

COMMUNICATIONS and INTERACTIONS WITH THE MEDIA

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Crisis Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) Six Principles

BE FIRST: Crises are time-sensitive. Communicating information quickly is almost always important. For members of the public, the first source of information often becomes the preferred source.

BE RIGHT: Accuracy establishes credibility. Information can include what is known, what is not known, and what is being done to fill in the gaps.

BE CREDIBLE: Honesty and truthfulness should not be compromised during crises.

EXPRESS EMPATHY: Crises create harm, and the suffering should be acknowledged in words. Addressing what people are feeling, and the challenges they face, builds trust and rapport.

PROMOTE ACTION: Giving people meaningful things to do calms anxiety, helps restore order, and promotes a restored sense of control.

SHOW RESPECT: Respectful communication is particularly important when people feel vulnerable. Respectful communication promotes cooperation and rapport.

As a spokesperson:

- Know your organization's policies.
- Stay within scope of responsibilities.
- Tell the truth. Be transparent.
- Embody your institution's identity.
- Stay on message:
 - "What's important is to remember..."
 - "I can't answer that questions, but I can tell you..."
 - "Before I forget, I want to tell your viewers..."
 - "Let me put that in perspective..."

CERC Tips for Interviews and Q&A Sessions:

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/pdf/cerc-wallet-english.pdf>

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/pdf/anticipatedqa.pdf>

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Build trust and credibility:

- Express:
 - Empathy and caring
 - Competence and expertise
 - Honesty and openness
 - Commitment and dedication
- Don't over-reassure.
- Acknowledge uncertainty.
- Express wishes. ("I wish I had answers.")
- Explain the process in place to find answers.
- Acknowledge people's fear.
- Give people things to do.
- Ask more of people (share risk).

Q&A sessions:

- Use Q&A sessions as opportunities to get your key messages out.
- Keep answers short (<2 minutes)
- Use personal pronouns ("I" or "We") rather than institutional nouns ("The Department of Public Health" or "this agency").

Pro Tips for Media Interviews

<http://www.prnewsonline.com/15-tips-for-media-training-success>

<http://www.cision.com/us/2015/09/brad-phillips-webinar-recap-media-training-tips/>

1. Don't be afraid of the interview.
2. Keep in mind that the great majority of reporters are cordial people who are not out to harm you. They just want to get a story that will satisfy their editors and go home to their family.
3. Reporters hate when someone misleads or lies to them. Reporters don't like it when their stories have to be corrected through no fault of their own and because of inaccurate information provided to them.
4. Don't "wing it." Come prepared with notes regarding the topic.
5. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell the reporter that you'll get back with an answer.

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Pro Tips for Media Interviews (continued)

6. An interview is not a legal hearing. It's okay to tell a reporter that some information is proprietary.
7. Just because a reporter puts away a notebook or turns off a tape recorder doesn't mean the interview is over and you can say anything without it being used.
8. If a reporter makes a statement that you do not agree with, say so. Remaining quiet may give the impression that you agree.
9. Don't answer if you are not sure of a reporter's question. Always ask for a clarification.
10. Never say anything negative about an individual or company.
11. Don't stray from the subject of the interview to comment on the day's news. That might open up a new line of questioning.
12. If a print reporter signals that the interview is over but the client wants to provide additional information, it's okay to ask the reporter for a few more minutes.
13. Reporters like facts and figures. Instead of just voicing an opinion, back it up with facts and figures.
14. Prior to departing, let the reporter know how you can be contacted if additional information is needed.
15. And most important, never lie to a reporter.

