Risk Communication Strategies

Module B3

World Health Organization
Module objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

● List the core ideas and principles for emergency risk communication and the different strategies and approaches used

● List tactics and approaches that are used in combination for communicating risk

● List factors that affect people's perception of risk

● Describe how emergency risk communication strategies can be applied for at least four scenarios
Emergency risk communication—
an umbrella term!

● The real-time exchange of information, advice and opinions between experts or officials and people who face the threat (from a hazard) to their survival, health or economic or social well-being;

● Purpose – everyone at risk is able to take informed decisions to mitigate the effects of the threat (hazard) – such as a disease outbreak – and take protective and preventive measures.
Guiding principles for risk communication best practice

1. Create and maintain trust
2. Acknowledge and communicate even in uncertainty
3. Coordinate
4. Be transparent & fast with the first and all communications
5. Be proactive in public communication
6. Involve and engage those affected
7. Use integrated approaches
8. Build national capacity, support national ownership
Emergency risk communication

- Uses a mix of tactics and approaches, including but not limited to:
  - public communication
  - media communication
  - social media
  - reputation management and institutional communications
  - mass awareness initiatives
  - health promotion
  - partner engagement
  - social mobilization
  - community engagement
The logic model

Public health event or emergency

- Public Information: through preferred channels of affected populations
- Mass Mobilization: of affected and at-risk communities using social mobilization, etc.
- Engagement: of community, family, and individuals, including through influencers
- Output: trusted information reaches people, rumors addressed
- Outcome: everyone at risk is able to take informed decisions to mitigate the effects of the threat (hazard)
How do we select the best risk communication strategy?

1. Assess the risk
2. Gauge risk perception of those at risk or affected
3. Select one of four risk communication strategies
1. Assess risk

- Big or small hazard?
- In the future or eminent?
- Levels of exposure?
- Vulnerability of population versus their capacity to deal with or withstand the threat?
- Resources available?
2. Risk perception

For experts, risk is high when there is

- High levels of morbidity/mortality
- High levels of disability
- High levels of property
- High level of financial loss
- Political loss

2. Gauge risk perception of those at risk or affected
But public perceptions of risk can differ from those of experts

People are less concerned about health risks that are:
- Voluntary
- Familiar
- Controllable
- Controlled by self
- Fair
- Chronic
- Diffuse
- Not fatal

They are more concerned about health risks that are:
- Involuntary
- Unfamiliar
- Uncontrollable
- Controlled by others
- Unfair
- Acute
- Focused in time and space
- Fatal

Source: Slovic et al
Perception

- Rooted in the sub-conscious
- Often not logical
- Influenced by culture
- Coloured by emotions
- Not always expressed verbally
- Shows in behaviour

3. Choose the most appropriate risk communication strategy

Outrage/Fear

Emotional response of affected or at-risk populations

Apathy

Outrage Management

Crisis Communication

Health Education, Stakeholder Relation

Precautionary Advocacy

Source: Peter Sandman
Strategy 1: Precautionary advocacy

What to do: Outrage them to your level of concern so that they take action
Arouse emotions
Required to prevent secondary crisis
“WATCH OUT!”

Source: Peter Sandman
Strategy 2: Outrage management

Outrage/Fear

Emotional response of affected or at-risk populations

Apathy

Outrage Management

What to do: Listen & acknowledge truth
Give facts about why there is no danger
"CALM DOWN" (respectfully)

Source: Peter Sandman
Strategy 3: Crisis communication

What to do:
- Explain what is happening
- Deal with emotions
- “WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER”

Crisis Communication

Source: Peter Sandman
Strategy 4: Health education, stakeholder relation

What to do: communications, surveillance
Identify and address outrage early on

Source: Peter Sandman
Reminder

- Follow steps 1 and 2 to decide which strategy to use
- Review your analysis frequently as the situation evolves; and change your strategy as needed
- Different populations, affected groups or audiences may require different strategies