

Activity #3: Practicing Communication in Outbreak Role Play

Communication During Pandemics and Outbreaks

Module 2 | STRIPE HIV Pandemic Preparedness Certification

Roles for Learner 2

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: Patient

You have heard about Lassa fever cases in the community and don't know if you should be concerned about the virus. You have a family member who was initially sick and recovered quickly at home, but you also know a neighbour who is rumoured to have died from an infection. You want to know what you can do to protect yourself from Lassa fever, but you don't like going to the hospital. You are worried that if you come to the hospital with Lassa fever, you will be put in isolation and will not receive any medical care.

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: Healthcare Worker

You are a worker at a healthcare facility in the community, and you have learned about this outbreak from public health officials. The cases are not due to influenza or COVID-19, but the cause is not currently known. Rumours are spreading in the community about the outbreak, and some people are trying preventative treatments from a local healer that appear to have made them quite sick. You have cared for a number of patients with this infection, as well as a few patients who became very ill after receiving herbal treatments from the local healer. Your neighbour knows that you work in healthcare and comes to talk to you about the outbreak. As you prepare to discuss the outbreak 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?