported they'd be able to deliver the messages within 8 hours. Of these organizations 35% could deliver the messages in foreign language.

Disaster Plans

- 63% of CBOs that responded have an updated disaster plan. Organizations serving the culturally isolated and undocumented immigrants were least likely to report having on updated disaster plan.

The survey results demonstrated promising opportunities for collaboration in message delivery during a public health emergency and a need to further explore communication barriers, how to overcome these barriers and specifics on how we can work together to provide effective communication to vulnerable populations.

CBOs that Received Survey 295	Total Responded 91 = 31%
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Community Forums

- Three 2-hour forums were held throughout San Mateo County. 69 participants representing 51 CBOs attended
- Small Group Discussion Questions
 - During a public health emergency, would residents come to your agency for information? Could your agency reach your clientele during an emergency?
 - What barriers would your clients experience in receiving and acting on a message? What barriers are there for your agency to deliver the message?
 - What are some possible solutions to the barriers?
 - What opportunities are there for collaboration between CBOs and the Health Department?
- During the forums, CBOs were excited about the possibility of collaborating with the Health Department on risk-communication. Many felt that they could potentially offer more to the Health Department than solely outreach to their clientele. By collaborating with the Health Department on risk-communication, the CBOs are ensured timely and accurate information that is crucial for their clients and the Health Department is provided with a direct link to the vulnerable populations that it is charged to protect.

Key Interviews

- Interviews were conducted with key Health Department staff to assess internal Health Department resources, capacity and needs with regard to risk-communication with vulnerable populations.
- 22 CBOs were identified by staff as ideal collaborative partners in risk-communication during an emergency.

Memorandum Of Understanding

- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) identifies risk communication responsibilities of the Health Department and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) before a health emergency, during a health emergency and after health emergency.
- The benefit of a formal agreement is that by signing, the CBO becomes familiar with the County's risk-communication plan and understands its role in the plan.
- By having a Disaster Services Agreement with the County, CBOs are put in the official disaster plan. Officially being part of the plan gives them greater strength, options and the opportunity for reimbursement in the event of a declared emergency. MOUs get CBOs in the chain of funding.
- The CBO can also use a copy of the signed MOU to demonstrate partnership for the purpose of grant writing. Being in partnership with the County in this way may make a CBO more appealing to potential funders. This partnership can also facilitate the CBO receive Homeland Security funding, which is currently only available to government entities.

Lessons Learned

- In the event of an emergency, the Health Department will not have the capacity to reach and serve every segment of the community.
- In San Mateo County, there are numerous community-based organizations which have the credibility and capacity to deliver risk communication messages to vulnerable populations.
- There is great value in having an official partnership with CBOs as part of a county risk communication plan. A clear understanding of community expectations will help insure that critical information quickly reaches all segments of the community.

Lessons Learned (cont'd)

- MOUs are a simple mechanism to coordinate response and allow CBOs to be eligible for possible reimbursement from local, state and federal emergency response agencies.
- There are many other strategies to meet the needs of special populations that need to be explored:
 - promoting Community/Neighborhood Emergency Response Teams
 - including schools, childcare centers and churches in emergency health information distribution network
 - Incorporating disaster preparedness training and deliverables to Health Department contracts

County of Sonoma – Dept. Health Services – Public Health Risk Communication Plan to Special Populations

The County Department of Health Services is developing a Risk Communication plan to be used in the event of a public health emergency. The Plan will outline how Public Health would get messages to Sonoma County residents and will also delineate special procedures for reaching populations who either are not tuned in to mainstream media sources or who cannot respond without assistance. Your agency has been identified by a multi-disciplinary group of emergency planners as one that may be able to help disseminate information quickly in a public health emergency. Please let us know some information about your organization and service population and your comments on participating in the Public Health Risk Communications Plan.

1. Agency name _____ 2. Contact person and phone _____
3. Briefly describe your mission and target population _____
4. What special considerations should be made for your population in an emergency? _____
5. How many individuals do you currently serve? _____ 6. Where is your population primarily located? _____
7. What mechanisms do you use to reach your population (mark all that apply)?
 home visits phone calls meet at central locations e-mail other: _____
8. How does your agency currently receive emergency information? _____
9. In an emergency, would your agency be able to provide your service population with information or instructions? Yes No
10. How many people could you reach in what time frame? _____ 11. How would you reach them? _____
12. Are you in contact with groups that aren't your service population but whom you could reach in an emergency? Yes No
if so, what groups and how could you reach them? _____
13. Do you have any concerns or comments on participating in the County's Risk Communication Plan? _____

Thank you! Health Services will review all comments and look for ways to refine and consolidate communication efforts so that we reach the maximum number of people possible in the shortest time. If you have any questions, please contact Christine Love (565-4404) or Barbara Graves (565-6680).

Please fold this survey in thirds and mail to the address on the reverse or fax to Christine Love at 565-4411.

