



Health Communications During Crisis, Pandemics in an Era of Misinformation

OREGON OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH CONFERENCE
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What we will cover today

Crisis Communications & Useful Definitions

Building your Crisis Communications Plan

Key Point Summary & Resources



Crisis Communications & Useful Definitions

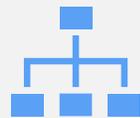
Personal Crisis Communication Roles



**COVID-19 Pandemic-
Public Information Officer
(PIO)**



**UCC Shooting-Board Chair
& Spokesperson**



**Crisis organization-
Executive Director/CEO**

A FEW Typical Communications in Health Care Settings

- ▶ Internal & external communications
- ▶ Health education targeted at changing a health behavior of patients or community (like a nutrition class or where to get your flu shot)
- ▶ Marketing and branding communications
- ▶ Responsive communications
- ▶ Multiple channels
 - ▶ Internal
 - ▶ Socials
 - ▶ Media/Press
 - ▶ Website
 - ▶ Phone/email/text
 - ▶ My chart/EHR

When a crisis hits, communications becomes both a **bigger need and a bigger challenge**. Add misinformation and disinformation and it is even more complex.

This body of work is often hard to get right, even in smooth sailing times

Communications are already difficult and complex but when a crisis hits, communications becomes both a bigger need and a bigger challenge. Add misinformation and disinformation and it is even more daunting and difficult.



KEY POINT # 1

What is an Infodemic?

"We're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic. Fake news spreads faster than this virus and it is just as dangerous." –Tedros, Director-General of the World Health Organization

Infodemic is defined (by the WHO) as: an overabundance of information, some accurate and some not-that occurs during an epidemic.

This applies not just to epidemics/pandemics but also any crisis threatening life and injury to groups of people.

Crisis

Crisis is an event or circumstance that happens, it changes something

Crisis is a significant disruption with high uncertainty

Crisis is time limited but has rapid onset and sense of urgency

Crisis requires adaptation

Some crisis response can be planned for

Some crises are novel and the level of response unprecedented

The response to crisis defines the trajectory of recovery from the crisis

**The COVID-19 pandemic was a global crisis
unlike any we've seen in our lifetimes**



Crisis

Results in
uncertainty, chaos
and safety concerns

Which then results in:

- excess of information
- lack of reliable information
- increase in misinformation & disinformation

Crisis Communications

- ▶ Crisis communications require different strategies to be effective, to reach your desired audience
- ▶ Building redundancy and multiple channels with same messages is vital
- ▶ How you present your communications and messaging are under more scrutiny than normal communications
- ▶ Be responsive and consistent (frequency) from trusted sources/spokesperson is vital



Crisis breeds Infodemics

KEY POINT #2

Comms Terms & Definitions

- ▶ **Information:** data with meaning, becomes knowledge if it resonates and is trusted
- ▶ **Infodemic:** an overabundance of information during a pandemic or crisis. Some will be accurate, some will not be. It can be a vortex or tornado of confusing information.
- ▶ **Misinformation:** accidental false information, wrong or misleading information usually unintentional and not intended to harm
- ▶ **Disinformation:** deliberate, engineered false information with malicious intent that serves a personal, political or economic agenda
- ▶ **Plain language:** using language that your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it, using only as many words as necessary and simple sentence construction
- ▶ **Message stickiness:** when information stays in a person's mind after exposure to it
- ▶ **Information Velocity:** how fast the message spreads through different communities, including web/internet platforms
- ▶ **Narrative:** a description of a series of events or a story that provides meaning to disparate pieces of information
- ▶ **Communications Health Risk:** the likelihood of misinformation/disinformation affecting the health and safety of a person or group
- ▶ **Social listening:** process of identifying, analyzing and evaluating online conversations about your crisis and/or organization



Acting on Misinformation & Disinformation

- ▶ Your role is **not** likely to censure or "police" misinformation or disinformation outside your organization
- ▶ Your role is to **add accurate and reliable information** about the crisis to the Infodemic and to do it with consistency, without significant absolutes and at a similar velocity as misinformation/disinformation and with consideration to your audience
- ▶ Your role is also to evaluate the **health risk** of the misinformation or disinformation and respond accordingly, you do not need to respond to every misinformation/disinformation

