

Activity #3: Practicing Communication in Outbreak Role Play

Communication During Pandemics and Outbreaks

Module 2 | STRIPE HIV Pandemic Preparedness Certification

Roles for Learner 1

Scenario #1

Background: Lassa fever is a cause of hemorrhagic fever that often leads to severe disease and can be fatal, particularly in elderly patients and young children. Over the years, there have been sporadic outbreaks of the virus in and around the community. Many people in the community have limited access to media and are highly suspicious of outsiders, including healthcare workers. While antiviral therapy is not commonly available, treatment in the hospital can help people recover from the infection. When these outbreaks occur, however, rumours about the virus spread quickly, and some individuals refuse treatment or quarantining measures. The virus can spread by accidental ingestion or inhalation of rodent droppings or urine, through contact with bodily secretions (e.g., urine, vomit, feces), or through unprotected sexual contact for up to 3 months after infection.

Role: Healthcare Worker

You are a worker at a healthcare facility in the community that has recently treated a growing number of patients with Lassa fever. You are caring for a patient who is recovering from a motorbike accident. She tells you that she has heard about the increase in Lassa fever in the community and wants to talk to you about it. As you prepare to discuss Lassa fever with this patient, consider the three main objectives of communication:

- Inform the public: What information do you want to share, and how will you share it?
- Maintain trust and confidence: How can you demonstrate active listening, empathy, honesty, and expertise?
- Promote action and/or behavioural change: what should your patient do to protect themselves or others in the community?

Scenario #2

Background: An unknown outbreak has caused a significant rise in cases of illness in your community. The disease has been spreading rapidly, with multiple individuals presenting with fever, fatigue, and respiratory symptoms. The exact pathogen is not yet identified, however, health authorities are investigating the source and working to contain the outbreak. Currently, evidence suggests that the illness is spreading to multiple individuals in the same household and respiratory droplets (from coughing, sneezing, and sharing space in poorly ventilated spaces) are likely to transmit the infection. It is uncertain if touching contaminated surfaces can transmit the virus. Some patients have been quite sick and have been admitted to the hospital, while others appear to have mild symptoms.

Role: Neighbour

Everyone in your community is talking about the outbreak of respiratory symptoms. You are scared that so many people have become sick in a short period of time, and you have two friends who were admitted to the hospital for a number of days, including one who almost died. You have heard about a respected local healer who is offering herbal and natural remedies to prevent the infection, and you would like to ask your neighbour who works in healthcare about this because you are considering getting the treatments for yourself. You are also concerned that local health authorities have not shared the cause of the infection, and you suspect that they are not sharing all information with the public. You are hoping that your neighbour can tell you what is really going on.