

Pandemic Influenza Communication *Challenges and Strategies*

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The Importance of Communication in a Crisis

“The need to communicate clearly was never more compelling than during the recovery from the World Trade Center attacks. People were desperate for information. The information had to be correct, but there were delicate questions of taste and sensitivity as well.”

-Former NYC Mayor Rudy Guliani

Communication: “The Resource Multiplier”

- Informing or instructing widely divergent audiences
- Minimizing panic or fear
- Encouraging the adoption of appropriate protective actions
- Building trust
- Minimizing or dispelling misinformation or rumors

Pandemic Influenza Communication Goals

To help the public and communities prepare for, cope with, and respond to an influenza pandemic to reduce the spread of influenza, minimize the impact on healthcare systems and social services, and prevent morbidity and mortality

Communication Challenges

- **Potentially controversial and/or uncertain aspects of pandemic influenza planning**
 - Quarantine and Isolation
 - Management of scarce resources
 - Capacity limits on the health care system
 - etc

“A National Culture of Unpreparedness”

- **August 2006 TIME poll – Half of those surveyed personally experienced a natural disaster or public emergency. Yet only 16% said they were “very well prepared” for the next one.**
- **“Fewer than half of those surveyed in an online poll...say they are very or somewhat familiar with avian flu”**
 - **Wall Street Journal – Aug. 16, 2005**

Pandemic Influenza Awareness

Health authorities know that too soft a warning won't be heard...(but)...fear that too loud a warning could...provoke fear...economic damage...panic

(So)

Authorities often miss the middle ground that can help build mutual trust involving the public early, arousing an appropriate level of public fear, and helping people to bear it

Peter Sandman and Jody Lanard Perspectives in Health, 2005

Some Key Risk

Communication Principles for Pan Flu

- Trust is particularly important when there is inadequate time or information to assess which actions should be taken
- Communicating risk entails confronting important uncertainties
- Assessment of risk is determined not by facts but by emotions

Accuracy of
Information

Speed of
Release

CREDIBILITY

+ =

**Successful
Communication**

Empathy
+
Openness

TRUST

Strategies for Building, Maintaining and Restoring Public Trust

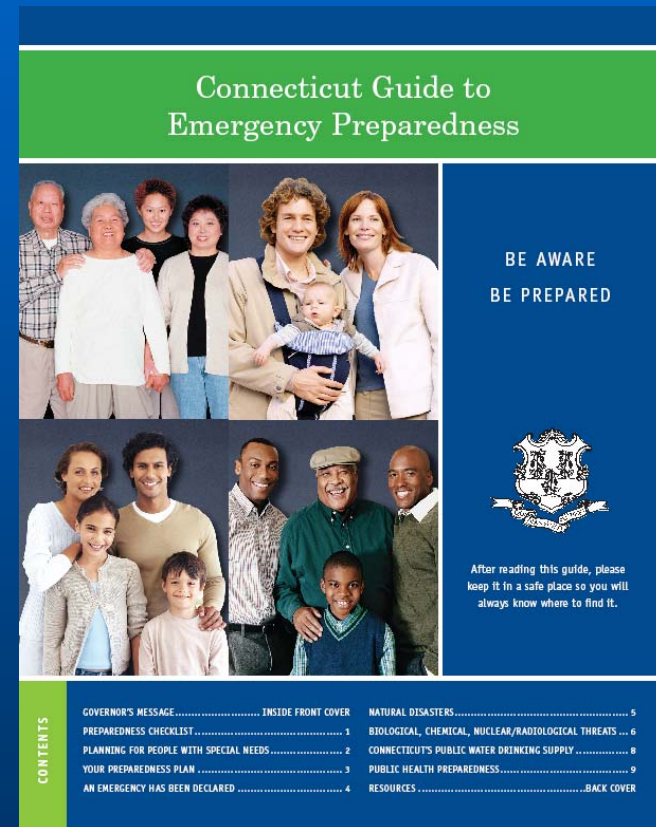
- **Involve the public in planning efforts early and often**
- **Offer guidance and statements that are easily understood**
- **Do not over reassure/Acknowledge uncertainty**
- **Inform the public early and aim for total candor and transparency**

Strategies for Building, Maintaining and Restoring Public Trust

- **Tailor messages to accommodate public beliefs, opinions and cultural sensitivities**
- **Give people things to do / Ask more of people**
- **Coordination of message development is key to avoid confusion than can undermine public trust**

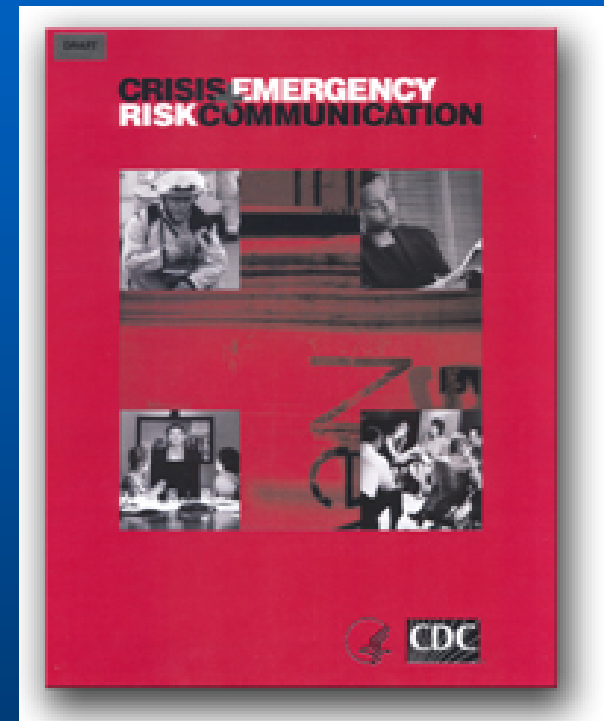
Current Efforts

- Interagency Risk Communication Subcommittee
- Region I Coordination
- Message Development
- Public Education Campaign
- Special Population Education/Outreach
- Communication Training



Pandemic Influenza CERC Training

- Building Community Hardiness
- Understanding loss, grief & bereavement by culture
- Countering Stigmatization in messaging
- Tailoring messages for special populations
- NIMS/JIC
- Role of technology and new media



Key Considerations

- **Assess your communication needs (e.g. update your communication plans, etc)**
- **Plan and coordinate your emergency communication activities with your key partners**
- **Identify and train lead subject specific spokespersons**
- **Develop a Continuity of Operations plan for your communications operation**
- **Implement and maintain community resources, such as hotlines and website, to respond to questions and concerns in your community**

Keeping Connecticut Healthy



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