

# Communications for Pandemic Influenza Response



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# Learning Objectives

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- Identify the core elements needed in communication planning for pandemic influenza response.
- Interpret the role and importance of communications during pandemic influenza response operations.
- Acquire skills in developing and applying appropriate communication strategies/ develop and apply appropriate communication strategies.

# Outline of presentation

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- Aim of PI communications
- Challenges for PI communications
- Planning assumptions for PI communications
- Planning recommendations for PI communications

# Effective communications can

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- **Help people overcome fear, anxiety and reduce feelings of vulnerability**
- **Help people make informed decisions**
- **Manage political instability and economic impact**
- **Save lives**



# Different levels of health communications

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Intrapersonal

Interpersonal

Group

Organizational

Societal

Global



# Outbreak communication - Key principles

- Focus on trust building
- Proactively announce real or potential health risks
- Practice ongoing transparency
- Listen to and integrate public concerns and views
- Plan



# Social mobilization/Communication-for-Behavioural-Impact

- Think "inside out" (what communities tell us about themselves, their needs and wants) to plan communication strategies and activities for containment
- Ensure communities' voices are heard
- Ensure that communication is a continuous and meaningful dialogue
- There is no magic bullet – use integrated and appropriate communication strategies



# How can communications help pandemic influenza response?

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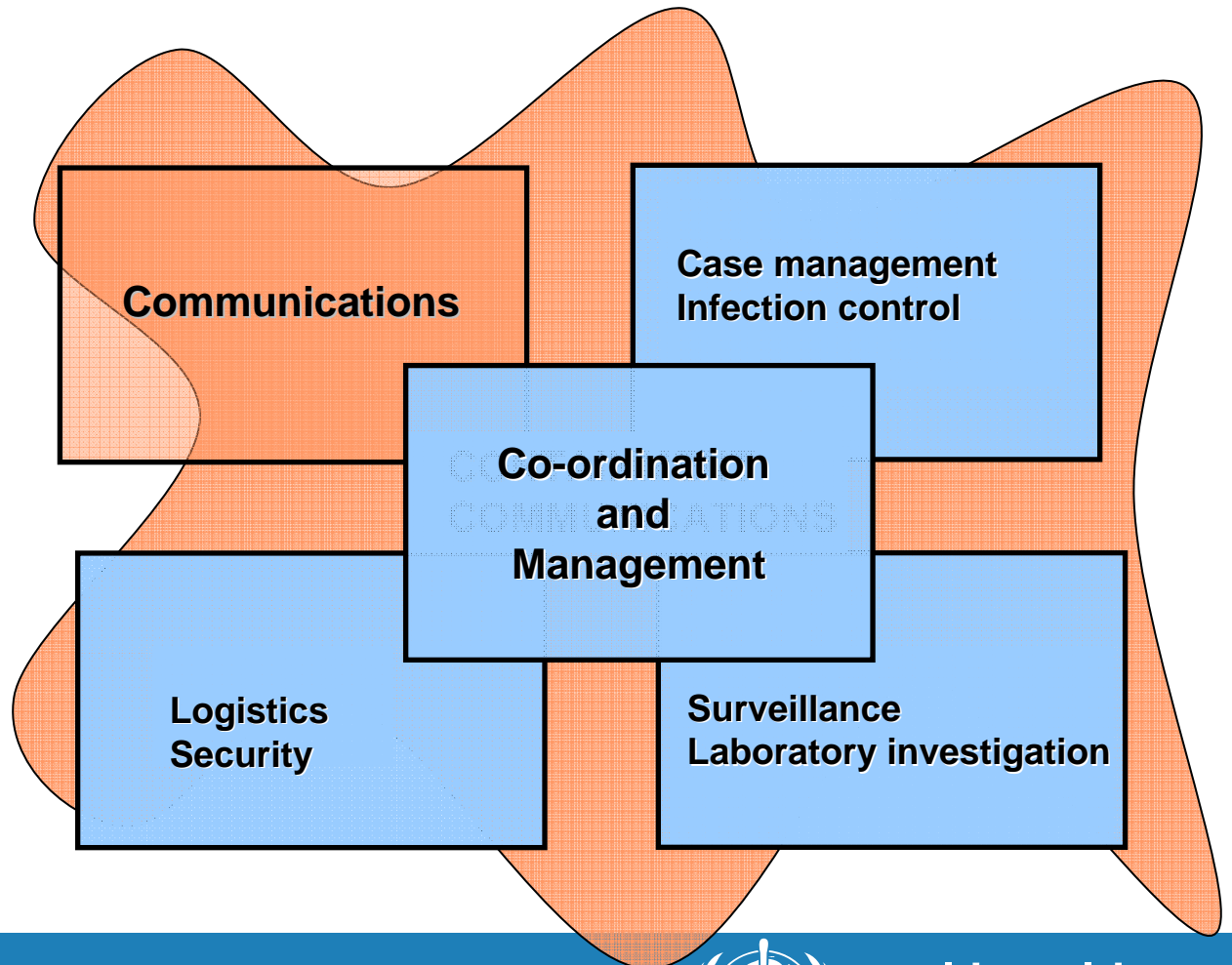
- Community level:  
helps communities understand the risks, deal with and survive the problem
- National level:  
guides and informs decision-making and response activities
- Global level:  
guides international coordination and collaboration





