

# COMMUNICATION

Effective communication will play a crucial role in controlling the spread of pandemic influenza and maintaining stability in the face of a disruptive situation. To achieve effective communication during a pandemic requires advance planning now.

While the exact messages to convey to the public will depend upon country-specific circumstances that cannot be predicted in advance, there are a number of essential issues that countries can address in their planning. These include the following:

- Identifying key audiences to receive information on pandemic influenza, including the media, the general public, health care workers, civic leaders, and community health responders
- Clarifying in broad terms the types of actions or practices that each of these groups could take
- Identifying communication channels to reach each audiences (for example, TV or radio, interpersonal communication through community or religious leaders)
- Specifying official chains of communication to expedite rapid and accurate dissemination of information
- Designating official spokespersons as well as other popular and trusted individuals to convey messages to the public
- Training spokespersons on how to convey information to reassure the public, dispel false rumors, minimize anxiety, and motivate the desired actions
- Educating journalists on key facts about pandemic influenza and how to communicate them without inducing panic
- Conducting research and pre-testing of possible messages to understand people's perceptions of risk and how to word messages so that they will lead to appropriate actions.
- Orienting local leaders and community health responders on how to communicate effectively with families and communities about pandemic influenza.

These issues need to be addressed in a specific communication plan that is part of the larger pandemic preparedness plan, both at national and lower (i.e. sub-national, district, or local) levels. The elements of the communication plan may include the following:

- Communication goals
- Plan implementers—roles and functions
- Conducting a situation analysis—rapid assessment/communication mapping
- Identifying the communication chain ("telephone tree")
- Setting up the communication control center

- Links to technical experts
- Target audiences (public, stakeholders, media, government)
- Key message points
- Channels of communication (mass media, electronic, traditional, interpersonal)
- Managing misinformation
- Tracking and monitoring communication