How you do this is what we'll talk about next

Know your role and
your organization's
role in responding to
misinformation and
disinformation



KEY POINT #3



Building Your Crisis Communications Plan

The Communications Team

Plan and identify roles **before** the crisis

- ▶ Identify a trusted, informed and well-spoken **spokesperson**
- ▶ Identify a **behind the scenes** monitoring and developing messaging role, preparing questions, filtering noise and knowing when to respond. Crafting continuity of message across all platforms
- ▶ Identify IT/Video production **expertise**
- ▶ Identify people/**expertise** to help you with design, branding, health education-print, social media and website
- ▶ Set up a community partners communications group or **JIC**
 - ▶ Who are other PIOs/Communications professionals in the community?
- ▶ Develop trusted relationships with **local media**

Identify multiple
comms roles &
connect with people
that will hold those
roles **BEFORE** a crisis
happens.



KEY POINT #4

Example: Douglas County COVID Communications Team

Our team was a multidisciplinary group comprised of medical & public health professionals, health educators, multiple PIO's, video and media production experts and people experienced with crisis communications

Spokesperson extraordinaire & content expert strategist	Dr. Bob/Public Health Officer
Video production and design	Media Consultancy Firm (local)
Content monitoring, scanning & channeling questions	Public Health PIO
Social media	PIO & Consultant
Daily communications/updates and media responses	Joint Information Center (JIC), Multiple PIOs, Elected Officials and Authorities
Infographics/health education materials	PIO & Consultant
Hotline communication coordination	PIO
Website build, regular updates	PIO
Communications & outreach for testing and vaccine clinics	PIO
Community health care partner vaccine campaign-Umpqua Valley Health Care Coalition	PIO representation from 10 health care & Tribal organizations

Build multiple channels



- ▶ Social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube)
- ▶ Print and radio
- ▶ Website
- ▶ Visual (infographics) communications
- ▶ Daily updates on numbers and emerging health recommendations via email & FlashAlert
- ▶ Twice weekly health community partner updates video call
- ▶ Hotline

Build these before a crisis

Infographic examples

HAVE SYMPTOMS? GET TESTED.



COUGH



FEVER



SHORTNESS OF BREATH



MUSCLE ACHES AND PAINS



DIARRHEA



SORE THROAT



DECREASED SENSE OF SMELL OR TASTE

If you have cough, fever, shortness of breath, muscle aches and pains, diarrhea, sore throat or decreased sense of smell or taste, talk to your Health Care Provider about getting tested.

DOUGLAS PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK
douglaspublichealthnetwork.org



Should I get tested for COVID-19?

I am currently sick with COVID-19-like symptoms: (cough, shortness of breath, diarrhea, nausea, loss of smell or taste, muscle aches, runny nose.)



YES!

As soon as possible.

WAIT...

At least 5-8 days after your last exposure. Most people start feeling sick 5-8 days after exposure, but symptoms may appear in as few as 2 or as long as 14 days. A negative test does NOT mean you can end your self-quarantine.



I am not sick but have been in contact with someone who is positive for COVID-19.



NO.

Unless you feel ill or are specifically directed by DPHN, testing is probably not needed.

I am not sick but I have been in contact with someone who is positive.

DOUGLAS PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK Learn more at douglaspublichealthnetwork.org or call (541) 440-3571.

I've been told that my child was exposed to a COVID case at school. **What do I do?**

Quarantine is recommended for close cohort contacts of a known COVID-19 case.

If your school has notified you that your child has been exposed to COVID and they need to **QUARANTINE**, this is what you should do:



Stay home.

Except to get medical care. Limit visitors unless they are already in your household. This includes day care providers, grandparents and other high-risk visitors.



Check your temperature.

Monitor your child's temperature at least daily.



Watch for other symptoms.

Aside from fever, COVID-19 symptoms include cough, difficulty breathing, headache, runny nose, diarrhea, nausea, loss of smell or taste, muscle aches, and/or fatigue.



Wear a face covering.

When your child is around others, like household members, or when you enter a healthcare provider's office.



Wash your hands.

Model good hand hygiene by washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer.



