### 7 STEPS TO EFFECTIVE MEDIA COMMUNICATION DURING PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES

**STEP 1: Assess media needs, media constraints, and internal media-relations capabilities**

1.1: **Assess** the needs of the media  
1.2: **Assess** the constraints of the media  
1.3: **Assess** internal media-relations capabilities

**STEP 2: Develop goals, plans and strategies**

2.1: **Develop** media communication goals and objectives  
2.2: **Develop** a written media communication plan  
2.3: **Develop** a partner and stakeholder strategy

**STEP 3: Train communicators**

3.1: **Train** the media communication team  
3.2: **Train** a public information officer  
3.3: **Train** a designated lead spokesperson

**STEP 4: Prepare messages**

4.1: **Prepare** lists of stakeholders and their concerns  
4.2: **Prepare** clear and concise messages  
4.3: **Prepare** targeted messages

**STEP 5: Identify media outlets and media activities**

5.1: **Identify** available media outlets  
5.2: **Identify** the most effective media outlets  
5.3: **Identify** media activities for the first 24–72 hours

**STEP 6: Deliver messages**

6.1: **Deliver** clear and timely messages  
6.2: **Deliver** messages to maintain visibility  
6.3: **Deliver** targeted messages

**STEP 7: Evaluate messages and performance**

7.1: **Evaluate** message delivery and media coverage  
7.2: **Evaluate** and improve performance based on feedback  
7.3: **Evaluate** public responses to messages

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When talking with the media, questions often asked include:

- Who is affected?  
- Who is at fault?  
- Who is responsible?  
- What has happened?  
- What is the cost?  
- Where has it happened?  
- What is being done?  
- When did it happen?  
- Why did it happen?  
- Why wasn’t it prevented?  
- Will it happen again?

*See WHO Handbook for a fuller list of 77 frequently asked questions.*

When wanting to return to key points or redirect the communication, examples of “bridging” statements include:

- And what’s most important to know is…  
- However, what is more important to look at is…”  
- However, the real issue here is…”  
- And what this all means is…”  
- And what’s most important to remember is…”  
- With this in mind, if we look at the bigger picture…”  
- With this in mind, if we take a look back…”  
- If we take a broader perspective…”  
- If we look at the big picture…”  
- Let me put all this in perspective by saying…”  
- What all this information tells me is…”  
- Before we continue, let me take a step back and repeat that…”  
- Before we continue, let me emphasize that…”  
- This is an important point because…”  
- “What this all boils down to is…”  
- “The heart of the matter is…”

*See WHO Handbook for a fuller list of 33 bridging statements.*

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*Taken from:  
When preparing messages

• prepare three key points that communicate your core messages;
• prepare supporting message points;
• develop supporting material such as visuals, examples, quotes, personal stories, analogies, and endorsements by credible third parties;
• keep messages simple and short; and
• practise delivery.

To communicate voluntariness – prepare messages that:
• make the risk more voluntary by providing options and choices;
• encourage public dialogue and debate;
• ask permission; and
• ask for informed consent.

To communicate controllability – prepare messages that:
• identify things for people to do (for example, precautions and preventive actions);
• indicate a willingness to cooperate and share authority and responsibility with others;
• provide important roles and responsibilities for others;
• tell people how to recognize problems or symptoms; and
• tell people how and where to get further information.

To communicate familiarity – prepare messages that:
• use analogies to make the unfamiliar familiar;
• encourage experiential learning;
• have high visual content; and
• describe means for exploring issues in greater depth.

To communicate fairness – prepare messages that:
• acknowledge possible inequities;
• address inequities; and
• discuss options and trade-offs.

To communicate trust – prepare messages that:
• cite credible third parties;
• cite credible sources for further information;
• acknowledge that there are other points of view;
• indicate a willingness to be held accountable;
• describe achievements;
• indicate conformity with the highest professional, scientific and ethical standards;
• cite scientific research;
• identify the partners working with you; and
• indicate a willingness to share the risk.

When delivering messages during an emergency

• recognize and acknowledge anger, frustration, fear, outrage or concern;
• provide three or more positive points to counter negative information or bad news;
• accept and involve the public and the media as legitimate partners;
• indicate through actions, words and gestures that you share their concerns;
• listen carefully to what people are concerned about;
• convey compassion, conviction and optimism through actions, gestures and words;
• speak clearly, simply and calmly – avoid technical terms and long words or phrases; and
• gain trust by admitting that there are things you do not know.

When conducting a news conference or other formal media event:
• make your formal statement as brief as possible;
• include all pertinent information in your statement and allow time for questions;
• limit the number of speakers to no more than three and limit each to 3–5 minutes;
• remember that it is primarily held to allow the media to ask questions, not to attend a lecture; and
• start on time – journalists have deadlines and need enough time to file your story.

When addressing affected populations:
• identify the information they most need to protect themselves;
• use very clear means and formats to communicate the information to them; and
• use diverse formal and informal channels, such as community meetings, open houses, stand-up presentations where people congregate, radio broadcasts and posters.

When communicating through the media during an emergency:
• brief the media promptly following an incident;
• fill information vacuums;
• state, if appropriate, that the information is preliminary;
• state that the media will be updated as additional information becomes available;
• state that what is factual and known – avoid speculating on the unknown;
• hold regular briefings (for example, every 2 hours) even if nothing has changed;
• state when you expect new information to become available;
• provide dedicated hotlines and telephone information services for all important stakeholders;
• provide a media communications centre that is staffed 24 hours a day;
• plan how often information updates will be provided, who will do it, and how; and
• use news conferences, briefings and one-on-one interviews.