COVID-19

RESOLVE TO SAVE LIVES · Vital Strategies

ANSWER THE CALL
FOR A MORE SECURE FUTURE
Communication Guidance for COVID-19 Contact Tracing

Contact tracing, one of the four pillars of *Box It In* strategy (Test, Trace, Find, Isolate), is an essential part of fighting COVID-19, and a key to safely easing strict physical distancing measures.

Strategic risk communication and community engagement are critical to the success of contact tracing as measured by people's willingness to cooperate with contact tracers when contacted. "Answering the call" **can only succeed if people trust contact tracing as an effective, respectful and confidential measure and are willing to participate**. It is also critical to consider the cultural and language issues and barriers of reaching diverse populations, including people of color who have been disporortionately affected by COVID-19 in some parts of the United States, at-risk populations such as older adults, and people with underlying health conditions.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC IS CRUCIAL

"Engagement of the public with contact tracers must be widely accepted in order to protect friends, family, and community members from future potential infections. **Key public officials and community leaders** will need to be engaged and supportive of contact tracing efforts. Consider **reaching out** to community leaders as part of the neighborhood-level contact tracing team. To be successful, a community will need **public awareness, and understanding and acceptance** of contact tracing and the need for contacts to separate themselves from others who are not exposed."

—US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Clear communication should:

Convince people to answer the call when contacted by a contact tracer.

- Educate the public on contact tracing and how it works ("What is contact tracing and what do I have to do?")

- Ensure people understand that contact tracing will result in individual support for those who test positive and that there are no negative social consequences or stigma for themselves or their contacts ("What are the personal benefits of participating in contact tracing?")

- Help people understand that contact tracing is important to protecting personal health, keeping families and communities healthy and that everyone has a role to play ("Why should I support contact tracing? What are the societal benefits?")

- Build trust that people's data and health status will remain confidential and not lead to negative repercussions with government agencies, health insurers/private entities, immigration officials, commercial interests, or other unintended snoopers. ("Are there risks to participating in contact tracing?")

Answering the call for a more SECURE future:

Support contact tracers with training and other needs

Engage community leaders

Communicate widely

Understand and apply risk communication principles

Respect public concerns

Evaluate and improve communication efforts

SUPPORT CONTACT TRACING WITH TRAINING AND OTHER NEEDS

Goal: Train contact tracers in risk communication to ensure that every person who engages with them feels supported and protected and receives empathetic, culturally appropriate engagement in appropriate languages.

Contact tracers interact with patients at a vulnerable, anxious moment. The nature of their interaction can influence a person's response. Negative reports on social media or poor experiences with contact tracers could quickly define and harm the entire program. Contact tracers need to have strong interpersonal skills, empathy and are comfortable talking to people, answering questions and gathering information.

ENGAGE COMMUNITY LEADERS

Goal: Work with credible leaders who can facilitate culturally sensitive promotion of contact tracing; these might include political leaders, faith leaders, leaders of color, immigrant group leaders, and leaders of vulnerable population group, etc.

Conduct a mapping exercise to identify trustworthy and credible leaders who support a public health response to COVID-19 including the importance of contact tracing. Politicians and governments cannot be the only spokespeople for this intensive effort; health and community leaders (faith, unions, racial and demographic groups, etc.) in whom there is considerable trust can help carry the "what, why and how" messages. Prepare honest and empathetic messages to address specific community concerns: eg: undocumented immigrants' fears of being reported; black and brown communities' lack of trust in government institutions; language issues among immigrant groups, etc. Consider celebrities—such as talk show hosts, radio DJ's, comedians, musicians and athletes—to carry the message in the press and and on social media.

COMMUNICATE WIDELY

Goal: Create widespread understanding that contact tracing is an important way to protect people's health, their communities, and their futures.

Most public understanding about contact tracing will be built through the media. Engage journalists and consider journalist trainings to enable members of the media to understand the program and report factual and timely information. Coordinate communication messages among stakeholders, news media and other channels to promote consistent messaging. Use a variety of communication channels to distribute evidence-based, audience-specific health messages and materials. This helps limit misinformation and rumors that contribute to confusion and fear.

Use mass media and digital communication campaigns to build awareness of how contact tracing plays a role in stopping COVID-19 transmission. Do not assume people know or understand what contact tracing is—explain in simple terms using infographics on the what, why and how of contact tracing.

Contact tracing should be cast as a positive, proven strategy to break the chain of COVID-19 transmission, and communication should emphasize that by participating in contact tracing, people are helping themselves, their families and their communities.

UNDERSTAND AND APPLY RISK COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

Goal: Apply risk communication principles to promote participation in contact tracing.

- Be credible: Honesty and truthfulness are invaluable during crises when building trust is key to encouraging behaviors that are self-protecting as well as protective toward communities.

- Express empathy: Acknowledge people's fear and concerns. Addressing how people are feeling and the challenges they face builds trust and rapport.

- Provide anticipatory guidance: Warn people about what is to come inclusion that their exposure may lead to COVID-19 infection and illness. Help people to be prepared.

- Promote action: Giving people meaningful things to do calms anxiety and promotes a sense of control.

- Show respect: Respectful communication promotes cooperation and is particularly important when people feel vulnerable.

RESPECT CONFIDENTIALITY

Goal: The more people trust that the information they provide won't be misused, the more likely they will be to opt in.

People tend to be apprehensive about technology apps that track people's personal information. This may be heightened in the current pandemic context and in a general climate of misinformation. People will have concerns about participating in any program that accesses sensitive information about their health and relationships. Communication on every level needs to address and allay fears about privacy and confidentiality.

EVALUATE AND IMPROVE COMMUNICATION EFFORTS

Goal: Assess what's working and what's not working to improve the investment in communication messages and strategies.

Test messages that will be delivered to the public. Gather information about knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and barriers related to contact tracing. Assess public attitudes and participation through surveys and social media tracking, leveraging key metrics that demonstrate the effectiveness of communication to shape attitudes and encourage participation.