

EMERGENCY HEALTH EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION: A Primer for Health Educators



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President's Message

The threat of severe pandemic influenza has emerged again with the discoveries of the H5N1 virus in domestic flocks of poultry, migrating birds, and some mammals.

If a major respiratory-transmitted infectious disease outbreak such as pandemic flu were to occur tomorrow, would you be prepared as a health educator?

Whether or not you are formally working as part of an emergency response team, all health educators need to have some level of training and preparation for such a major public health event. Your knowledge and skills in the behavioral, organizational, and communication arenas provide a tremendous advantage in a crisis and can be brought to bear in three essential areas: 1) preventing further illness, injury or death; 2) restoring or maintaining calm; and 3) engendering confidence in the operational response.

SOPHE is proud to collaborate with CDC's National Center for Health Marketing on this special *News & Views* insert to bring you basic information about this topic. This insert is part of a broader SOPHE initiative to inform and prepare all health educators about their role in emergency preparedness through special sessions at SOPHE meetings, webinars, and a biweekly e-newsletter. In the coming months, SOPHE will also offer information and resource links on its website, and develop a "Surge Capacity Network" of health educators who can provide technical assistance to communities in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.

We encourage you to read this insert and become more knowledgeable about your role in emergency preparedness and response. Indeed, your life and those whom you love may depend on it.

SOPHE's Health Educator Surge Capacity Network

SOPHE is partnering with CDC's Community Health Education and Outreach Team (CHEOT) under the Emergency Communication System to support health educators in preparing for and responding to public health emergencies. A collaborative effort supporting this project is to develop a Health Educator Surge Capacity Network for emergencies. This specialized network will receive public health emergency alerts, as well as other relevant preparedness and response resources and materials. The network may be called upon to share knowledge, skills, and experience with other public health professionals in the event of a public health emergency. If you are interested in joining this network, contact tmaslak@sophe.org to sign up.

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication*

Natural disasters, bioterrorism, pandemic influenza—the list of potential public health emergencies continues to expand over time. In 2006, the Federal Emergency Management Agency declared 52 major disasters, an additional five emergency declarations, and 86 fire management assistance declarations.¹ However, these figures account for natural disaster events only. Public health professionals are also responsible for responding to additional events. The recent national outbreaks of peanut-butter-associated *Salmonella* and Spinach-related *E. coli*² are just two examples of additional public health emergencies to which health educators must be ready to respond.

Health educators face numerous challenges in effectively planning for and responding to emergency events. Many of the risk factors, including high population density, settlement in high-risk areas, technological risks, an aging population, emerging infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance, international travel, and the threat of terrorism, are also on the rise. However, limited resources, which also pose a challenge to effective planning and response, can most efficiently be put to use if well-planned and well-executed crisis and emergency risk communication techniques are fully integrated into each stage of event response.

What is Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication?

