



## **Communicating Public Health Preparedness Media and Message Guide**

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Qorvis Communications

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## Introduction

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This Media and Message Guide is intended to be used by public health professionals and partners to help provide consistent messages and communications about public health preparedness. Consistency in messaging is essential to ensure that the importance of emergency preparedness is communicated effectively with reporters, policy makers and the public.

Our nation's ability to prevent, protect, respond to, mitigate and recover from threats to the public's health is critical. In the last five years alone, national and global health security have been threatened by incidents including Hurricane Katrina, West Nile virus, the H1N1 influenza pandemic, bacterial contamination of food by E. coli and salmonella, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the Haiti earthquake and cholera outbreak, and the Japanese tsunami and subsequent radiation release.

State and local health departments and individuals are first responders for public health emergencies, including outbreaks, intentional attacks and environmental disasters. Citizens are becoming a trained resource by equipping themselves with the knowledge to combat emergent threats through nationally recognized programs such as the Citizen Corps.

In addition, public health programs at all levels are enhancing the nation's ability to prevent and respond by implementing scientific and technological innovations and developing partnerships with other response agencies.

These are challenging economic times. We must sustain existing public health capabilities and infrastructure while developing solutions to build the public health systems of the future.

Communicating the importance of public health preparedness and the role it plays in Americans' daily lives is critical, especially when budget cuts threaten our ability to respond properly to health emergencies. This guide will help identify those messages that will likely resonate with important audiences and will offer tips on how to deliver those messages.

*Communicating Public Health Preparedness* builds on previous work conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response (OPHPR) and five core national partner organizations in public health preparedness and response to improve the collective effectiveness of our communications about preparedness to policy makers, the media, and the public.

The language included here is a guidepost. Spokespeople need to put these messages and concepts into their own words and use their own examples. The messages developed offer spokespeople a framework to communicate. Examples complement the messages by providing real-world situations so the audience, reader or policy maker can understand the critical role emergency preparedness plays in their daily lives.

The guide includes the core messages for *Communicating Public Health Preparedness* in addition to other messages or sound bites that may help enhance those core messages for meetings or interviews. Also included are message diamond examples developed during a messaging summit workshop that might be helpful as you think about the examples you would highlight in meetings or interviews.

## Background

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In July 2011, senior leadership and policy and communications staff from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response (OPHPR) met with five core national partner organizations: the [Association of State and Territorial Health Officials \(ASTHO\)](#); the [National Association of County and City Health Officials \(NACCHO\)](#); the [Association of Public Health Laboratories \(APHL\)](#); the [Association of Schools of Public Health \(ASPH\)](#); and [Trust for America's Health \(TFAH\)](#). Participants were broken down into work groups and one of the immediate action items was to develop a common set of core messages around the importance of public health preparedness and response.

The output from the communications work group was handed over to a health communication specialist at CDC who synthesized the material and developed the following three core messages:

- **Public health protects all Americans from health threats every day — and when disaster strikes.**
- **All response to health threats starts at the local level, and our communities need the resources to protect and save lives.**
- **Budget cuts place Americans at risk and threaten our national health security.**

The development of these three core messages was just the first step towards building a more comprehensive approach to getting out the message about the importance of public health preparedness and response.

The next step was to work with the American Public Health Association (APHA) and convene a messaging summit facilitated by the national strategic communications firm Qorvis Communications. In addition to participants from the July 6, 2011 meeting, APHA

invited representatives from other national organizations including the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Medical Association (AMA), the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE), and the Campaign for Public Health Foundation. On November 14, 2011, a total of 25 participants from 11 national organizations gathered in Washington, D.C. for *Communicating Public Health Preparedness: A Messaging Summit and Advanced Skills Workshop*. The purpose of the workshop was to build on the previous work and to improve the collective effectiveness of our communications about preparedness to policy makers, the media and the public.

## **Additional Messages for Consideration**

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The most effective messages are positive, concrete and empathetic, never defensive. Taking a positive and proactive approach will help frame the discussion on your terms and make your message more effective in the long run.

Strong messages are those that explain what you are doing now and what you are committed to doing in the future. They are supported by credible evidence; they reflect a sensitive understanding and sincere concern for what matters most to the target audience. Effective messaging includes statements to the effect that “we care, we are committed, and we are taking action.”

