



MEDIA SAVVY

ANNOUNCER: This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

MODERATOR: Our next speaker, Leah Bucco-White, from the Nebraska Health and Human Services Department, is here to talk to us about how to best to collaborate with the media and turn them into champions of pan flu preparedness information.

LEAH BUCCO-WHITE: Thanks, Dan. Well, we know communication is a cornerstone of pandemic planning and is included in almost everyone's pandemic plans. We also know the media will play a critical role in communicating with people during a pandemic. Interviews and news conferences can be uncomfortable and intimidating and usually aren't a spokesperson's favorite thing to do. One of our pandemic successes in Nebraska has been increasing the level of media savvy among our spokespeople and partners using visual media like mock newscasts and news conferences. We want to anticipate how the media might react to a pandemic. How a story may be reported. Questions reporters could ask and the best way for us to answer them.

So let me set the stage for what you're about to see. A television anchor and reporter are covering a pandemic flu outbreak as it spreads across their state. Each clip shows a passage of time and the outbreak is getting worse. Now, we developed this mock newscast three years ago and at the time the terms 'bird flu' and 'pandemic flu' were being used interchangeably. Now, obviously we distinguish between the two, so please keep that in mind as you watch the clip.

ROLL CLIP

We've used this several times successfully for exercises and presentations, including during our state pandemic flu summit. It's an attention grabber; the audience instantly becomes very focused. It's also a reality check. The seriousness of a possible pandemic outbreak really hits home when you put human faces with it on the big screen. It adds a much-needed element of realism. We don't know when it's going to happen, so instead of out of sight out of mind, it's right in front of you. The mock newscast also shows how media could report the story.

During a crisis people act differently so we know not only what we communicate is important but how we communicate.

So let's take a quick look at a pandemic flu mock news conference where the spokesperson answers the questions the wrong way using bad communication and then the right way using good risk communication.

ROLL CLIP – 3:42 (Mock News Conference)

The mock news conference is part

of a statewide pandemic flu risk communication training.

It helps spokespeople and partners become familiar with questions reporters could ask during an outbreak and the right way and wrong way to answer them.

What's interesting is people on the inside... those of you who deal with pandemic flu a lot have a high-level of expertise and probably know all the terminology...you're very close to it and lots of information is important.

But people on the outside like your media and public don't spend as much time with it and just want to know the basics...should I be worried? Is this going to affect my family? Could I die? Is there anything we can do to protect ourselves?

We stress that with our spokespeople... keep it simple, need-to-know information.

We also developed a handout highlighting the do's and don'ts to go with this particular piece so people would have something to refer to later.

It's one thing to learn risk communication techniques...but it's another to see them put to use in a crisis or mock crisis situation.

Spokespeople and partners get a chance to practice or at least think through how they'd handle a pandemic.

If they have a visual, they're more likely to put themselves in that situation. What would I do? How would I handle that tough question? Would I do things differently? Could I do them better?

More exposure to mock media simulating real-life situations equals a higher comfort level when it comes to the real thing.

Planning and practicing ahead of time increases awareness and preparedness.

Media savvy is also understanding what information may be helpful to reporters working on stories.

Let's face it, there's a lot of pandemic flu information out there and it can be overwhelming.

We'd been talking about our 53-page state pandemic flu plan in Nebraska and had gotten several questions from reporters like, "What happens in Nebraska if there's a case of pandemic flu?" What's your response?"

So we thought... instead of trying to explain our plan, let's actually show reporters how it works.

So we decided to put our state plan in action in the form of a one-page response sheet based on different “What happens if?” scenarios.

We came up with a step-by-step written response showing how our plan works.

It’s a simple snapshot of information media can use for stories and share with the public.

Reporters are on tight deadlines and as a former reporter I can tell you—you may only have two hours until your deadline and someone hands you a big document to sift through, let’s say, like a pandemic flu plan, and you just don’t have the luxury of time.

Giving reporters tools to help pinpoint crucial pandemic flu information quickly not only is appreciated, but it also helps get accurate information out to the public in a timely manner, which increases pandemic awareness and even preparedness depending on the angle of the story.

Providing media with useful information helps solidify our role as the go-to source for information and when a reporter has another pandemic flu story idea, they pick up the phone—they’re gonna call us.

All the tools I discussed today are available to you.

If you’d like to obtain copies please contact us at
402-471-9108
or you can email us at birdflu@hhss.ne.gov

MODERATOR: Great example of partnership in action: being able to share some of these tools and also the innovation that they represent and really putting a face to some of the issues, as the examples demonstrated there. It looks like you’ve done a lot of work, especially in making everybody in the department more “media savvy.”

BUCCO-WHITE:

And more media savvy is key. And actually, Dan, we’ve got some projects coming up, on the horizon. You know, we do know media is our lifeline to the people and we depend on them in a crisis situation to get that message out. But what about the media and pandemic planning? Will they be up and running? How will they cover the news? Will they send reporters out into the field or to a news conference?

We’re going to survey all the media in Nebraska about pandemic flu news coverage plans and their continuity of operations plans.

We’re going to offer to meet with them and have a frank discussion about pandemic flu.

Do they need help planning?

What other tools may be helpful?

Should we consider setting up our information channels differently?

Also, we're planning on having an upcoming discussion at the state-level about possibly including media as critical infrastructure in our pandemic plan.

So, lots going on.

MODERATOR: Sure, and working WITH media, not than AGAINST them.

BUCCO-WHITE: Working WITH is key.

MODERATOR: It's important for us to look at the media, not as a partner in the classical sense, but not necessarily as an adversarial relationship either.

BUCCO-WHITE: Right. Working with. Work with. Not partner. Not an adversary. Yep.

MODERATOR: You are well on the way in Nebraska setting us some good examples for the rest of us. Thank you so much.

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