Roles of effective risk communication in ensuring advocacy and coordinated stakeholders’ responses

Animal disease risk assessment, management & simulation exercises training workshop Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 17-19 October 2023

Foor and Mouth Disease, Peste des Petits Ruminants, Lumpy Skin Disease, Rift Valley Fever, Sheep and Goat Pox
Learning Objectives

• Targeting communication messages to the right people
• What language to use
• What message to give
• Who needs to know
Poor risk communication

**UK Oct 2014 – pets and Ebola**

Excalibur, Spanish Ebola patient’s dog, is euthanised despite global outcry

**RIP Excalibur: Husband of Ebola nurse writes moving letter to dead dog mourned by 350,000**

Nearly 100,000 people sign petition calling for Spain’s health minister to quit over the order to kill Excalibur, the beloved pet dog of recovered Ebola nurse

**Migrating bats 'to bring rabies to UK' in deadly disease outbreak**

A DEADLY pandemic of rabies will be spread by monster vampire bats and migrants "smuggling puppies into the UK from Eastern Europe" in a matter of years, experts have warned.
Effective risk communication

• What is the issue?
• The nature of the risk
• Are there any benefits?
• Uncertainties in the risk assessment
• Risk management options

• Government and private veterinarians;
• Industry & stakeholders;
• Policy makers and ministers;
• General public
Principles of risk communication

- Know the audience
- Involve the scientific experts
- Establish experts in communication
- Be a credible source of information
- Share responsibility
- Differentiate between science and value judgement
- Assure transparency
- Put the risk in perspective

The application of risk communication to food standards and safety matters (fao.org)
Barriers to risk communication

- Differences in perceptions
  - Some people may choose a high risk activity, but be more worried about a low risk one imposed on them

- Differences in receptivity
  - Some people may be more risk averse than others

- Lack of understanding of the scientific process
  - Don’t use clever language, but also don’t over-simplify

- Source credibility
  - Having a joined-up message
  - Building trust

- The media
  - Work with journalists from all areas of the media

- Societal characteristics
  - Language, religion, poverty, illiteracy
## Risk Communication Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Level</th>
<th>Management Options</th>
<th>Public risk communication options</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Do some tracings, raise awareness about the clinical signs</td>
<td>Nothing unusual or proactive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Seize recent imports, quarantine or treat</td>
<td>Reactive mode – if questioned, explain what is happening</td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Surveillance, disease control plan, zones in high risk areas</td>
<td>Proactive comms to farmers, to the public,</td>
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What novel ways are there to get a message out to the right people?

- Veterinary professionals
- Industry stakeholders
- Farmer groups
- Social media
- Posters or feed packaging
- Apps
- Radio or television
- Religious leaders, faith leaders, educators, medical centres
Risk comparators

• Risk criteria are unacceptable; tolerable or acceptable
• Comparators should include hazards with similar outcomes or similar probabilities in the same host population
• For example, causes of death in cattle each year may include other infections – anthrax, pneumonia or clostridia, nutritional problems and deficiencies, physical injuries.
Working with industry

• Setting up a core group of stakeholders in peace time
• Develop common understanding of the strategy
• Roles and responsibilities
• Working with one another’s comms teams to develop common messages
• If there is a public health risk, you must involve the public health authorities – chief vets cannot talk for chief medics and vice versa
• Who else do you need to bring to the table?
Briefing the Minister

• Time is of the essence therefore keep it short
• As the expert you may want to know all the detail but the Minister may not
• Keep the language plain and get the message across
• What decisions should the Minister make – offer some alternatives and costs / effectiveness
• Who are the main stakeholders and what are the opinions of other government departments, legal challenge, public concerns
Briefing the public

• In general, the public will have two differing views – the risk to them and the risk to the World they live in.

• Trust, transparency and reassurance, but most of all, what is government doing about it?

• If there are uncertainties, then explain what they are and what government is doing about it.
Questions or comments?