The following messages are based on those that we identified and developed throughout the November 14 messaging summit workshop through exercises and discussions. These suggested messages enhance the emergency preparedness core messages and may serve as effective sound bites. Below are the messages along with an analysis of the strength of the messages and ways they might be varied.

Public health protects all Americans from health threats every day – and when disaster strikes.

### **Message**

We work every day in public health to make sure we’re prepared to keep everyone safe. For instance, public health keeps food and drinking water safe and prevents infectious diseases from spreading.

### **Analysis**

This is a powerful point. The examples can be varied, but you want to make sure the reader, viewer or policy maker understands that public health workers are not just waiting for the next crisis – they work every day to keep Americans safe.

**Message**

Public health needs consistent funding and training to stay prepared. Just as you can't buy the fire truck or train the firefighters after the fire strikes, you can't wait until after public health emergencies occur to support public health preparedness.

**Analysis**

This analogy particularly resonated with the November 14 working group. Other examples similar to firefighters, such as the defense department, could also be used to support this statement.

**Message**

Public health is not just about saving lives. Public health also saves money. If we're prepared on the front end, we'll spend less when emergencies arise.

**Analysis**

This is an important point to convey when meeting with policy makers. It would be enhanced by comparing responses and the associated costs of those responses for communities that were prepared for a response versus one that was not, when such data are available.

**Message**

What public health does every day helps keep our communities safe on an ongoing basis and helps us be prepared for tomorrow's emergencies. For instance, providing flu shots routinely protects us from influenza outbreaks every year, but also prepares us for providing immunizations on a mass scale in an epidemic.

**Analysis**

This example illustrates the everyday activities of public health and how these activities play a role in keeping Americans safe. This example highlights that public health workers are not just waiting for the next crisis – they work every day to keep Americans safe.

**Message**

It's not just about making sure we're healthy today, but also healthy tomorrow. This requires an investment in public health so that we are healthy and safe today and tomorrow.

**Analysis**

This statement should be followed by examples of what public health is doing to keep citizens safe and healthy today to ensure that they will be healthy tomorrow. Immunizations, food safety, teaching healthy habits, etc. could be used as examples here.

**Message**

Public health preparedness is a matter of national security – it saves lives and money.

**Analysis**

This message should be augmented by one or more examples of how preparedness has helped saved lives and money following a natural disaster or disease outbreak, tailored to a particular state or locality as appropriate. For example, you may consider using the Gulf oil spill as an example of how public health was prepared to respond to this disaster and ensure that seafood remained safe for our food supply. This saved lives and the seafood industry.

All responses to health threats start at the local level, and our communities need the resources to protect and save lives.

**Message**

The federal Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) program is the foundation and bedrock of public health preparedness in the U.S. The program provides critical resources, scientific expertise and coordination to ensure that all Americans will be protected during public health emergencies.

**Analysis**

The terms “foundation and bedrock” demonstrate that public health emergency preparedness is critical to public health.

**Message**

Preparedness starts at the individual level, but it takes a government response to address a national issue. We need a public health system in which local, state and federal governments, the private sector, and individuals work together to protect everyone.

**Analysis**

This example establishes that public health is a system and we rely on many partners and players to ensure that system works. This would be a good message to use when meeting with policy makers.

**Message**

Federal, state and local governments work together on behalf of the public health. Each has unique expertise and capabilities. For instance, local governments know best how to organize local resources in an emergency response. State governments provide centralized services for all localities, such as laboratory testing and statewide distribution of drugs and vaccines. The federal government provides high-level scientific expertise and national standards and coordination.

**Analysis**

This statement may be more relevant for meetings with policy makers who need to know how governmental public health works and how it is funded.

Budget cuts place Americans at risk and threaten our national health security.

**Message**

Public health funding has been declining steadily and is at great risk. If governments don't spend the dollars to invest in public health, no one will.

**Analysis**

This gets to the heart of the importance of public health emergency preparedness. Depending on the context in which this message is used, it might be strengthened by adding "federal," "state" or "local" to modify "government."

**Message**

Without adequate, sustained public health funding, our citizens will be placed in jeopardy and at risk of the many threats society faces.

**Analysis**

This is a very strong statement and gets to the heart of how budget cuts place Americans at risk.

**Message**

It's not enough to have a plan for responding to a public health emergency. We must have the funding, trained people and a fully functioning public health system to put plans into action. An unfunded plan is as useless as no plan at all.