Stay in a specific room.

If your child is sick, its best to stay in a designated area away from others if possible. If the child is not old enough to be alone, try to keep the same adult with the child, using a designated toilet/bathroom if possible.



Get tested.

If you have symptoms and its been 5 days or more since exposure. If you need a safe to return to work letter contact DPHN.

When is it okay to end self-quarantine?

14 days after your last exposure
*Oregon Health Authority removed the testing out of quarantine and extended quarantine for all contacts back to 14 days in April 2021.

If your child develops symptoms or you have questions about COVID-19, please call our hotline.

DOUGLAS PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK

Learn more at douglaspublichealthnetwork.org or call (541) 464-6550

Help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by following the **3W's**. Please continue to ...



WEAR
a recommended face covering



WATCH
your distance



WASH
your hands

Help us keep our community safe and strong!

DOUGLAS PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK

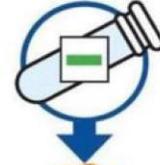
COVID-19 Incubation Timeline

Day 1



Jane was exposed to COVID-19

Day 5



Jane felt well and tested negative for COVID-19.

Day 8



Jane enjoyed Thanksgiving with 17 family members **while contagious.**

Day 10



Jane developed symptoms and tested positive for COVID-19. **Don't be like Jane this holiday season!**

The virus doesn't take a holiday. Please celebrate safely.

DOUGLAS PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK

COVID-19 Hotline
(541) 464-6550

8 am-5 pm, 7 days per week

Visit douglaspublichealthnetwork.org for the latest updates on testing and FAQ

Using our “channels” for other public health issues

► [Smoke and home made filter how to video](#)

Poor Air Quality
How wildfire smoke can affect your health

Wildfire smoke creates tiny particles in the air that can cause concerns.

Poor air quality can affect your health.
It can cause chest pain, irregular heartbeat, shortness of breath, headaches, sore throat, coughing and eye irritation.

People most at risk:
People with heart and lung issues, children, pregnant women, adults over 65 and smokers may be sicker faster.

Protect your health.

- Limit time outside.
- Close windows and doors when possible.
- Set air conditioner to recirculate and use a HEPA filter.
- Drink plenty of water.
- If you are sick, call your doctor.

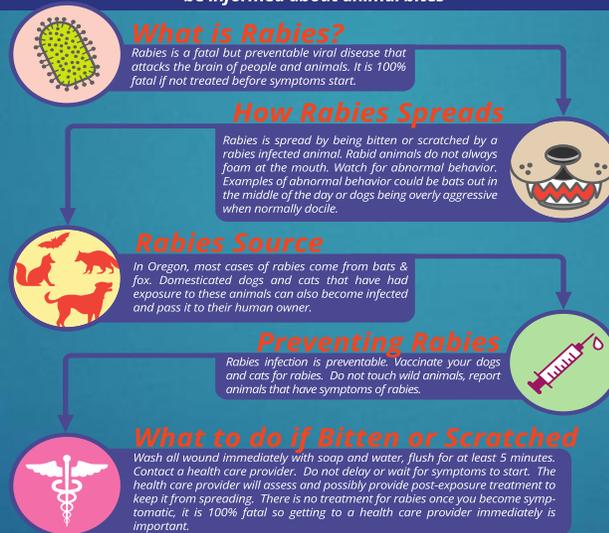
Check your local air quality at oregonsmoke.blogspot.com or the OregonAir application on your smartphone.

Good Moderate Unhealthy for Some Unhealthy for All Very Unhealthy for All Hazardous for All

For more information, visit douglaspublichealthnetwork.org or call the Hotline at 541-464-6550.

RABIES

be informed about animal bites



DOUGLAS PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK
douglaspublichealthnetwork.org • 541-957-3716

Stop Overdose. Be Prepared. Get Naloxone.

Save a Life.

