



Communicating in a Public Health Emergency or Response

TEPHINET 1-Day Workshop Small Group Exercises



TEPHINET

Training Programs in Epidemiology and
Public Health Interventions Network

Module 1 Small Group Exercise: Risk Communication Essentials

Scenario

In the fictional country of Martec, at least 40 people have gone to two hospital emergency rooms in the capital city with shortness of breath, high fevers, severe headaches, chest pain or tightness, and an aggressive cough. Twenty-five people are currently hospitalized with severe illness, and ten are on ventilators to help them breathe. So far, no one has died.

Thus far, the illnesses appear to involve people from a small working-class neighborhood in the capital city. Those affected span a range of ages, from 13 to 78 years old, with about half between 35 and 50 years old. Just over half are male. Almost 75% of those who are hotel or restaurant workers.

Both hospitals have contacted the Ministry of Health about the patients, including to request assistance in determining why the people are ill and the possible cause of the illness. Family members of some of the patients have begun telling others about the illness, including on social media.

The Assignment

You are a field epidemiologist working in country to support the Martec Ministry of Health. The Minister has asked you to help support the risk communication planning and response efforts. You are providing input to the Office of Communications for the Martec Ministry of Health. Various stakeholders are calling about the situation at the two hospitals. You have been asked by the Minister of Health to provide recommendations regarding initial communications.

1. Outline the basic elements that you need to consider as request for information begin coming in.
2. Provide recommendations regarding three key pieces of information that should be provided in the initial communications. You should assume we in real-time – that is, you just received the information provided in the scenario and you have just been asked by Minister of Health for a recommendation and rationale.
3. What are three questions you would anticipate having to respond to at the start of this situation? These should be complete sentences.

Module 2 Small Group Exercise: Identifying Potential Stakeholders and Relevant Communities

Scenario

Three days have passed since the hospitals contacted the MOH to request assistance. Covid-19 has been confirmed as the illness that affected most of the people who sought emergency care at the two capital city hospitals. In the past three days, there have been additional outbreaks in several other poor and middle-class neighborhoods and in three additional cities in Martrec.

Most of those infected work in service and tourist-oriented businesses, including hotels, restaurants, and shops. However, there are many reports of businesses and workers being unconvinced that actions need to be taken to prevent spread of the virus and illness. The Ministry of Health is under pressure to respond, with some calling for preventive measures and others saying such measures are not needed. Stakeholder and community engagement have been recommended.

This is a short summary of what is currently known:

1. Cases are spreading beyond initial neighborhood cluster.
2. A coordinated approach is needed to prevent spread of the illness and reduce the number of infections.
3. Poor and middle-class populations are of particular concern and have the highest rates of infection.
4. Many affected towns and people lack trust in the government and the public officials who provide guidelines for safety.

The Assignment

Working in small groups, assume you have been asked to advise the communications experts working in the Office of Communications for the Martrec Ministry of Health. You have been asked to provide suggestions regarding stakeholder and community engagement to the Ministry of Health staff working on the risk communication plan and materials.

1. Identify two key stakeholders and describe the role that each of those stakeholders would or could play when it comes to the public health response and risk communication efforts.

2. Identify two communities that the public health response and risk communication efforts would benefit from engaging with, particularly when it comes to achieving success in the public health response.

Module 3 Small Group Exercise: Creating Effective Public Health Messages

Scenario

In response to the COVID-19 cases, and greater availability of COVID-19 vaccines, the Ministry of Health has decided to undertake a public health communication campaign to increase COVID-19 vaccination among service and tourism sector workers. The goal is to have 50% of service and tourism workers receive a dose of COVID-19 in the next 30 days.

The Office of Communications in the Ministry of Health has been asked to develop recommendations regarding the public health communications that will be done to announce the vaccination campaign and to foster acceptance of the vaccination recommendation by service and tourism sector workers.

The Assignment

You are a field epidemiologist working within the Ministry of Health. You have been asked to provide assistance related to the forthcoming COVID-19 vaccination recommendation and the announcement of the new campaign. Your suggestions are sought for the following:

1. What is an important target audience for the vaccination announcement and initial messages?
2. For this audience, what are two health-related beliefs or concerns that could influence their acceptance of the COVID-19 public health information and recommendations?
3. For this audience, what is an example of a key message that could help persuade individuals to want to get a COVID-19 vaccination?

Module 4 Small Group Exercise: Delivering Public Health Messages

Scenario

As noted in the previous module, the Ministry of Health has started a public health communication campaign to increase vaccination among service and tourism sector workers with a goal of having 50% of service and tourism workers receive a dose of COVID-19 in the next 30 days. Unfortunately, this goal is proving tough to achieve.

Misinformation about the vaccine is spreading through the community, due in part to a viral social media post that argues the vaccine does little to protect against the virus and is even infecting people with COVID-19. There is evidence that audiences are becoming skeptical about the vaccine. Some are turning to “homemade” remedies made with potentially toxic household cleaning supplies. Several influencers on Twitter are helping to spread these sensational stories.

The Assignment

Working in small groups, assume you have been asked to provide technical assistance to the Office of Communications for the Ministry of Health about ways to combat the spread of misinformation about the vaccine and its effectiveness. Your job is to:

1. Identify how you would prioritize the misinformation that is being spread. Which pieces of misinformation are most important to deal with first, and why?
2. Explain 2-3 tactics you might take to combat the misinformation identified on the previous slide, and mock up some communications for how you would package those tactics.
3. Identify the type of pushback you might receive from audiences as you try to combat this information. How could you overcome this pushback?