**Analysis**

This statement resonated with the November 14 working group.

**Message**

The challenging economic climate has made more Americans reliant on basic public health services, putting extra burdens on the public health system. Cutting budgets not only hampers everyday services, but also puts us all at risk when disaster happens.

**Analysis**

This is an important statement to illustrate how people rely on public health every day, especially when the economy is weak.

**Message**

Public health funding cuts mean jobs lost and training and education wasted. Budget cuts mean slower response times because of fewer trained public health employees.

**Analysis**

This message can be augmented by specific examples of federal, state or local budget cuts and their effects, depending on the context in which it is used.

**Message**

After years of progress, the nation is less prepared for public health emergencies than just a few years ago because the public health system has suffered multi-year cuts and is now working with a bare bones budget.

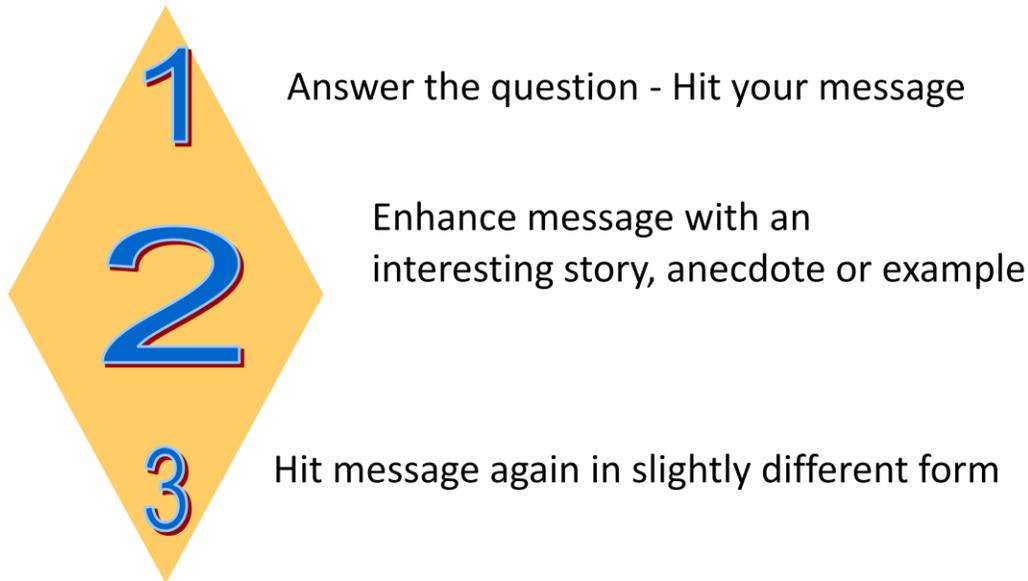
**Analysis**

This statement may be enhanced by adding specific information on the effect of cuts at the federal, state or local level, as appropriate.

## The Message Diamond

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A message is only good if it is delivered in a clear, concise and compelling manner. Qorvis Communications has developed a technique to help you do just that – it's called the message diamond. The message diamond is an effective way to answer questions. It helps keep your message focused and can help a reporter develop the sound bite or quote he or she ultimately uses. Develop your answers using the following three steps:



## Message Diamond Examples

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### Example 1

1. Budget cuts place Americans at risk and threaten our national health security.
2. When the U.S. isn't at war we don't stop funding the Defense Department.  
That's because we know we have to be proactive in order to identify threats and be prepared to respond if necessary. This is the same with local, state and federal public health. Public health needs to be funded consistently to support the monitoring and tracking of seasonal flu and then needs to be ramped up at a moment's notice to respond to global pandemics such as H1N1.
3. Budget cuts hinder this ability and place all Americans at greater risk.

By comparing preparedness funding to defense spending, Example 1 illustrates the importance of health security and funding health preparedness. It is a strong message diamond because it includes an example most Americans can relate to, the H1N1 pandemic, and also identifies the role that public health plays in responding to health crises.

### **Example 2**

1. Funding to prevent, prepare for and respond to public health emergencies saves lives and money.
2. Whether it's the listeria outbreak in Colorado cantaloupes, tornadoes in Joplin, Missouri, or meningitis in Washington, we can save countless lives and prevent illness by funding public health emergency preparedness.
3. Public health preparedness works and deserves your full support.

