CBRN Crisis Communications
(Adapted from OHPIP, Chapter 12A)

Developing a crisis communication plan and infrastructure is an integral part of public health emergency preparedness. Effective communication in both the public and private sectors can help ensure public trust and credibility in the emergency response system and support efforts to protect the public in the event of a declared emergency. Timely, consistent, and accurate communication can impact how the media, public and emergency response/health care communities react to an emergency – fostering appropriate behaviors and levels of concern.

- Assure that products and processes are anchored on HIRA priorities.
- Adapt and use crisis communication products produced by others, with appropriate credit.
- Refer to the appropriate OHPIP Chapter 12 for pandemic-specific crisis communications.

Crisis communications is a key component of the new Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Program Standard – Health Protection: Risk Communication and Public Awareness:

*"The board of health shall develop, implement and document 24/7 notification protocols for communications with internal board of health staff and **external stakeholders**…"*
"The board of health shall participate in public awareness activities on emergency preparedness and response."

External stakeholders are external individuals or groups with whom an organization must communicate, and include: clients, patients, visitors, member organizations and others.

Key Considerations

Emergency crisis communication planning should account for the following key factors:
- Effective crisis communication requires extensive pre-event preparation. Pre-event preparation includes the development and distribution of messages and materials now to increase knowledge about HIRA-prioritized CBRN emergencies. Early messages should emphasize factual information on the CBRN event, transmission, symptoms, prevention of exposures, control strategies and the public health system's response to the CBRN event. Such communication should be aimed at increasing local readiness for a CBRN event and at increasing knowledge levels among the general public.
- Like other recent public health emergencies, a CBRN event may generate immediate, intense, and sustained public, health care provider, policy maker and media attention and demand for information.
- Good communications during an event can reduce public anxiety and enhance the workings of emergency service responders and health care workers. The public should understand that a plan is being followed and given explanations for various actions being undertaken. Detailed accounts of what is being done to address and control the CBRN event should be provided. Specific steps people can take to protect themselves and their families should be provided, including sources for more information.

- Communications activities must address the needs of provincial and regional public health professionals, local health care providers, and key partner organizations. They must also track the effectiveness of communication approaches. Diverse communication channels (e.g., Web-based, hotlines, conference calls, media briefings) will be needed to disseminate messages to these various audiences.
- During a CBRN event and in the immediate time period following an event, frequent, regularly scheduled updates/meetings between public and private partners, stakeholders and the media will be critical to ensure coordinated, consistent and responsive communications.
- Given that several CBRN events may require the use of isolation and quarantine to control the spread of biological agenda that will cause concern among affected people. It will be necessary to lay the groundwork to explain why these public health measures may be necessary, to describe the legal considerations for implementing them, and the mental health issues that they can cause among affected people.

Crisis Communication Team
- Each organization is expected to have a crisis communication team. Team members should have particular skills and experience that will help them communicate and manage the effects of the emergency on the organization and its stakeholders.
- Ideally, crisis communication teams are small and nimble but they have access to additional staff who can gather information and perform duties as required. Each member of the team should have at least one back-up designated in the event the core member cannot perform his/her function.

Liaison Organizations
- Where necessary and relevant, use liaison organizations that will take information provided by the health unit and share it with other organizations in their sector, and they will also coordinate and synthesize information received from their sector and communicate this information to the health unit in a timely effective manner.

Crisis Communication Team – Key Roles
- Works with senior leadership to liaise with the sector's liaison organization.
- Develops key messages/statements.
- Works with other internal experts (including Joint Health and Safety Committees or Health and Safety representatives in matters of occupational health and safety) to develop content for internal and external communications.
- Distributes organization's materials and other information (e.g. from MOHLTC) to members.
- Communicates with media.
- Identifies and helps prepare primary and back-up spokespeople.
- Determines third-party contacts to use as spokespeople.
- Ensures media monitoring is in place.

- Updates senior leadership.

Example: Responsibilities of the Communication Officer during an Event (*from the BC Smallpox Emergency Response Plan***)**

During a CBRN event, the public information officer will have primary responsibility for the following:

- Ensure all information is clear, confirmed and approved by the appropriate authority prior to release to the public or media
- Ensure unconfirmed information is not released
- Monitor news programs and reviewing news articles for accuracy and correct serious misinformation when possible
- Establish the 24 hour call-center, provide sufficient staffing and training
- Provide public information according to priorities
- Ensure official spokespersons are briefed about all aspects of the event
- Keep medical health officer, communicable disease staff, directors, etc. informed of all media actions taken or planned
- Keep public information officers in other jurisdictions and at other government levels informed of information released
- Maintain a log and file of all information
- Release emergency instructions/information to the public as necessary (i.e. closing of public facilities, vaccine locations, etc.)
- Release prevention, treatment and control information as appropriate
- Respond to media calls
- Attend briefings and planning sessions
- Consider additional methods of distributing emergency instructions
- Arrange daily, or as needed, media briefings
- Prepare news releases, as required
- Provide information in foreign languages, as required

Key Steps

Get in Front
- To ensure clear communications during an emergency, it is essential to identify information pathways, expectations and reporting mechanisms in advance.
- Each organization should establish and convene the crisis communications team as soon as is necessary/possible.

Manage
- Plan according to an EOC-established information cycle (using the example of the pandemic plan 24-hour information cycle clock).
- Carry out routine situation scans, incorporating the inputs from liaison organizations, within the established information cycle. These should assess the current state of the crisis and provide up-to-date information/messages for internal and external audiences, especially the EOC.
- Use the **New Information Report** to record decision and to assess the status of actions at the team's next meeting.
- Use previously developed communication materials, where and when possible.

