

Managing the Media

During a Community Health Crisis

First Nations Health Council Toolkit



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Managing the Media During a Community Health Crisis

The Role of the Media

The media is responsible for gathering information and providing that information to the public. Each media source is unique, and although they may all be reporting on the same story, the final products can be very different. This is what the media calls “framing a story;” it’s how they want to present a story to the public. How the media frames a story will affect public opinions and actions. That is why it’s important to be prepared for the media; the more information you can provide and control, the closer the final products will look. The media will get their story no matter what, so cooperating with the media will help you and them.

What is News?

Issues that affect us socially, economically, emotionally or environmentally—most news stories focus on what is new about the world.

What the Media Are Looking For

When the media call in the early stages of a crisis they are looking for facts, which is why it is important to prepare a holding statement early on. Ultimately, newsworthy stories about people interest journalists and make good headlines, as do stories involving conflict, crisis and tragedy. Competition to deliver a story is intense and with deadlines looming journalists will look for a spokesperson to retrieve information; however, this might not always be accurate or culturally sensitive.

Five Important Reasons to Talk to the Media

1. Communicate your position on matters of public importance
2. To send a message to government
3. To raise your public profile
4. To combat rumours and protect a nervous public
5. If you don't someone else will

Types of Media

There are four main types of media who will be taking pictures and videos along with interviews from key speakers. Their stories will generally run between a minute and two minutes in length. Radio media will want audio clips from the same people, and will get most of their information over the phone. They will be the first to run the story. Newspapers will send photographers and reporters, and will also want information over the phone. Their stories will be more detailed than television and radio media. And finally there are internet media. They will gather their information over the phone, and from the other media sources. All of the media are following twitter and are monitoring blog posts and Facebook postings. Citizen journalists will be taking pictures and uploading these to websites such as Youtube, or providing them to major news organizations.

Types of media

- Print
- Radio
- Television
- Internet
 - Facebook
 - twitter
 - Citizen journalists

Deadlines

When reporting a story, journalists live by their deadlines. The deadline is when a reporter has to hand his finished story to the editor in time for it to be printed or broadcasted. Deadlines are inflexible and cannot be broken. Without deadlines, the six o'clock news might be shown at 6:30 or a newspaper might only run every few days. It is important to ask a journalist what their deadline time is because the deadlines for television, radio, newspaper and Internet are all very different.

Media tip:

If you miss a journalist's deadline someone else will be happy to tell your story—which may not be what you wish to see in print.

The Critical First Hour

In the event of a health emergency in your community—be it an H1N1 outbreak or a water-borne illness—everyone is going to want answers. Are you prepared for when the international media descends upon you? Here are a few things to prepare in the first hour a crisis hits your community:

1. Develop a holding statement for the media. This is the initial statement released to the media once a crisis has broken to avoid speculation and distortion of facts.
2. Identify spokespeople and organize them with messages. This will ensure consistent and accurate messages are given to the media.
3. Track media calls; prioritize them in order of target audiences. This will guarantee that all media who call receive clear, accurate answers in time for their individual deadlines.
4. Draft a news release.

* Please refer to the back of this booklet for templates for a holding statement and news release.

Characteristics of the first 24 hours of an emergency

- A surge of media attention
- Media voids not filled by official sources are filled by unofficial accounts
- Communication breakdowns
- Spokespeople subject to severe stress
- Opposing voices seek visibility
- Media sensationalism

Developing Key Messages

Key messages are essentially what you want the journalist to "take away" from the interview and write about. So, it is important they are clear and concise and based on facts. They should be no more than one or two sentences in length and should address the main concerns surrounding the crisis.

*A key message worksheet is included at the back of the booklet.

Delivering Your Message

To get the message across to the media it is important to focus on only a few key messages that are timely, accurate, clear, concise, credible and memorable.

One technique for ensuring this is to use bridging phrases that link one message to one another. Bridging, along with hooking and flagging, are similar techniques discussed later in this booklet.

In terms of message delivery, it is important to be:

- First
- Accurate
- Honest
- Accessible
- Credible
- Consistent
- Caring and concerned
- Committed to action
- Relevant

Preparing for the Media

Dealing with the media can seem overwhelming, but proper preparation will help you tackle even the hardest of media interviews. The media will want to know as many facts as you can provide, and will probably have some assumptions made even before the interview. The most important thing to prepare is your facts. Accurate and reliable facts will help the media see you as a cooperative and credible source of information. You must also be prepared to answer questions based from rumours and gossip. Remember, if you aren't sure of your facts it's best not to release them, as that can fuel further rumours and speculation.

Take Control

Remember you have information the media needs. So take control of the interview by setting time limits on interviews, stick to the facts, don't speculate or provide guarantees, and don't repeat negatives.

Do deliver your message as many times as possible by using bridging, flagging and hooking language .

