

Communications During Pandemics and Outbreaks

Module 2 of the Strengthening Interprofessional Education for HIV
(STRIPE HIV) Pandemic Preparedness Certificate

Approximate time to complete module: 100 minutes



**Strengthening
Interprofessional
Education
for HIV**

Knowing Your Audience

Knowing your audience can ensure that your communication considers the following factors:

- What is and is not already known about the outbreak
- Rumours that may be spreading about the outbreak
- Local customs or beliefs
- Pre-existing trust or mistrust in the healthcare system
- Care-seeking behaviour outside of the formal healthcare system (e.g. alternative medicine, healers, etc.)
- Potential barriers to taking action or making behavioural changes
- Preferred mode of communication, including language/dialect, written vs spoken communication, how and when to reach people, etc.

Communication Objectives and Strategies (for Activity 2)

Objectives	Strategy
Maintain or instil trust and confidence	Ensure that communication demonstrates: • Empathy and caring—always start by expressing empathy and acknowledging the concerns/anxiety/worry for those affected by the outbreak; avoid using stigmatizing language and ensure patient confidentiality • Active listening (be attentive and responsive to the emotional and psychological needs of the audience) • Honesty and openness • Dedication, commitment, competence and expertise. Express a desire to find answers.
Inform the public	• Clarity: Ensure that the audience understands the nature of the threat how it spreads, and what actions they should take. Avoid medical jargon and use simple, understandable terms, preferably in the local language or dialect. • Accuracy: Information should be accurate and avoid unnecessary corrections to the information that may create confusion, fear or mistrust in the community. Do not over-reassure and make sure to acknowledge uncertainty when it exists. Explain the process for finding answers. • Timeliness: Timely information allows early mitigation in the spread, fosters trust, & prevents misinformation. Foreshadow what may come next, if known.
Promote action and behavioural change	• Provide clear, accurate, timely information regarding what people can do to protect themselves and others (but acknowledge that making behavioural changes can be challenging) • Link your recommendations for behavioural change to the values and motivations stated by your patients (e.g. caring for others, protecting the health of others in their household, avoiding missing time at work due to illness, etc.)

Risk Communication Messaging to the Community:

Sample Sentences to Meet Communication Objectives

Maintain/Instill Trust and Confidence

- Express **empathy** and **understanding**: “We know this situation is scary.”
- **Express a desire to find the answers for what is not yet known**: “We wish we had answers to...”

Inform the Public

- **Do not over-reassure**: “Let me make myself clear. This is a challenging situation.”
- **Acknowledge uncertainty**: “Here is what we do not know yet.”
- **Share dilemmas**: “We can do [X] or [Y]. If we do [X], here are the advantages and disadvantages. If we do [Y], the advantages and disadvantages are...”
- **Foreshadow possibilities**: “Over the next several days, we might see more cases because...”
- **Explain the process in place for finding those answers**: “Here is what we are doing to learn more.”

Promote Action/Behavioural Change

- **Give the audience some things to do**: “Here is what we need you to do.”

Source: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/index.asp>

Communication Objectives and Strategies (for Activity 3)

Objectives	Strategy
Maintain or instil trust and confidence	Ensure that communication demonstrates: • Empathy and caring—always start by expressing empathy and acknowledging the concerns/anxiety/worry for those affected by the outbreak; avoid using stigmatizing language and ensure patient confidentiality • Active listening (be attentive and responsive to the emotional and psychological needs of the audience) • Honesty and openness • Dedication, commitment, competence and expertise. Express a desire to find answers.
Inform the public	• Clarity: Ensure that the audience understands the nature of the threat how it spreads, and what actions they should take. Avoid medical jargon and use simple, understandable terms, preferably in the local language or dialect. • Accuracy: Information should be accurate and avoid unnecessary corrections to the information that may create confusion, fear or mistrust in the community. Do not over-reassure and make sure to acknowledge uncertainty when it exists. Explain the process for finding answers. • Timeliness: Timely information allows early mitigation in the spread, fosters trust, & prevents misinformation. Foreshadow what may come next, if known.
Promote action and behavioural change	• Provide clear, accurate, timely information regarding what people can do to protect themselves and others (but acknowledge that making behavioural changes can be challenging) • Link your recommendations for behavioural change to the values and motivations stated by your patients (e.g. caring for others, protecting the health of others in their household, avoiding missing time at work due to illness, etc.)

Mpox Community Message: Sample Outline

- What is Mpox?
- Current Mpox Outbreak
- Symptoms
- How Mpox Spreads
- How to Protect Yourself
- When to Seek Care
- What Action Is Being Taken
- Summary/Take Home Messages (sometimes these are placed at the top)
- Consider adding visuals to make your message clearer and more interesting

1 of 2: Mpox Community Message: Sample Text

What is Mpox?

Mpox (previously known as monkeypox) is a virus that can cause infections in people and can spread from person to person.

Current Mpox Outbreak

As of [date] there have been [X] cases of mpox identified in the [location]. Health experts think more people could get mpox.

Symptoms

Mpox can cause an uncomfortable rash with bumps on your skin, in your mouth, or on your genitals. Some people also have a fever, swollen glands (lymph nodes), muscle aches, or a sore throat—sometimes before the rash starts.

How Mpox Spreads

Mpox can spread from contact with the skin of a person with mpox, including sexual contact. Spending time in a poorly ventilated area with somebody with mpox can also spread the virus.

2 of 2: Mpox Community Message: Sample Text

How to Protect Yourself

- Avoid close contact with people who may have mpox.
- Wash hands with soap and water if you think you have been exposed.
- Limit sexual contact with new partners. Condoms can help lower your risk, but they don't fully protect you.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about getting a vaccine to prevent mpox.

When to Seek Care

There may be treatments for the virus that help you feel better. You may need to stay away (isolate) from others to prevent the spread of the virus.

- Talk to your doctor if you think you may have symptoms.
- Talk to your doctor if you have been around someone who might have mpox.

What Action Is Being Taken

Public health officials are tracking cases, sharing information with the public, and providing vaccines and treatments to help protect people and stop the spread of mpox.

Mpox Community Message: Sample Summary/Take Home Message

Mpox can cause a rash and flu-like symptoms. It spreads through close contact with someone who has it, like skin-to-skin or sexual contact. It can also spread in places with poor airflow.

You can protect yourself by:

- Avoiding direct contact with someone who might have mpox
- Washing your hands
- Talking to a doctor about getting vaccinated
- Limiting sexual contact with new partners

If you think you might have mpox or were exposed, talk to a doctor right away. There may be treatments to help you feel better and keep others safe. Public health teams are tracking mpox, sharing information, and offering vaccines and treatments.

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the key objectives of communication—and how to achieve them—when front-line healthcare workers are sharing information with the community during a disease outbreak
2. Demonstrate how to provide effective verbal communication with patients regarding a disease outbreak or pandemic
3. Demonstrate how to provide concise and effective written communication with patients regarding a disease outbreak or pandemic

