

Exercise 6: Working With the Media

Scenario 1

Directions: You are a local public health information officer. Your director of health is available for 2 hours today if you need her to participate in any media activities related to the situation described below. Please explain your plan for the director's time during those 2 hours.

It's January—an outbreak of a severe pulmonary disease has hit your community hard. Doctor visits, emergency room visits, and hospital admissions are on the increase. Deaths are being reported. Your health department has not yet confirmed what is causing this influenza-like illness with respiratory complications. Cultures were sent to the CDC. In the 5 days since this has hit the media, concerns about a possible bioterrorism attack are increasing. Your telephone hotline at the health department is near its call capacity. Media are demanding interviews from the director of public health. Your director, lead epidemiologist, and lead lab researcher have just finished a conference call with CDC. The community is suffering from a strain of influenza type A that was not included in this year's flu vaccines. Antivirals will help people reduce their chances of severe illness if they take the medication soon after symptoms develop.

What is your media plan involving the director regarding today's issue?

Scenario 2

Directions: You are a local public health information officer. Your director of health is available for 2 hours today if you need him to participate in any media activities related to the situation described below. Please explain your plan for the director's time during those 2 hours.

Forty-eight hours ago your community suffered a catastrophic chemical explosion. Thirty-four workers at the chemical plant are known to be dead. Three are still unaccounted for. Residents in a 5-mile radius were evacuated and are staying in American Red Cross shelters until they can return home. The chemical is known to be harmful to humans, children especially. Terrorism has not yet been ruled out and the FBI has joined with local law enforcement to investigate. There has been an increase of medical clinic and emergency room visits in the surrounding community and county. Mothers are reporting more skin rashes on their children. The epidemiological work has just begun to determine what, if any, common source rash is occurring in the community.

Today, you are bombarded with calls from the media and public about the dreaded Klingerman virus as the possible source of the rash. The Internet and e-mails have been circulating that the Klingerman virus can cause skin rashes and may be a secondary terrorist attack against your community.

CDC has debunked the Klingerman virus as an Internet hoax in the past. Its statement reads:

“The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently received several inquiries concerning an e-mail message about people who have been infected with “Klingerman virus” after opening gift packages delivered to them in the mail. The e-mail is a hoax. There is no Klingerman virus, and the information in the e-mail notice is untrue. If you receive an e-mail message about Klingerman virus, please do not forward it to others.

“Although the e-mail message is a hoax, if you are concerned about the contents of a package you receive in the mail, contact your local post office. It is a criminal offense to send potentially hazardous agents through the mail for the purpose of deliberately causing harm to human health. When such an incident occurs, the local emergency response system should be activated by dialing 911 in most communities; in communities without 911 systems, local law enforcement authorities should be notified. The local FBI field office and local and state public health authorities also should be notified.”

What is your media plan involving the director regarding today's issue?