

## [HANDOUT 2]

### What is Risk Communication? Goal and guiding principles

The real-time exchange of information, advice and opinions between experts, community leaders, or officials and the people who are at risk (...) It allows people most at risk to understand and adopt protective behaviours, and authorities and experts to listen to and address people's concerns and needs so that the advice they provide is relevant, trusted and acceptable (WHO, 2018).

Risk communication uses many communications techniques ranging from media and social media communications to mass communications and stakeholder and community engagement. It requires the understanding of stakeholder perceptions, concerns and beliefs, as well as their knowledge and practices. Effective risk communication must also identify early on and subsequently manage rumours, misinformation and other communications challenges (WHO, 2020).

Risk communication is a public health intervention **required throughout the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery phases** of a serious public health event.

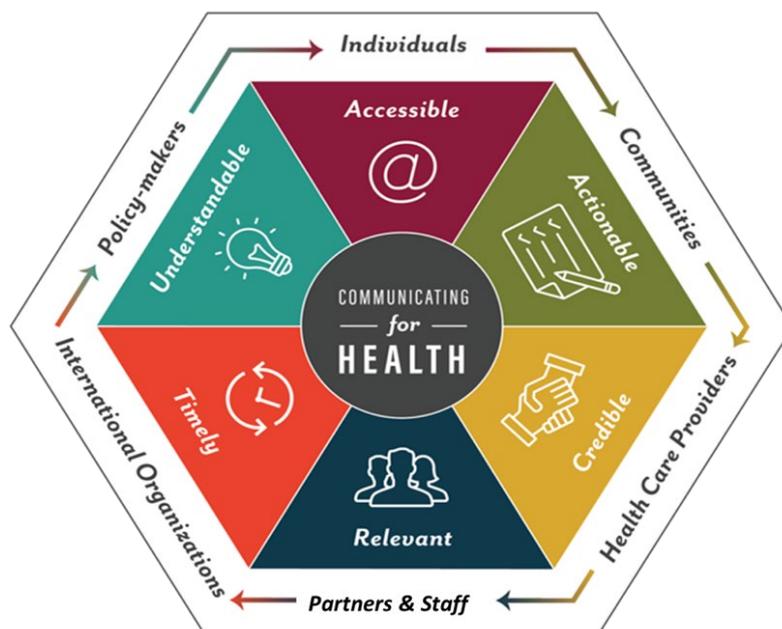
Emergency risk communication is **one of the eight core functions that WHO Member States must fulfil as signatories to the International Health Regulations (IHR)** core capacities are still in need of improvement. Afghanistan became a party to the IHR in 2007. IHR core capacities are those required to detect, assess, notify and report events, and respond to public health risks and emergencies of national and international concern.

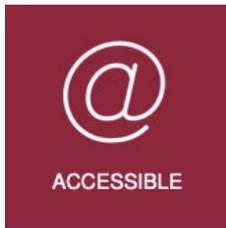
In short, **risk communication is not optional, is a must** for signatories to the IHR.

### Goal and guiding principles

For WHO, the overarching goal of risk communication during a health emergency is to **mitigate adverse effects by ensuring informed decision-making and encouraging protective behaviors among the affected population**. This goal is in line with the overarching goal for all WHO communications: to provide information, advice, and guidance to decision-makers (key audiences) to prompt action that will protect the health of individuals, families, communities and nations.

The **6 key principles** of effective communication are described in the WHO Strategic Communications Framework (WHO, 2017) and are relevant for risk communication:





### 1. Accessible

The general public rely on their ability to access the information they need to protect and improve their health. Communicators should identify all channels that are available, and map their comparative capacities to reach priority audiences. Using the right mix of channels helps empower audiences with the information they need to make informed decisions.



### 2. Actionable

Effective communication is based on the adoption of healthy behaviours and the implementation of policies to protect health. To be successful, communicators must understand target audience(s) knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in order to create messages and interventions that address barriers to taking the recommended actions.



### 3. Credible and trusted

Reputation is a key factor for whether individuals will be motivated to take action on advice, guidance and recommendations. Communicators must use every opportunity to reinforce trustworthiness so the recommendations become the basis for more informed health decisions.



### 4. Relevant

Communication must be able to help target audiences understand whether there is a health risk for themselves, or for those they care about, whether that the risk could be severe and whether they reduce that risk by undertaking the recommended actions.



### 5. Timely

Across all health issues, information, advice and guidance must be made available in a timely way, so audiences have the information they need, when they need it, to make appropriate health decisions.



### 6. Understandable

Many target audiences are not knowledgeable about the actions that they should take during a crisis or health emergency. They need information that is easy to comprehend in order to adequately understand health risks and be able to take appropriate actions.

## References

- WHO (2020) Risk communication: Frequently asked questions. Available at: [www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/risk-communication-frequently-asked-questions](http://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/risk-communication-frequently-asked-questions)
- WHO (2018) Communicating Risk in Public Health Emergencies. A WHO Guideline for Emergency Risk Communication (ERC) policy and practice. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259807/9789241550208-eng.pdf?sequence=2>
- WHO (2017) Strategic Communications Framework for effective communications. Available at: [www.who.int/about/what-we-do/strategic-communications-framework/en/](http://www.who.int/about/what-we-do/strategic-communications-framework/en/)