DOUGLAS PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK
douglaspublichealthnetwork.org

SUMMER SAFETY

Summer Heat Safety Tips

- Wear lightweight, light colored clothing
- Stay hydrated and drink plenty of water, avoid alcohol
- Take it easy and plenty of breaks
- Slow down, avoid strenuous activity
- Check on elderly neighbors with no AC
- Never leave children unattended in a hot car
- Call 911 if someone has symptoms of heat stroke

Summer Pet Safety Tips

- Make sure your pet has fresh, clean drinking water
- Make sure your pet has shade to get out of the direct sun
- Never leave your pet in a hot car

DOUGLAS PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK
www.douglaspublichealthnetwork.org



Build your
"channels" and
audiences before
a crisis

KEY POINT #5

What channels/how?

COVID Pandemic Comms

- ▶ 675+ daily updates, 7 days a week pushed out to over 15K people daily
- ▶ Hotline set up March 13th, 2020. 7 Days a week, over 10K calls and still running
- ▶ 149 Facebook live events, twice weekly during the peak of the pandemic
- ▶ 30+ educational videos such as how to safely trick or treat during COVID
- ▶ Multiple “mythbuster” type videos on YouTube channel
- ▶ 50+ infographics built and distributed
- ▶ Weekly radio appearances, hundreds of interviews on TV and print media
- ▶ It’s your turn campaign (DPHN) and It’s Our Turn community partner campaign
- ▶ COVID Question of the Day-social media
- ▶ Website: outreach, infographics, vaccine clinic sign up, changing eligibility comms
- ▶ 50 COVID conversations and more

Active Shooter Event Comms

- ▶ Immediately reached out to other PIOs, established a JIC
- ▶ Identified organization spokesperson within the first few hours
- ▶ Drove all requests, in a coordinated fashion, through PIO team of 4
- ▶ Set up hotline within 4 hours
- ▶ Website and other comms were down from traffic, so we set up a skeleton site and switched over domains
- ▶ Focused on local media requests v.s. the hundreds of requests we were getting daily. National and international media had access via planned press conferences
- ▶ Reiterated to staff, faculty, volunteers and students that they don’t have to talk to the media and to drive them to the PIO team

Top 10 Lessons Learned during COVID-19 Response

1. Use communications professionals and listen to them, build an internal and external team
2. Do not get ensnared in controversy, focus on your health message and role
3. Don't just say it louder, you need many channels/modalities to reach all audiences
4. Manage external messaging shifts and changing landscape of advice by not speaking in absolutes, do not act like we know everything
5. Be responsive and consistent-be the certainty during times of uncertainty
6. Devote resources specifically to communications, devote extra resources during crisis
7. **Redundancy**, be ready to change the face of the message/spokesperson but have them amplify your same message
8. Social media is its own animal, just because you have your own personal FB page doesn't equate to being able to manage an agency page. Hire professionals to help with social media & social listening/monitoring
9. Find balance between communicating information, directives/recommendations, scary realities and celebrating successes/positives
10. You don't have to respond to every request, every controversy, every question. Triage your efforts



After a Crisis Communications Event

Hotwash it!

- ▶ **Get into a regular routine of doing a hotwash/evaluation and situational awareness meeting of your core team on a regular basis during the crisis.**
 - ▶ **Use the notes/discussion from these hotwash exercises to incorporate into your after action/things in two categories:**
 - ▶ **What we should definitely do again/went well**
 - ▶ **What didn't go well/should be thought through**





Debrief and track
lessons learned
(the good, the bad
and the ugly) after
a crisis. Hotwash!

KEY POINT #6



Resources

Crisis Communication Resources

- ▶ [Public Health Collaborative](#)
- ▶ How to Build an Infodemic Insights report
 - ▶ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240075658>
- ▶ Example of Communication Tracking & Response, Project VCTR
 - ▶ <https://projectvctr.com/>
- ▶ FEMA PIO trainings
 - ▶ <https://training.fema.gov/programs/empp/pio/>

Key Points

Communications are already difficult and complex but when a crisis hits, communications becomes both a bigger need and a bigger challenge. Add misinformation and disinformation and it is even more daunting and difficult.

Crisis breeds Infodemics.

Know your role and your organization's role in responding to misinformation and disinformation.

Identify multiple comms roles & connect with people that will hold those roles BEFORE a crisis happens.

Build your "channels" and audiences before a crisis.

Debrief and track lessons learned (the good, the bad and the ugly) after a crisis. Hotwash!

Thank you for your kind attention today!

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