



Zika Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) Discussion: Leaders as Spokespersons—How to Prepare

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Yes, leaders communicate, and



- In a catastrophic event, your . . .
 - every word,
 - every eye twitch,
 - every passing emotion. . . resonates with heightened importance to the public

Role of a Spokesperson in an Emergency

- Take your organization from an “it” to a “we”
- Remove the psychological barriers within the audience
- Ultimately, reduce the incidence of illness, injury, and death by getting it right

Leadership Styles

- Authoritarian, high levels of control
- Democratic, solicit input from subordinates
- Laissez-faire, delegate authority

Which is best suited in a crisis?

Transformational Leadership

Inspirational Motivation



- Mobilize emotions to motivate others to do more with less self-interest

What the public seeks from your communication

Five public desires

1. Gain wanted facts
2. Empower decision making
3. Be involved as a participant, not spectator
4. Provide watch guard over resource allocation
5. Recover or preserve well-being and normalcy

Spokesperson Qualities

- What makes a good spokesperson?
- What doesn't make a good spokesperson?

How to be a great spokesperson after 5 minutes of training!

Spokesperson Recommendations

- Stay within the scope of your responsibility
- Tell the truth
- Repeat, repeat, repeat
- Follow up on issues
- Expect criticism and think

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Don't over reassure
- Acknowledge that there is a process in place
- Express wishes
- Give people things to do
- Ask more of people

Great Spokesperson Step 1

- It's more than “acting natural.” Every organization has an identity.
- Try to embody that identity—what do you stand for as an organization? — what is your ultimate mission?

Great Spokesperson Step 2

- Know your audience
- Your audience is NOT the reporter interviewing you
- It's NOT your scientific peers

Lessons We've Learned to Benefit Your Leaders

1. Be prepared to answer with: “I don’t know.”
2. Avoid bureaucratic speak at all cost.
3. “Based on what we know now . . .”
4. Be the first to raise the question that hasn’t been answered.
5. Leaders: share more, expect criticism, inspire others

Six Principles of CERC

- **Be First:** If the information is yours to provide by organizational authority—do so as soon as possible. If you can't—then explain how you are working to get it.
- **Be Right:** Give facts in increments. Tell people what you know when you know it, tell them what you don't know, and tell them if you will know relevant information later.
- **Be Credible:** Tell the truth. Do not withhold to avoid embarrassment or the possible “panic” that seldom happens. Uncertainty is worse than not knowing—rumors are more damaging than hard truths.

Six Principles of CERC

- **Express Empathy:** Acknowledge in words what people are feeling—it builds trust.
- **Promote Action:** Give people things to do. It calms anxiety and helps restore order.
- **Show Respect:** Treat people the way you want to be treated—the way you want your loved ones treated—always—even when hard decisions must be communicated.

Trust and Mistrust

- Stakeholders judge the response to an issue or crisis based on trust.
- Trust is the natural consequence of promises fulfilled.
- Mistrust is an outgrowth of the perception that promises were broken and values violated.
- CDC fulfills trust by combining our best science with strong ethics and values.

Acting Trustworthy

- Share information early.
- Acknowledge the concerns of others.
- Under promise and over deliver.
- Select a spokesperson who is never condescending.
- Engage third-party validators and advocates.

Risk Communication Resources

- CDC Zika website: <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/>
- Zika communications resources: <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/comm-resources/index.html>
- CERC resources: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/index.asp>
- Emergency Risk Communication Training: Atlanta, August 10-12, 2016
- To sign up for the Emergency Partners newsletter to receive Zika and other updates from the CDC, please click [here](#)
- Contact cercrequest@cdc.gov for questions

For more information, contact CDC
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)
TTY: 1-888-232-6348 www.cdc.gov

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