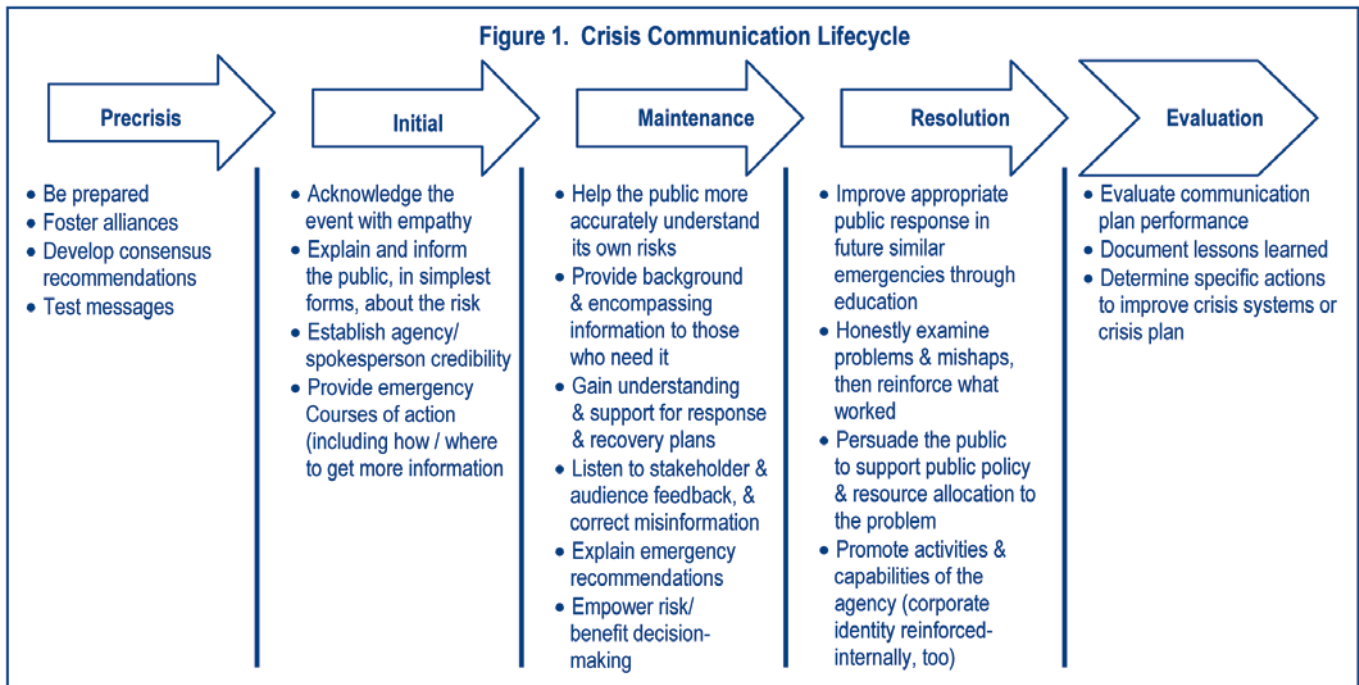
Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) can be defined as "the effort by experts to provide information to allow an individual, stakeholder, or an entire community to make the best possible decisions about their well-being within nearly impossible time constraints and help people ultimately to accept the imperfect nature of the choices during the crisis." CERC differs from other forms of communication because decisions often must be made within a narrow time constraint with imperfect or incomplete information, and the outcome of the decision is often uncertain and may be irreversible.

Crisis Communication Lifecycle

Those responsible for communicating during a public health emergency must first recognize and fully understand the typical pattern of a crisis—the phases through which the event evolves, and the unique information needs during each of these phases. (See Figure 1. on page 2)

1 Federal Emergency Management Agency. 2006 Federal Disaster Declarations. Viewed 3/28/07 at <http://www.fema.gov/news/disasters.fema?year=2006>

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevent. Recent outbreaks and incidents. Viewed 3/28/07 at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/recentincidents.asp>



Why CERC?

CERC is one of many vital components of an effective public health emergency response program. CERC is essential in helping communities recover and return to a sense of normalcy following a crisis situation. CERC is also capable of minimizing poor decisions and negative behavior patterns that may arise following a crisis situation by clarifying details of what happened, what assistance may be available, what the affected citizens can do on an individual and community-wide level to respond and recover, minimize or prevent false rumors, etc.

However, pre-existing trust and credibility of your organization within the community is key to successful communication. Credibility is established by presenting accurate information in a timely manner, while trust is gained from a showing of empathy and openness. Without obtaining trust and credibility with your audience, your messages are not likely to be of use (See Figure 2).

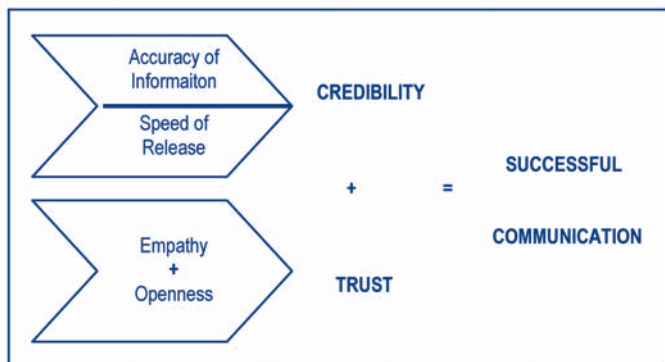
Health Educator’s Roles

Health educators can benefit from using some of the principal theories behind CERC. As illustrated in Figure 1-Crisis Communication Lifecycle, health educators can provide vital assistance throughout a number of the different stages. For example, in the Precrisis phase, health educators’ experience with developing education and outreach material can be beneficial when developing and testing key messages and recommendations. Health educators will consider the various populations making up the local community and how to best communicate with those groups. During the Initial phase of the event, health educators can be used to help explain and inform the public on any health-related risks in a clear and concise manner. As we move into the Maintenance phase, health educators can once again help the public more clearly understand the various health risks that may exist. They can also provide the critical information on what positive behavior changes or courses of action can be taken to respond to any existing health-related problems or steps to prevent any anticipated injuries or diseases that may result during response to the initial event. Health educators are also vital during this phase in order to clear up any misconceptions that the public may have regarding health-related issues. During the Resolution phase, education is important to raise awareness in the community of appropriate measures that can be taken to deal with this type of event, should it occur again in the future.

