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KENYA MEDICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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In Search of Better Health

Emergency Communications for COVID-19

"Do your part to stop stigma and combat COVID-19"

(WHO Director-Genera)

https://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/unifeed/asset/2536/2536753/?jwsource=cl

Working Definitions

- Emergency Communication
  - Provide information about an unexpected crisis
    - *To explain how the crisis happened and what (if anything) the audience should do*

- Risk Communication
  - Provide information about the potential outcome of a behavior or exposure and how to mediate risks.
   - *To empower decision making*

Working Definitions cont'

- Emergency Risk Communications (ERC)
  - Encompasses the urgency of crisis (disaster or disease outbreak) communication with the need to communicate risks and benefits to target audiences

    - *Explain crisis and empower decision making*

Emergency Risk Communication Objectives

- To provide accurate and timely information

- To ensure essential coordination

- To inform the public of potential risks and steps being taken

- To aid those at risk to make the best possible decisions

- To prevent or contain the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19), and minimize social and economic disruption
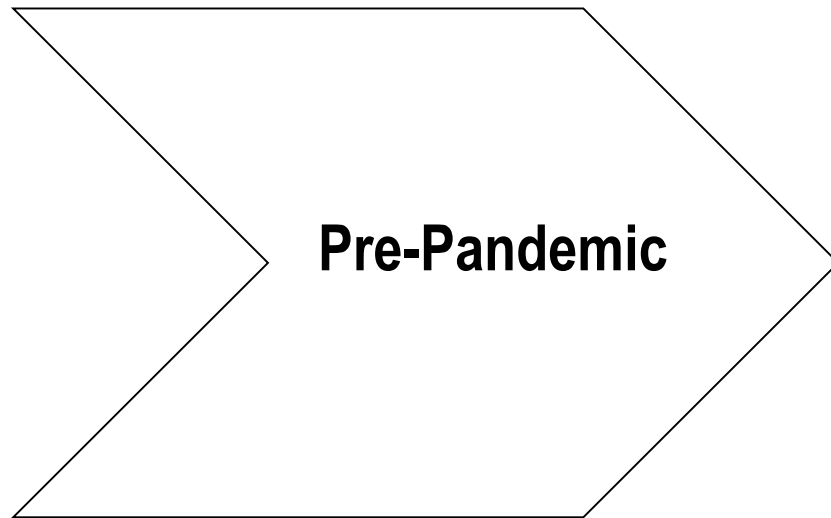
ERC Lifecycle

Pre-Pandemic → Pandemic → Post-Pandemic
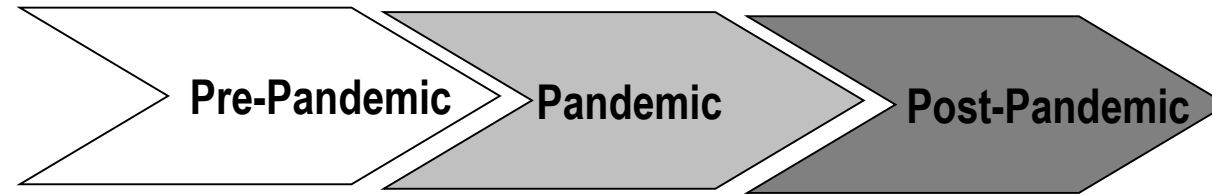
Each period has unique communications
and information requirements . . .

Pre-Crisis Preparations

Pre-Pandemic Communication Preparations

Goal: Anticipate and prepare for the needs of the public, the media and their partners

Pre-Pandemic

- Inform stakeholders about the potential crisis

- Foster alliances with key stakeholders (identify core working group partners)

- Conduct behavioral science research

Risk Communication Plans

- Establish a multi-Agency communications working group with relevant ministries and partners

- Integrate risk communications as part of pandemic preparedness planning

- Sensitize partners about the potential crisis and appropriate preparedness plans

- Develop effective partnerships with the media and other stakeholders/partners for the exchange and dissemination of accurate and timely information

Working Group Goals

- Establish good inter-agency communication with members and partners prior to an outbreak

- Establish lines of command within the team with a designated spokesperson

- Develop a communications strategy

- Share communication plans with other working groups, government officials and partners

- Decentralize communication plan

Entry ports and Central command post

- Identify and coordinate relevant entry ports) and Central authorities involved in communications

- Determine agency Chain of command for emergency risk communications

- Train officers on emergency risk communications related to COVID-19

- Establish terms of reference for each port of entry teams regarding risk communication

Potential In-Country Partners

➢Public and private health care providers

➢Veterinarians/other animal health workers

➢Government and private media

➢Advertising and other marketing agencies

➢School authorities

➢Religious groups

➢Community leaders

➢Market associations, women's and youth groups

➢Police, Government agencies and other security

Communication Development

- Identify dangerous/risky beliefs and practices
- Identify target audiences and potential communication channels to reach those audiences
- Elaborate messages for each period of the pandemic
- Test and modify messages
- Develop informational materials
- Train media and others involved in community mobilization and interpersonal communication on delivery of messages
- Distribute materials/disseminate messages to inform the public during the pre-crisis stage

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Criteria for Selection of Target Audiences

- Which groups are most vulnerable to the health problem?
- Which groups are most adversely affected by the health problem?
- Which groups are large enough to justify intervention?
- Which groups can be easily reached and influenced?
- Which groups are most likely to change factors contributing to the risk?

