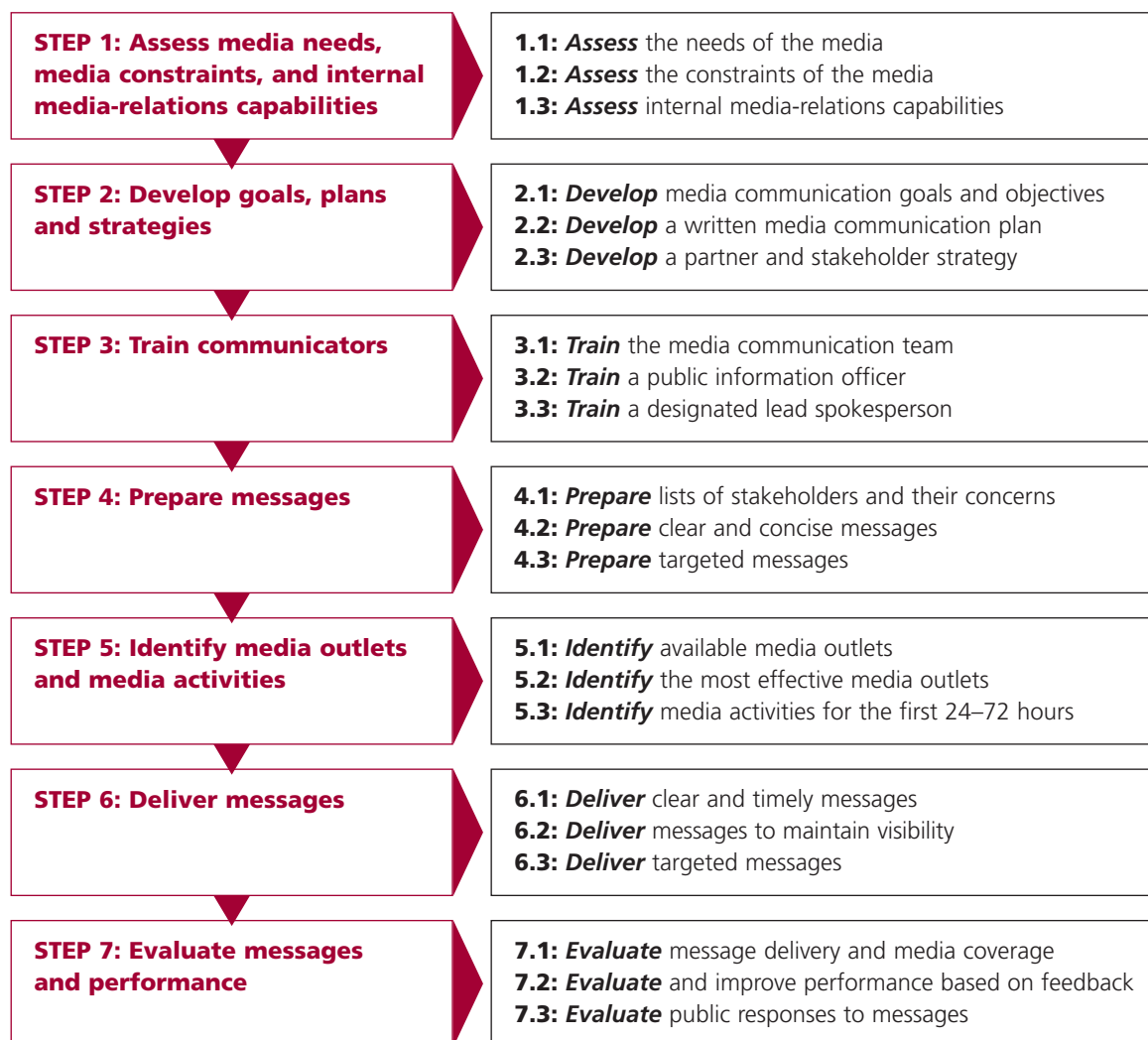


7 STEPS TO EFFECTIVE MEDIA COMMUNICATION DURING PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES



Taken from:

Effective Media Communication during Public Health Emergencies: A WHO Handbook.

Hyer RN and Covello VT. Geneva, World Health Organization (WHO/CDS/2005.31) 2005; July.

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.



World Health Organization

POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN PREPARING AND DELIVERING MESSAGES

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 go 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 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.