

COVID-19 Pandemic and the Absence of Strategic Communication in the United States

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Communicating a Health Crisis is a real public-social challenge

- Communication in a highly dynamic environment
- Scientific standards - vs - politics at play → news media reality
- Strategic communication by whom
- Experts and the public have different views
- Goals from political communication vs health communication vs strategic communication
- Terms are difficult to understand:
 - Immunosenescence, T Cells vs B Cells, Cytokines and Mykotines



Fundamental 1: Information use for Public Emergency Officials

Public information is a top priority for Federal CDC and State Health Agencies

Mission:

Get accurate, understandable information to the public in a timely manner so people can take action to save lives and minimize damage to property.



Fundamental 2: American Joint Information Centers

* a real challenge during Crisis because...



Fundamental 3: Health Communication - the connection with the news media

- 🌐 **What do journalists need to think about/consider/pay attention to when covering health crisis?**
 - 🌐 Science, laboratory, surveillance, case definition, medical management guidelines, PPE recommendations, community containment measures
 - 🌐 Prevention
- 🌐 **Who is the expert?**
 - 🌐 CDC, state level public health officials, local health officers and WHO
- 🌐 **What should be expected from the government?**
 - 🌐 Federal, State and local exchange of official public health information to PIOs for dissemination to affected public.
 - 🌐 Information to vulnerable populations
- 🌐 **Protect themselves?**
 - 🌐 If there is uncertainty about the chemical/biological agent, radiation exposure, or novel emerging disease, **don't rush in.**
- 🌐 **Media plays a vital role in getting the message out rapidly. 90% of the public gets emergency information from TV, radio and online news organizations**



Journalists are First Responders

Leading through communication

- 🌐 **Express empathy - Acknowledge fear and uncertainty**

“We will learn things in the coming days that we will wish we had known when we started. I wish we knew more.” or “What ever the loss of life, it will be more than we can bear.”
- 🌐 **Clarify facts - What is known? What is not known?**
 - 🌐 Explain steps being taken by officials:

“We are isolating patients, investigating who they came in contact with, alerting the public to signs and symptoms, and seeking the public cooperation with voluntary quarantine.””
- 🌐 **Give people things to do – It helps channel distress and anxiety**
 - 🌐 “If you were in __ location, on __ date, please call 1-800-__-__.”
 - 🌐 “Check on your neighbors.” “get tested or wash your hands.”



CRISIS EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION

🌐 Principles of risk communication for public emergency officials. Protocol 102.

- 🌐 Be the first source for information
- 🌐 Express empathy early
- 🌐 Show competence and expertise
- 🌐 Remain honest and open
- 🌐 Commit and remain dedicated

🌐 BUT, IT FAILED IN THE U.S.A.



Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard

COVERING PANDEMIC FLU

HOME

- AN INTRODUCTION
- THE SCIENCE
- PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS
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 - Coming to Terms With Uncertainty
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- A HISTORY OF PANDEMICS
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Outbreak Communication: How the Sources See the Story

Communicating the emerging details of an outbreak of pandemic flu to the public—and doing so in a timely manner while maintaining public trust—creates many challenges for those charged with the task. Speaking out of their experiences at two leading health organizations, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization, respectively, communications specialists Glen Nowak and Dick Thompson share insights from their work.

On this page...

Glen Nowak, Chief of Media Relations, CDC:

- [Communicating in a dynamic environment »](#)
- [Scientific standards versus news media reality »](#)
- [Education is not the sole purpose of news reporting »](#)
- [You can not just "FYI" the media »](#)
- [Why we need transparency in crisis communication »](#)
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Dick Thompson, WHO Pandemic and Outbreak Communication:

- [From Time to WHO—just in time for SARS »](#)
- [If I were a reporter, what would I want from me? »](#)
- [The five principles of outbreak communication »](#)
- [Public terror during the 1918-19 pandemic »](#)

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