Potential Audiences

- County administration
- Villagers
- Community leaders (Religious, women gps etc)
- School teachers and students
- Health care providers
- Government and private agencies
- Travelers
- Media
- Veterinarians or agricultural specialists

Formative Research

- Understand the target audience
  - Knowledge about COVID-19
  - How to reach (e.g. media, person-to-person)
  - Information needs

- Determine which risky behaviors can potentially be modified

- Understand how to motivate (facilitators and barriers) to accept health recommendations

- Ensure that messages are contextually relevant and the language is appropriate

Behavioral Analysis

➢ What risky behaviors related to the health problem is the target audience presently performing?

  ▪ Physical contact with a sick (person) without protection
  ▪ Failing to use protective gear in handling suspected individuals as well as sick persons

➢ What is the desired behavior?

➢ What are the barriers and facilitators to carrying out the desired behavior?

➢ Are there environmental or economic constraints that make it impossible for the behavior to occur?

Communication Approaches

➢ Mass Media
  - TV, radio
  - Newspaper supplement
  - Social media (WhatsApp, Twitters etc)

➢ Direct Communication
  - Public meetings/barazas, public announcements/village criers, one-on-one interactions, telephone contact

➢ Printed Materials
  - Flyers, fact sheets, wallet cards

Summary

- Gather an in-depth understanding of knowledge and behaviors relating to COVID-19

- Apply findings: inform communication strategy, message development and dissemination activities

- Conduct on-going surveillance to track changes

Responding to a Crisis

Pandemic
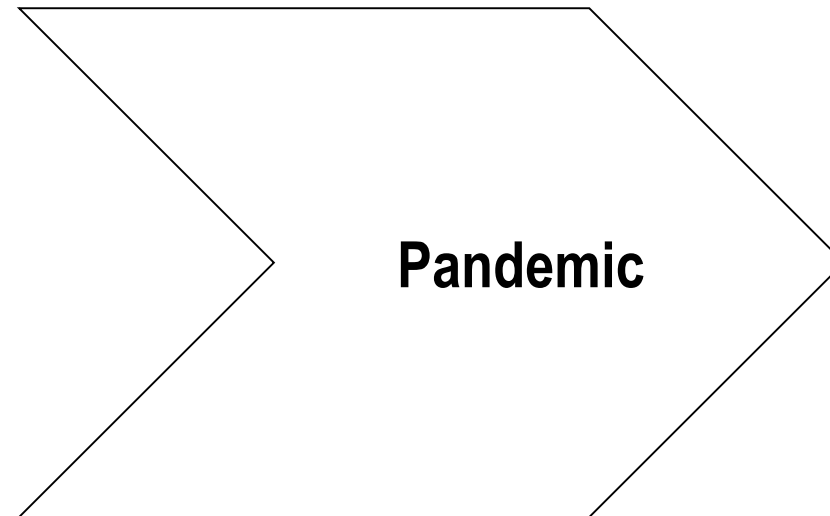
Message Development

- Adapt risk communication messages for COVID-19

- Modify messages based on audience

- Consider resources available and the control measures used (e.g. protective equipment, isolation/quarantine, community health interventions)

- Choose communication channels and materials according to the local communication infrastructure and population affected

Message Development, cont.

➢ Consider economic and social feasibility of proposed interventions

➢ Take into account geopolitics and make decision wisely e.g.

- Restriction of unnecessary travels to the affected countries

➢ Use simple and appropriate language

➢ Use graphics to demonstrate message conveyed

Considerations—Defining the Problem

NATURE OF DISEASE

➢ A pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, China

➢ First reported to the WHO Country Office in China on 31 December 2019.

➢ The affected persons have >97% chances of survival

➢ The outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020.

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

1. Don't over-reassure
2. Address existing concerns before providing updates
3. Emphasize the process in place
4. Give people appropriate instructions
5. Acknowledge people's fears
6. Avoid mistakes or confusion

Establishing Trust and Credibility

1. Respond in a timely fashion
2. Be accurate and consistent
3. Be honest and transparent
4. Show empathy
5. Make yourself understood
6. Take the local context into account
7. Honor promises

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Communication Challenges

- Convincing people about the potential magnitude of the problem
- Targeting all populations including foreigners
- Communicating with minority groups
- Promoting measures that do not impact on economic livelihoods and are culturally acceptable
- Coordinating information with neighboring countries, particularly in border areas

COMMUNICATION

Three elements of communication:

1. Communicator (status, credibility, appeal, trust and presentation)

2. Message (verbal/non verbal, appeal/fear, presentation style)

3. Recipient (attitude, education, environment and persuasibility)

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

An effective communication strategy should address 4 desired objectives:

1. Define the key goals of the communication exercise by identifying what the main issues are and what messages must be communicated.

2. Adopt an open multi-displinary approach to communication process by involving where possible all stakeholders.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY Cont'd

3.   Include information from all relevant sources (stakeholders) and avoid presenting an obviously one sided or biased viewpoint.

4.   Prepare a balance presentation for messages being communicated and avoid making claims that are clearly difficult to support.

Summary

➢ Risk communication involves providing information to allow individuals or communities to make the best possible decisions

➢ A key to success is to provide consistent, accurate and timely information about the threat or risk

➢ Communication efforts must be coordinated across agencies and the media and at different levels of government

➢ Governments and key stakeholders should develop a communications strategy for all periods before an emergency occurs