# Where does communications fit into pandemic influenza response?

- Exists as a distinct pillar of any effective response
- It also supports and integrates all other aspects of pandemic influenza response
- Organizes and guides information dissemination to



# The objectives of pandemic influenza response communications

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- Instil and maintain public confidence in public health interventions, institutions and personnel
- Reinforce the international coordination and cooperation underpinning the response effort
- Provide information in a timely and appropriate manner
- Promote compliance, participation, ownership in control measures
- Address inaccuracies/rumours to minimize stigmatization and fear
- Prepare for a possible pandemic

# Communications characteristics of pandemic influenza response

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- Uncertainty and anxiety will make maintenance of trust in authorities challenging
- Many critical questions will not be known for weeks
- Information about the outbreak is incomplete
- Extreme time pressure
- Need to address multiple audiences simultaneously

# Role of Medical Experts in Communication

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- Coordinate with communication experts **prior to, during and after** the response operation
- Have ongoing dialogue to decide on key messages
- Coordinate activities with social mobilization committee
- Participate in the process of evaluation of the campaign



# The challenges for Pandemic Influenza response communications

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# The challenges to compliance with public health measures

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- Separation of families and the fear of isolation and stigmatization
- Uncertainty about the efficacy and effectiveness of proposed health measures health outcomes
- Mistrust of personnel involved in control programmes and sources of information
- Availability of and access to antivirals and appropriate health care
- Availability of and access to essential supplies and the disruption of basic services
- Inability to work and loss of income
- Enforcement of restricted movement within quarantined areas

# How to address the challenges

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- Form social mobilization committee involving all key-players involved in pandemic influenza response
- Develop communication strategies for urban and rural populations
- Utilize TV, radio, posters, brochures, theatre groups and identify ambassadors to represent rapid containment



# Planning assumptions for Pandemic Influenza response communications





# Planning assumptions for Pandemic Influenza response

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- National authorities will lead on and coordinate country level communications
- WHO will lead on global level and coordinate country and international agencies
- Communication specialists integrated in decision making and risk management activities
- Pandemic influenza response communication will be a separate function
- Communications strategy will be based on knowledge of local communities' existing infra-structures
- Demand for information will exceed usual dissemination capacity



# Planning recommendations for Pandemic Influenza response communications

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# The importance of preparedness

- When people have an "illogical" fear, accepted social norms can be forgotten
- In the absence of clear guidance and direction, people will do what they perceive is "logical" and useful
- Coordinated action using multiple interventions is better than ad hoc uncoordinated and reactive measures



# Planning recommendations (1)

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- Different elements of communications need to be consistent and complementary
- Public communication activities need to be coordinated among partners
- Response policies should be developed and shared in advance
- Communication plan needs to be developed

# Communication Plan: check-list

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- ✓ Clear overall objectives
- ✓ Specific communications objectives
- ✓ Who do you need to reach? Target audience
- ✓ What do you want them to do? Target response
- ✓ Why would they want to do that? Emotions and needs
- ✓ Develop key messages: tailor to the audience
- ✓ How do you reach them? Channels and delivery systems
- ✓ Budgeting time and funding for communication
- ✓ Languages

## Planning recommendations (2)

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- Where possible, information and key messages need to be prepared and field-tested in advance around key events and through credible, trustworthy and empathetic information sources
- Potential distribution points and mechanisms for information dissemination and feedback systems should be identified
- Options for communication vehicles should be based on the communication assessment and be designed to reach various audiences

# Planning recommendations (3)

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- Resources for tracking of rumours and misinformation, information gaps or misunderstandings
- Public communications assessment needed
- Community outreach and liaison activities critical
- Simulation exercises are part of the preparation process
- Failure to do human resource planning can threaten all other planning elements