Successful communication is critical for an effective response to any public health emergency. Those with knowledge and skills in crisis and emergency risk communication must be involved in all aspects of planning and response.

*Adapted from: Reynolds, B. Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2002. and Reynolds, B. Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication: Pandemic Influenza. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control 2006.

Figure 2. Elements of Successful Communication



Project Public Health Ready

Project Public Health Ready (PPHR) is a collaborative effort among the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), the Center for Health Policy at the Columbia University School of Nursing, the CDC, and Centers for Public Health Preparedness focusing on partnership-building between state, local, and academic organizations. The project commenced in 2003, with the goal of preparing local health department (LHD) staff to respond and protect the public's health through a competency-based training and recognition program. PPHR requires each site to achieve criteria in three key areas: emergency preparedness planning, workforce competency development, and demonstration of all-hazards readiness through exercise simulations. Visit: <http://www.naccho.org/topics/emergency/pphr.cfm> for more information. Following are resources available from PPHR:

* The PPHR Toolkit- www.naccho.org/topics/emergency/pphr.cfm is a searchable database of best-practices, including tools and resources from recognized LHDs and regions which address the PPHR criteria.

* PPHR Criteria Self-Assessment for LHDs- http://www.naccho.org/topics/emergency/documents/PPHRSelf-Assessments_000.pdf

* PPHR Process & Regional Criteria Evaluations; RAND Corporation- <http://www.naccho.org/topics/emergency/PPHR/Evaluations.cfm>

*Map of PPHR demonstration sites- http://www.naccho.org/topics/demonstration/PPHR/PPHR_Map.cfm

CDC Resources on Preparedness

CDC's Emergency Preparedness and Response Webpage

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/>

This site provides a variety of background information and links on topics related to emergency preparedness and response, including:

- * Agents, Diseases, and Other Threats
- * Laboratory Information
- * Resources on Preparation and Planning
- * Resources on Surveillance
- * Clinician Resources
- * Training and Education
- * Disaster Mental Health
- * And Other Related Links

Public Health Workbook to Define, Locate & Reach Special, Vulnerable, & At-Risk Populations in an Emergency (Draft)

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/workbook/>

The Workbook provides a process that can support state, local, and Tribal planners as they advance in their efforts to reach all populations—and specifically, special populations—in day-to-day communication and during crisis or emergency situations. This document was released for field testing in 2006.

SNAPS:

Snapshots of Data for Communities Nation-Wide

SNAPS provides local level community profile information nation-wide. It can be browsed by county and state and searched by zip code. SNAPS serves as a valuable tool when responding to public health emergency events at the state, Tribal, and local levels. It provides a “snapshot” of key variables for consideration in guiding and tailoring health education and communication efforts to ensure diverse audiences receive critical public health messages that are accessible, understandable, and timely. Contact Senia Espinosa, Health Education Specialist at the CDC, exq6@cdc.gov, for copies or additional information.



CDC's Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) Training

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/erc/cerc.asp>

This fast-paced, interactive course gives participants essential knowledge and tools to navigate the realities of communicating to the public, media, partners and stakeholders during a public health emergency. The course consists of 12 self-contained modules that can be arranged to meet the training needs of distinct groups (e.g., public health or medical professionals, first responders, community leaders, or volunteer organizations) at the local, state and federal levels.

CDC's CERC: Pandemic Influenza Training

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/erc/panflu/>

Preparing for and responding to a pandemic, especially a severe pandemic, will challenge response officials and the public in all communities. The HHS/CDC “Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication (CERC): Pandemic Influenza” course offers a combination of influenza communication tabletop exercises and informative group discussions.

CDC's CDCynergy: Emergency Risk Communication Edition Training

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/erc/erc.asp>

This comprehensive course combines the highlights of all the emergency risk communication courses offered. This is an intense course designed for those who need extensive training in emergency risk communication.

CDC's Face the Media Training

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/erc/media.asp>

This one-day “hands on” media training is designed for top level public health crisis and emergency risk communication specialists. The training is limited to small groups in order to provide intense, highly-interactive, individualized instruction.