



Preparing for the Media Response before Disaster Strikes

In the minutes and hours following a crisis, the media response can be overwhelming. Fortunately, there are many tools that you can use to help you anticipate how the media will respond and to prepare thoughtful and effective responses to their most common concerns.



What are the most common questions the media will ask during a public health crisis?

Research examining hundreds of media responses following disasters has shown that the media usually ask certain questions during times of crisis, and that you can predict 95% of them ahead of time! You can identify the risks that are likely in your region and practice responding to some of the most common questions reporters will ask if a disaster occurs:

- What is your name and title?
- What are your job responsibilities?
- What are your qualifications?
- Can you tell us what happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Who was harmed?
- How many people were harmed?
- Are those who were harmed getting help?
- How certain are you about this information?
- How are those who were harmed getting help?
- Is the situation under control?
- How certain are you that the situation is under control?
- Is there any immediate danger?
- What is being done in response to what happened?
- Who is in charge?
- What can we expect next?
- What are you advising people to do?
- How long will it be before the situation returns to normal?
- What help has been requested or offered from others?

These are just the 20 most common questions. There are 77 questions in total. For the complete list visit: <http://www.astho.org/docs/productions/workbook.htm>

This workbook developed by Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) also has other risk communication tools that can help you prepare for media inquiries and develop effective risk communication strategies.

What is the best way to develop responses?

One effective way to develop media responses is through message maps. Message maps are risk communication tools that help you organize complex information and convey your message succinctly. They are organized by the rule of threes:

- 3 key messages
- 3 supporting statements for each key message (maximum)
- 3 seconds (for radio or TV) or 9 words (for print) for each message

To develop a message map, address a likely concern related to a health risk by filling in key messages that you would like to convey to the public along with facts to support your key messages. In the example below developed by United States Department of Health & Human Services, the risk is pandemic influenza and the concern addressed is “What is pandemic influenza?”

What is pandemic influenza?		
Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
<i>Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak caused by a new influenza virus</i>	<i>Pandemic influenza is different from seasonal influenza (or “the flu”)</i>	<i>Timing and consequences of pandemic influenza are difficult to predict</i>
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
The virus may spread easily, possibly causing serious illness and death	Seasonal flu is caused by viruses that are already among people	Pandemic influenza has occurred three times in the last century
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Because so many people are at risk, serious consequences are possible	Pandemic influenza may begin with an existing influenza virus that has changed	Flu viruses are constantly changing
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
Historically, pandemic influenza has caused widespread harm and death	Fewer people would be immune to a new influenza virus	The most serious was the 1918 pandemic which killed tens of millions of people worldwide

Want to learn more about message maps?

For more details on message maps see: <http://publichealth.yale.edu/ycphp/messagemapping.pdf>

For over 60 complete message maps on pandemic and avian influenza, visit:

http://www.pandemicflu.gov/news/pre_event_maps.pdf



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*The purpose of this newsletter is to provide preparedness information to public health professionals.
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