

Effective Health Communication Techniques During a Crisis

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Risk Communication

A science based approach for communicating effectively in high concern, high stress, emotionally charged or controversial situations



Psychology of a Crisis

- The psychology of a public health emergency and what messages the public will need from those in charge is an important component of the response
- If it is the first emergency of its type (e.g., manmade, catastrophic) the communication challenges will increase:
 - Anthrax
 - Superstorm Sandy
 - Train derailment
 - Mass shootings
 - Novel virus

Messages Should...

- Be short, concise, and focused
- Contain relevant information only
- Give action steps in positives
- Be repeated

TAKE
ACTION!

Messages Should NOT...

- Contain promises and guarantees
 - Only promise what you can deliver
 - Promise to remain committed throughout the event
- Do not speculate
 - Stick to the facts
- Include humor



Explain the Consequences

- **Why** you are asking people to do something
- **How** it benefits them or others
- **What** might happen if they don't do it
 - e.g., stay home if you are sick so others don't get sick

Health Communication Challenges

- Anticipate questions and draft message(s)
- Correcting erroneous or misinformation (including rumors)
- As the situation evolves, information may change
 - Be prepared to explain changes to original recommendations

NJ COVID-19 Timeline

- NJDOH began planning COVID-19 response in January 2020
- First positive NJ COVID-19 case: March 4, 2020
- Executive Orders
 - Public Health State of Emergency issued March 9, 2020
 - Closure of schools/universities and non-essential businesses began March 18, 2020
 - Stay at home order issued March 20, 2020

Communicable Disease Service Response Activities

- Coordinated messages with three hotlines
- Provided info to COVID19.nj.gov website
- Created educational materials
- Engaged translation services for materials
- Constant communication with partners/stakeholders
 - Webinars, conf calls, virtual meetings
- Post guidance and provide technical assistance

COVID-19 Challenges

- New virus; a lot of unknowns
- Stigma and uncertainty
- Federal guidance and revisions/changes
- Lack of testing early in response

COVID-19 Challenges

- Overwhelmed health care systems
- Mixed messages due to unknown and evolving situation
- Misinformation is everywhere!!!
- Re-opening

Going forward

- Continue with prevention messages
- Second wave?
- Contact tracing to minimize spread
- Enhanced testing availability
- Work with partners to relay a consistent message

New Jersey Efforts

- Risk communication principles used to tailor messages during a crisis
- All partners should echo these messages
- Anticipate information and propose actions that people can do to empower and help reduce fear and anxiety (NOTE: with a novel virus this is a challenge!)
- Time will tell...

COVID-19 Materials

nj.gov/health/cd

- Public
 - Fact sheets
 - Health Actions to Protect You and Family
 - Isolation and Quarantine
 - Face coverings
 - Instructions if test COVID-19 positive/negative
 - Antibody testing
- Multi-system Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C)
- Seasonal farm workers

THANK YOU!

