



Kellee Waters  
Senior Health Communication Specialist



Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
Office of Public Health  
Preparedness and Response  
Division of Emergency Operations

# Agenda

1

Welcome and Introductions

2

Psychology of a Crisis

- Psychology of a crisis
- Communication in a crisis
- Perception of risk
- CERC in action

3

Q&A

# Purpose

CERC principles can help you provide the public with information to make the **best decisions** within incredibly **challenging time constraints** and to accept the **imperfect nature of choice**.

The **right message** at the **right time** from the **right person** can save lives.

# Psychology of a Crisis

# What do people feel when a disaster threatens?

## Psychological barriers:

1. Denial
2. Fear, anxiety, confusion, dread
3. Hopelessness or helplessness



# Panic Myth



# Communication in a Crisis

# Communicating in a Crisis is Different

People tend to

- Simplify messages.
- Hold onto current beliefs.
- Look for additional information and opinions.
- Believe the first message.



# Hazard and Outrage Differences & Principles

- **Hazard:** Scientific Measure
- **Outrage:** Emotional Measure



# How do we communicate about risk during an emergency?

## All risks are not accepted equally:

- Voluntary vs. involuntary
- Controlled personally vs. controlled by others
- Familiar vs. exotic
- Natural vs. manmade
- Reversible vs. permanent
- Statistical vs. anecdotal
- Fairly vs. unfairly distributed
- Affecting adults vs. affecting children



# Example: Hazard and Outrage

Bioterrorism attack with anthrax in your area

	High Hazard	Low Hazard
High Outrage		
Low Outrage		

# Example: Hazard and Outrage

Bioterrorism attack with anthrax in your area

	High Hazard	Low Hazard
High Outrage		
Low Outrage		

CERC in Action

# Trust and Mistrust

- Stakeholders judge an emergency response based on trust.
- Trust happens when promises are fulfilled.
- Mistrust grows from the perception that promises were broken and values violated.



# Consequences of Mistrust

- Health recommendations are ignored and disease and death rates go up
- Demands for misallocation of resources
- Opportunists prey on those who are looking for someone to trust

*We can't accomplish our mission!*

# 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.



# CERC in Action

- Allow people the right to feel fear.
- Don't over-reassure.
- Acknowledge uncertainty.
- Give people meaningful things to do.
- When the news is good, state continued concern before stating reassuring updates.

# The CERC Rhythm

## Engage Community • Empower Decision-Making • Evaluate

### Preparation

- Draft and test messages
- Develop partnerships
- Create plans
- Determine approval process

### Initial

- Express empathy
- Explain risks
- Promote action
- Describe response efforts

### Maintenance

- Explain ongoing risks
- Segment audiences
- Provide background information
- Address rumors

### Resolution

- Motivate vigilance
- Discuss lessons learned
- Revise plan



**Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention**  
Office of Public Health  
Preparedness and Response  
Division of Emergency Operations