Modified FEMA Communications Assignments List and CERC Immediate Response Checklist

- The following table combines abridged versions of two forms in order to provide the epidemiologist with a guide to obtain information for his/her communications role during an incident:
 - FEMA ICS 205A Communications List: contact information for personnel with communications responsibilities during a specific incident
<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/33528>
 - CERC Immediate Response Checklist: questions for facility and communications leadership (likely PIO) when a crisis hits
https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/pdf/cercimmediate_response.pdf
 - Questions to ask of facility and communications leadership (likely through HIMT and PIO) when crisis hits
- The complete version of the FEMA ICS 205A table is likely maintained and distributed by the Communications Unit personnel/the Public Information Officer (PIO)

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Your HIMT Role:				
Your Communications Assignment:				
Incident Name: (name assigned to the incident, likely by communications leadership/PIO)				
Operational Period Starting Date/Time:				
Operational Period Ending Date/Time: (form expires)				
Hours of operation for communication team:				
Timing of updates for communications personnel/ spokespeople:				
Name	Communications Assignment	HIMT Role	Cell	Email

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Question/Consideration	Notes	Contact(s)	Relevant File(s) (documents, URLs, etc.)
Magnitude of event?			
Status of known information? (sources, consistency, plausibility)			
Who has been notified? Facility HIMT/core team			
Facility leadership			
Patients			
Other facility leadership			
Facility personnel			
Local/county agencies			
State agencies			
Federal agencies			
Elected officials			
Media/public			

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Question/Consideration	Notes	Contact(s)	Relevant File(s) (documents, URLs, etc.)
What is the crisis level?			
Who has jurisdiction over information?			
Are there specific audience concerns?			
Is a press release planned?			
Is the drafted press release timely, accuracy checked, showing compassion, addressing audience concerns, cleared?			
Who will make updates? (e.g. facility, federal, state, local agencies)			

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Question/Consideration	Notes	Contact(s)	Relevant File(s) (documents, URLs, etc.)
What will be the frequency of updates?			
Who will receive updates?			
What channels will be used to make updates?			
Who is monitoring media coverage and audience feedback? (e.g. communications leadership, PIO)			
What mechanisms are in place for determining which messages are needed, what misinformation needs correcting, concerns, interests, and needs arising from crisis as it is being reported?			
Who is providing feedback to facility leadership?			

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CERC Sample Message Planning

https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/pdf/cercsample_msgplan.pdf

Row #	Audience	Key Message	Supporting Facts	Communication Channel
EXAMPLE	General Public	A pandemic is a worldwide flu outbreak.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pandemic flu occurred 3 times in the last century.• Most scientists believe it's only a matter of time until there's another pandemic.• The flu spreads from person to person and is highly contagious.• Pandemic flu is expected to have a high death rate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facility website• Fact sheet• Press release to newspaper, local TV, radio
EXAMPLE	General Public	If the current Asian bird flu spreads to humans, no one will be protected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The US is working with the World Health Organization to take necessary steps to meet the threat of a flu pandemic.• Vaccine will not be available initially.• New vaccine production can take as long as 3-6 months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facility website• Fact sheet• Press release to newspaper, local TV, radio
1				
2				

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Row #	Audience	Key Message	Supporting Facts	Communication Channel
3				
4				
5				
6				

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Row #	Audience	Key Message	Supporting Facts	Communication Channel
7				
8				
9				
10				

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CERC Anticipated Questions Worksheet

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/pdf/anticipatedqa.pdf>

- Commonly asked questions by the media, stakeholders, partners, and the public during crisis events.
- Use right column to prepare, review, and practice responses.
- Additional rows provided for additional likely questions (e.g. questions specific to incident).

Question	Response
What happened?	
Why did it happen?	
What was the cause?	
When and where did it happen?	
Who is to blame?	
Do you accept responsibility?	
Has this ever happened before?	
Is the public safe?	

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Question	Response
What are you doing to protect people?	
Is anyone hurt, sick, or dead? What are their names?	
What do you have to say to the victims?	
Is there danger now?	
Will there be inconvenience to the public?	
What are you going to do about it?	
Who is in charge?	
Are victims being helped?	
Did you see this coming?	
What can we expect, right now and later?	
When will we find out more?	