



Communication for Disease Surveillance and Control

As mentioned earlier, one of your roles is to communicate with various audiences about disease surveillance, prevention, outbreak, and response.

Different mechanisms can be used to communicate the information to the audiences:

- Formal or informal face-to-face meetings
- Informal conversations at social, religious, political, or business gatherings
- Briefing meetings
- Program site visits
- Fact sheets
- Press conference
- Newspaper articles
- Letters: personal, organizational, or coalition

Below are some general guidelines to bear in mind when communicating with any audiences. Individual fact sheets will more specifically address key messages for particular audiences.

Elements of Effective Communication

- **Focus on your audience:** Define who is the audience of your communication — the specific group of people you will be addressing — and plan the communication bearing in mind their point-of-view. What are their interests, fears, literacy level? General communications are far less effective than communication that is customized to different audiences.
- **Promote an action:** What is your communication objective? Your communication objective may likely be different than the overall public health objective. What do you want your audience to DO as a result of your message? Make sure that is absolutely clear to the audience.
- **Encourage Dialogue** A key to good communication is two-way exchange. This means listening for the audience's concerns and responding appropriately, rather than just informing.

More Elements of Effective Communication

- **Update your audience regularly:** Whatever the audience, provide your key audiences with regular updates on the community's health status and local government efforts at prevention and control in collaboration with the health personnel. Review past outbreaks for signs of future ones; provide reassurance that problems will be solved and tell them what steps are being taken. Inform the community when an investigation may take place; listen to hear concerns.

Be sure to also acknowledge successes and contributions, not just disease outbreaks or problems. For example, acknowledge an increase in fully immunized children, community participation in reporting diseases, or multi-sectoral coordination in surveillance and response. Telling people that "everything is alright" can actually undermine community confidence, because they have direct experience that contradicts this.

- **Keep to the facts:** Use limited and appropriate surveillance data and disease prevention information to support your communication. Never distort data or intentionally mislead. **Don't "dazzle"** your audience with complicated statistics or language.
- **Make it relevant:** Selectively give priority to information that is relevant to the people you are communicating with or addresses their concerns. Decide which data or information best illustrates your points and achieves your objective. Don't overburden people with information that is not relevant to them, or ignores their concerns.



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