- Determine who key audiences are, identify the member of the crisis team responsible for communicating with each audience, by what method and when. Enable the systems required to communicate with each audience (i.e., email distribution lists readied, notification sent to stakeholders to receive information).
- Develop and communicate key messages that should:

✓ Describe the details of the current situation.

✓ Describe the impact of the situation on your stakeholder audience.

✓ Describe the action being taken to mitigate the spread of disease and promote treatment.

✓ Provide contact information for more information or answer questions.

Identify spokespeople (primary and backup) based on their knowledge and experience, their ability to connect with the intended audience, and their ability to deliver information in a clear and direct way. Spokespeople should be calm and reassuring while educating audiences about proper methods of protecting depending on the nature and circumstances of the emergency. The person in the "command" role is often the spokesperson; however, in some cases another member may be better suited to the task.

Communicate

Use the **Content Checklist** to help ensure your communications address all the information internal and external recipients need.

Take the lead role in communicating the details of the situation with employees. Work with Joint Health and Safety Committees or Health and Safety Representatives to communicate the health and safety precautions to be followed.

Use different methods to communicate with employees (e.g., pay envelopes, by email, on the company intranet, on bulletin boards, by newsletter, by voice recording on a company phone system). Ensure information is available in languages appropriate to the organization's workforce.

Make sure that external stakeholders have specified means to contact the crisis communication team, e.g. dedicated phone lines, email addresses, website. Give staff handling calls from and to stakeholder's key messages and **Communications Logs**. The log should be used to track calls related to the emergency.

Act immediately on stakeholder/employee requests for information.

Forward completed log forms to the crisis team as soon as possible to keep members updated on stakeholders' questions and comments. Use the information to modify key messages.

Ensure that the provision of summaries of contacts with external stakeholders and the outflow of communications information correspond to the information cycle established by the EOC.

Communicate with the media. Media relations are a key method of communicating in a crisis. Be aware of and plan for the needs of the different media attending briefings, (e.g. print vs. radio vs. television), ensuring that the physical locale of media briefings can address these needs. Be attentive to such issues as filing deadlines. Plan communications with media with the EOC information cycle in mind. Please refer to **Incoming Media Call Log.**

Provide additional communication to the general public and specific risk populations (e.g. schools) through mechanisms such as:

- in-store public address systems

- posters and pamphlets

- announcements at meetings

- existing mailings of newsletters or statements.

Update communications with new information when relevant and appropriate, to keep the community and decision-makers aware of developments in the emergency, measures to individuals, families and stakeholders can take to manage, mitigate or prevent further impacts of the emergency.

Evaluate Progress

Evaluate information delivery, media coverage and stakeholder response. Scan daily newspapers, radio and television coverage for stories related to the situation. Analyze news coverage for:

Content: key messages used and understood; quotes from your organization's stakeholders and sector's organizations; pictures; content placement; page number or time of day.

Distribution: the number and location of media outlets that print/broadcast stories.

Evaluate quickly the types of requests, their tone and the responses required from the communications logs to identify issues to be addressed.

New Information Report

Date:	Time:

Source:

Situation and New Information:

Next Steps:

Source Contact:

Name:	
Title:	
Organization:	
Business Phone:	Cellular Phone:	
Email address:	

Key Audience Grid

Audience	Who's responsible for contacting them?	Method of contact? (e.g., email distribution, phone, meeting, signs)	By when/ How often?
Other organizations in the sector			
Employees			
Joint Health and Safety Committee/Health and Safety Representative			
Patients			
Visitors			
Volunteers			
Suppliers			
Government			
Professional Association			
Labour Organizations			
Media			

Communications Log

Subject of Communication:

Date: Time:

Stakeholder Contact Information:

Name:

Title (if known):

Company/Organization Name:

E-mail address (if known):

Telephone (if known):   Fax (if known):

Method of Contact:

☐ Incoming Call   ☐ Outgoing Call   ☐ E-mail (attached)   ☐ Fax (attached)

☐ Letter (attached)   ☐ In Person

Category: (please tick one):

☐ Member ☐ Employee ☐ General Public ☐ Government ☐ Other (specify)

Specific Questions:

Other Comments:

Your Response: (include what you said, what was promised and/or what expectations were set for information and deadlines)

Your Assessment of Level of Concern: (tick one)

☐ High   ☐ Low   ☐ Neutral

Your Name/Position:

SEND TO:
- Your organization's crisis team
- Sector organizations send to their sector's liaison organization
- Liaison organizations send to Crisis Team Command

Incoming Media Call Log

Date: **Time:**

Media (name of newspaper, radio/TV station):

Reporter's name:

Phone:

Fax:

E-mail:

Reporter's/producer's deadline:

Key questions:

When will the story run?

Who else is being interviewed for this item?

What information was provided, by whom?

*** Liaison organizations receiving these forms should share the information with the MOHLTC***

Stakeholder Communications Checklist

Content
❑ Contains information relevant to your stakeholders:

❑	Hospitals	❑	Emergency services workers
❑	Long-term care facilities	❑	Laboratory employees
❑	Home care providers	❑	Pharmacists
❑	Doctors	❑	Physiotherapists
❑	Nurses	❑	Faith/support workers
❑	Municipal employees	❑	Other health care providers
❑	Community support services		

❑ Includes scientific references for information provided

❑ Provides practical direction to a variety of sectors and health care providers based on the information provided

❑ Contains information for reaching a contact who can provide clarification

Format
Addresses language needs:
- ❑ English
- ❑ French
- ❑ Other _____

Logistics:
❑ Created by _____

❑ Approved by _____

❑ Distributed by:

   ❑ Email distribution list: _____

   ❑ Voicemail distribution list: _____