

Effective Crisis Communication: step-by-step guidance

A sequence of steps to assist you
in communicating during a crisis.

What makes crisis communication effective?

Effective crisis communication consists of a continuous loop of understanding your target audience, defining your communication objectives and strategy, and communicating content that is useful and actionable for the audience. By monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of your communications and understanding how your audience interprets it, you can improve and adjust.

Effective Crisis Communication

Step 0:



WHAT IS THE TOPIC OF COMMUNICATION?

Identify a **clear, focussed topic**: specific research results, updates, clarification of previously made messages.

Step 1:



KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

The audience is the **public**, (non-expert, general target audiences) and **stakeholders**, (relevant target audiences). Assess their perspectives, culture, beliefs, and local context (economic status, literacy rate, current struggles such as psychological distress, risk exposure, and other current happenings).

Identify what is needed to fill the gaps between what people know and need to know to take action, make informed decisions and reduce harm.



Tips

ON COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA DURING A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS:

- Be accessible and respect deadlines
- Prepare a limited number of key messages before media interactions and take control of the interview
- Repeat your key messages several times
- Keep interviews short
- Focus on the message and words what you want the media to repeat
- Tell the truth
- Provide background materials about complex risk issues Provide information tailored to each type of media, e.g. sound bites and visuals
- If you are unable to answer a question, focus on what you do know and tell the reporter when and how you will follow up
- Anticipate and respond carefully to tricky questions
- Avoid saying “no comment”
- Work to establish long-term relationships with editors and reporters
- Know the audience your media is reporting to, to tailor the key messages effectively

Step 2:



DEFINE THE COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVE AND STRATEGY

Consider the following questions when defining the strategy:

- **Objective:** What do you want to achieve with your communication? What does the public need to know or do right now?
- **Target Audience:** Which audience do you want to reach and what will help them to take action (Step 1)
- **Methods:** How do you want to achieve the objective? The message should be empathetic, touch on uncertainties, provide instructive and/or

protective information.

- **Dissemination and outreach:** What are the best way to reach that audience and disseminate your message?

Make sure to **coordinate with internal and external staff and stakeholders**. Update all colleagues regularly. Develop external relationships to ensure a **coordinated approach** and **consistent messaging** to avoid confusion and rumours.



Step 5:



REPEAT!

Repeat Steps 1-4 continuously as communication is a dialogue. Adjust the message based on new information, responses of the target audiences, and further research and insights. These steps will assure your audience takes effective action to prevent harm during a public health crisis and that you have a clear and effective message.

Step 4:



MONITOR AND EVALUATE

Understand and monitor the **impact** and the public's **perceptions**. Use analytical data (attendance rates, viewings, ratings) and listen to the public's responses.

Step 3:



COMMUNICATE

- Consider **timing** and **rapidity**—quick responses can help prevent harm to target audiences.
- **Contextualise and adjust information.** Use appropriate format and framing.
- Communicate **instructive and empathetic messages**. Communicate uncertainty by telling what

you do not know, and when and how you will share new information.

- Remain available to your audience, **communicate consistently and transparently** to build trust and reduce confusion.

Tips

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The mass media can be instrumental in dissemination, but they may present oversimplified, sensational or inaccurate reports. Consider how you convey the messages and how the audience may interpret them. Be the best source of information and provide clear, honest and empathetic messages.

