COVID-19 Risk Communication

Julie Leask PhD, MPH
School of Nursing and Midwifery and School of Public Health
University of Sydney
APRU/UCLA
Twitter @julieleask

Perspectives of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Epidemiology, Prevention and Control
Risk communication – from this EXPERTS AUDIENCE
“Risk communication is an interactive process of exchange of information and opinion among individuals, groups, and institutions. It involves multiple messages about the nature of risk and other messages, not strictly about risk, that express concerns, opinions or reactions to risk messages or to legal and institutional arrangements for risk management”.

(National Research Council, 1989)
### Foundations – heuristics and biases

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<th>Availability</th>
<th>Assessing the likelihood of an outcome by how readily it comes to mind.</th>
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<td>Ambiguity aversion</td>
<td>People avoid taking risks when the outcome is uncertain.</td>
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**Confirmation bias**

“Strong initial views are resistant to change because they influence the way that subsequent information is interpreted.”

(Slovic P. Science, 1987)
Foundations - values

HAZARD

PROTECTION

SELF-DETERMINATION

SANCTITY

FAIRNESS

RESPECT

UNITY

Sources: Hooker C, Leask J (2020)
Foundations - trust

1. Perceived competence
2. Objectivity
3. Fairness
4. Consistency
5. Faith
6. Empathy

(Renn and Levine 1991)

Principles of Risk Communication

1. Accept and involve the public
2. Plan and evaluate efforts
3. Prioritise key groups
4. Listen and be responsive to specific public concerns
5. Be honest, frank and open
6. Work with other credible sources
7. Meet the needs of the media
8. Speak clearly and with compassion

Adapted from Vincent Covello’s Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication
Accept and involve the public

– They are the people subject to the risk
– Messages and actions will be more relevant and effective
Prioritise key groups

Ask, listen then share

Culturally respectful strategies and services

“So the service may have spoke to one mum, but guess who that mum has spoken to in the next couple of hours...20 mums and she is passing that on. You might not have that flash brochure...but the power and the time that you have put into her, she is putting that into her friends”.

doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.healthpol.2011.07.004

Creighton A Gaba Binggi (Good Needles) MPhil Thesis, USYD.
Work with community leaders who are trusted


Staff at WHO Samoa office discuss measles outbreak recovery, January 2020
Good leader communication

– Communicate early and often
– Acknowledge uncertainty
– Tolerate early over-reactions
– Give people things to do
– Show empathy
– Share dilemmas
– Trust your public(s)

Coronavirus overreaction: Experts advise there’s no need to panic and to ‘be sensible’

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAC147109069954329

Further reading, Peter Sandman Risk Communication Website
https://www.psandman.com/index.htm
“But we too face a serious situation. We expect more imported cases...... In Singapore, two of our big clusters happened in church groups...The issue is of course not religion itself, but that the virus can spread quickly to many people in crowded settings........ Please work with your religious leaders to make these practical adjustments. .... What else must we do? First, because Covid-19 will be with us for a long time, there are baseline things that we must get used to, like practising good personal hygiene, adopting new social norms and discouraging large gatherings, and generally, maintaining some physical distance from one another. That is why we already scaled down community activities, especially for the seniors.”

Lee Sien Loong, Singapore PM, 12 March 2020
Communicate clearly

- For understanding
  - Communicate clearly, without jargon
  - Attend to health literacy
  - Focus on actions

- For persuasion
  - Focus on the benefits and gains
  - Focus on protecting others
  - Align with the recipient’s moral values
  - Appeal to social consensus


Meet the needs of the media

- Develop relationships with trusted journalists
- Work with specialist reporters
- Be available
Respond well to misinformation

- Is a problem if it affects behaviour
- Monitor impact
- Prepare people – “you may hear”
- Fill the gap – early and factual communication
- Use trusted people or organisations

Use social science

https://go8.edu.au/research/roadmap-to-recovery
Many resources available

Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19

Interim guidance
7 April 2020
Thank you

Dr Sheela Basrur, 1956 – 2008