You should know the following before making a statement to the media:

- Who is your key speaker, the one that will deal with the media the most?
- Who is your secondary speaker, maybe an expert or someone who works closely with your key speaker?
- Who is your communications person, the person(s) responsible for creating a Holding Statement and Key Messages?
- What facts do you know for sure?

Bridging, Hooking and Flagging

Bridging, hooking and flagging are Time-proven methods for controlling and influencing the direction of an interview, and ensuring that the messages you want to deliver are communicated effectively and repeatedly.

Bridging

Bridging is a technique that allows you to move the interview from a line of questioning you're uncomfortable with to one that allows you to effectively communicate your key messages.

Hooking

Hooking is a technique whereby statements that you make lead reporters to ask the questions you want them to ask. Bringing up a certain topic in your statement usually leads a reporter to ask about that topic.

Bridging language includes:

I am not the best person to answer that question BUT WHAT I CAN TELL YOU is...

I don't know about that, but what I do know is...

That may have been true in the past, but the reality today is...

I suppose that's one way to look at it. I see it this way...

I think you are missing the point. Let me explain...

Hooking language includes:

We are concerned about the situation, and we are doing all we can to help. This is particularly troubling for us considering all the work we have done to protect the community.

Flagging

Flagging is the simplest and most effective way to ensure that reporters and the viewing public recognize your key message. Essentially it is an attempt to tell people what is important by flagging important points, drawing attention to the crucial issues.

Flagging language includes:

- If there's one thing to remember it is...
- Do you know what really surprised me about this? ...

Media Call Log

Reporter:	
Media Name:	
Telephone Number:	
Fax Number:	
Time Called:	
Date Called:	
Deadline:	
Angle of Story:	
Interview Requested: (who, what, when, where)	
Information Given: (example: spokesperson's phone number)	
Further Information Needed/ Request Sent To:	
Other Comments:	
Call Back By Who:	

Bridging Phrases

1. ...But the facts are...
2. ...Here's another way to say it.
3. ...From my perspective...
4. ...Here's an even tougher question...
5. ...I have heard that too, but the real focus should be...
6. ...I would describe differently...
7. ...If I may, let me pick a more important point...
8. ...Looking ahead...
9. ...Let's deal in reality...
10. ...Let's talk about something I'm even more familiar with...
11. ...Let's use another perspective...
12. ...Opinions can differ, but I believe...
13. ...Our goal is...
14. ...That's one view, mine is...
15. ...The critical issue is...
16. ...The question should be...
17. ...What concerns me even more...
18. ...What's more important is...
19. ...Yes, but...

Key Messages Worksheet

Instructions: Develop messages and responses for questions that reporters may ask.

Step 1: In plain language, develop a 30 to 60 second (75 to 100 words) key message. You will use this message to talk about the issue, answer a question, etc.

Step 2: For each key message you should have several proof points. Develop a brief description and examples that illustrate the message you want to bring across.

Key Message

Supporting Points

Proof Point	Supporting Points	Examples

Holding Statement

For Immediate Release

(INCIDENT) AT (NATION'S NAME)

(Location): At approximately (time) there was what is currently being investigated as a (Brief general description – H1N1 outbreak, death, fire, etc.) at (Nation's name).

We are working to determine (injuries, deaths, outbreak cases, etc.). At this time we have confirmed that (General information that is FOR CERTAIN, e.g., one person is confirmed to have H1N1 and is currently in hospital, etc. DELETE THIS SECTION IF NO CONFIRMED INFO IS AVAILABLE.) The safety and well-being of our community, our neighbors and the public is our first priority (Expressions of compassion/concern if appropriate).

As more information is available we will be providing updates through (web site address) and regular media briefings.

Note for the media: Media briefings will be held at (Location) at (Time- specific time, or general, i.e., every hour on the hour, etc.)

For more information please contact:

Contact Name:

Contact Phone Number:

Contact Email Address:

Press Release Template

For Immediate Release

Headline

(Location, Date) One sentence, 7-10 words, that describes the major point of the release: (e.g., One confirmed case of H1N1 found on Soowahlie reserve.) (Date)

Main Paragraph

Quickly answer the Who, What, Where, When and Why

Who is affected?

What is going on?

Where is this taking place?

When did this happen?

Why is this important?

Following Paragraphs

These paragraphs should include key messages and quotes from pre-determined spokespersons detailing what actions they are taking, or voicing compassion and concern:

Key Message

1. _____

2. _____

Quote

For more information please contact:

Contact Name:

Contact Phone Number:

Contact Email Address:

7 Steps to Effective Media Communication During Public Health Emergencies

- 1. Assess the media's needs, constraints and capabilities**
 - Assess the needs of the media
 - Assess the constraints of the media
 - Assess internal media-relations constraints
- 2. Develop goals, plans and strategies**
 - Develop media communication goals and objectives
 - Develop a written media plan
 - Develop a partner and stakeholder strategy
- 3. Train communicators**
 - Train the media communication team
 - Train the public information officer
 - Train a designated lead spokesperson
- 4. Prepare messages**
 - Prepare a list of stakeholders and their concerns
 - Prepare clear and concise messages
 - Prepare targeted messages
- 5. Identify media outlets and media activities**
 - Identify available media outlets
 - Identify the most effective media outlets
 - Identify media activity for the first 24-72 hours
- 6. Deliver messages**
 - Deliver clear and timely messages
 - Deliver messages to maintain visibility
 - Deliver targeted messages
- 7. Evaluate messages and performance**
 - Evaluate message delivery and media coverage
 - Evaluate and improve performance based on feedback
 - Evaluate public response to messages

Basic Information Typically Included in a Media Communication Plan

A media communications plan should include:

- Describe and designate staff roles and responsibilities for different emergency scenarios
- Designate who is responsible for leading the response
- Designate who is responsible for implementing various actions
- Designate who needs to be consulted
- Designate who needs to be informed about what's taking place
- Designate who will be the lead spokesman and backup
- Include procedures for information verification, clearance and approvals
- Include procedures for coordinating with important stakeholders
- Include agreements on releasing information
- Include policies and procedures for employee contact with media
- Outline contingency plans for various scenarios
- Include regularly checked and updated media contact list
- Outline exercises and drills for testing the media communications plan
- Identify subject matter experts willing to collaborate during an emergency
- Identify preferred communications channels (for example, telephone, news conferences, etc) to communicate to the public, stakeholders and media
- Contain holding statements, key messages and templates
- Contain fact sheets, talking points, and any other supplemental materials
- Contain procedures for posting information on websites
- Contain task checklists for the first 2, 4, 8, 12, 16, 24 and 48 hours
- Contain procedures for evaluating the media plan

Preparing for Interviews- The Top 77 Questions You're Likely to be Asked

1. What is your name and title?
2. How do you spell and pronounce your name?
3. What are your job responsibilities?
4. Can you tell us what happened? Were you there? How do you know what you are telling us?
5. When did it happen?
6. Where did it happen?
7. Who was harmed?
8. How many people were harmed or sick?
9. Are those that were harmed getting help?
10. How are those that were harmed getting help?
11. Is the situation under control?
12. How certain are you that the situation is under control?
13. Is there any immediate danger?
14. What is being done in response to what happened?
15. Who is in charge?
16. What can we expect next?
17. What are you advising people to do? What can people do to protect themselves and their families?
18. How long will it be before the situation returns to normal?
19. What help has been requested or offered from others?
20. What responses have you received?
21. Can you be specific about the types of harm that occurred?
22. What are the names, ages and hometowns of those that were harmed?
23. Can we talk to them?

24. How much damage occurred?
25. What other damage may have occurred?
26. How certain are you about the damage?
27. How much damage do you expect?
28. What are you doing now?
29. Who else is involved in the response?
30. Why did this happen?
31. What was the cause?
32. Did you have any forewarning that this might happen?
33. Why wasn't this prevented from happening? Could this have been avoided?
34. How could this have been avoided?
35. What else could go wrong?
36. If you are not sure of the cause, what is your best guess?
37. Who caused this to happen?
38. Who is to blame?
39. Do you think that those involved handled the situation well enough? What more could or should those who handled the situation have done?
40. When did your response to this begin?
41. When were you notified that something had happened?
42. Did you and other organizations disclose information promptly? Have you and other organizations been transparent?
43. Who is conducting the investigation? Will the outcome be reported to the public?
44. What are you going to do after the investigation?
45. What have you found out so far?
46. Why was more not done to prevent this from happening?
47. What is your personal opinion?
48. What are you telling your own family?
49. Are all those involved in agreement?
50. Are people over-reacting?

51. Which laws are applicable?
52. Has anyone broken the law?
53. How certain are you about whether laws have been broken?
54. Has anyone made mistakes?
55. How certain are you that mistakes have not been made?
56. Have you told us everything you know?
57. What are you not telling us?
58. What effects will this have on the people involved?
59. What precautionary measures were taken?
60. Do you accept responsibility for what happened?
61. Has this ever happened before?
62. Can this happen elsewhere?
63. What is the worst case scenario?
64. What lessons were learned?
65. Were those lessons implemented?
66. What can be done now to prevent this from happening again?
What steps need to be taken to avoid a similar event?
67. What would you like to say to those who have been harmed and to their families?
68. Is there any continuing danger?
69. Are people out of danger?
70. Will there be inconvenience to employees or to the public?
What can people do to help?
71. How much will all this cost?
73. Who else will pay the costs?
74. When will we find out more?
75. What steps need to be taken to avoid a similar event? Have these steps already been taken? If not, why not?
76. Why should we trust you?
77. What does all this mean?