Example 2 is a strong example (especially for a meeting with a policy maker) because it is concise and contains many examples that many Americans will know. These examples include references to locations across the U.S. It also works because instead of using PHEP, it defines the term. It also ends with "an ask". This is valuable when meeting with a policy maker as it defines what you want that policy maker to do or support.

### **Example 3**

1. The public health system must be funded on an ongoing basis because it deals with everyday emergencies and major disasters.
2. During a normal flu season, health departments run vaccine clinics and work with pharmacies, doctors, hospitals, and nursing homes. Providing flu shots routinely protects us from influenza outbreaks every year and also prepares us for providing immunizations on a mass scale in an epidemic.
3. We must fund health preparedness on an ongoing basis. We can't fund after disaster strikes – these emergencies happen every day.

The first portion of the message diamond illustrates the need for continuous funding since it references everyday emergencies in addition to major disasters or outbreaks. The second part includes an example that audiences will easily understand. The diamond closes well by demonstrating the importance of funding.

### **Example 4**

1. Government public health laboratories need sustainable levels of funding to ensure that our nation will remain safe.
2. Government labs are responsible for the surveillance and detection of disease outbreaks at the federal, state and local levels of government operating with razor-thin margins. When outbreaks such as pandemic flu occur, it is vital that our labs are able to tackle the outbreak and also be ready for any other event that may happen simultaneously.
3. Government public health labs require sustainable levels of funding so we don't rely on luck or good timing to get through the next health crisis.

We included this example because addresses the consequences of operating the public health system on razor-thin margins. It uses labs as an example and can be adapted for other entities within the public health system.

### **Example 5**

1. Public health, which depends on federal funding, is on the front lines in preparing for and responding to disasters.
2. The federal funds public health departments receive have allowed health departments to build the workforce and infrastructure they need when disasters strike. Because of these federal funds, the Louisiana health department was able to activate quickly following the Gulf oil spill and work with federal partners to test the water and seafood to help protect the health of Americans.
3. Without ongoing investment from the CDC, the state wouldn't have had the resources to mitigate the disaster. This is true of Louisiana and other state and local health departments that rely on federal funding to keep citizens safe.

Example 5 illustrates the cause and effect of funding with a real-world example.

### **Example 6**

1. Public health protection is as critical to our national security as fire and rescue, but continuous budget cuts mean we are not as prepared as we were a few years ago.
2. Since 2008, we've lost 49,000 state and local public health workers through budget cuts. These cuts mean we are less prepared for disasters; you cannot hire and train preparedness workers after disaster strikes.
3. While we've made tremendous progress in preparing for health emergencies and crises since September 11, budget cuts put Americans at risk.

This example illustrates the loss of funding public health has already experienced and puts into context the effect additional cuts would have on an already bare bones budget.

### **Example 7**

1. Local and state health departments are the only entities responsible for protecting the public's health.
2. They not only provide flu vaccinations and investigate food outbreaks, but also prepare for and protect citizens from catastrophic events such as the tornado that ripped through Joplin, Missouri. In Joplin, public health coordinated setting up shelters for those who were displaced, connected victims with crisis counselors and monitored for a possible fungal infection outbreak.
3. Without public health, some of the day-to-day services that you rely on and that receive little fanfare, such as immunizing students before they start school so diseases don't spread, or making sure your favorite restaurant isn't serving contaminated food, would not be done and would leave your community at risk.

The examples included in this message diamond bring to life the work that local public health does on a regular basis. Highlighting the everyday issues that public health plays

a role in (that receive little fanfare) should be included frequently to provide audiences or policy makers with an understanding of what public health does every day to keep communities safe, in addition to responding to extraordinary emergencies.

**Example 8**

1. Public health laboratories are a backbone of public health. Not only do they do routine surveillance, but they also respond during emergencies.
2. For example, a lab in New England responded when a fishing vessel dragged up a canister of unknown origin. A fisherman developed large blisters on his arms. The lab responded and tested the fisherman and found that he had been exposed to a blister agent. Because of the lab's quick action, the fisherman received the necessary medical treatment and his catch was quarantined to protect others. The lab was only able to respond and conduct testing because of a previous investment in preparedness.
3. Without public health labs, public health does not have the tools it needs to protect Americans and their communities.

This message diamond illustrates the importance of public health laboratories and offers a specific example of how labs tackle everyday public health emergencies.

## Tips for Media Interviews

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The following are tips for media interviews and offer advice on delivering your message and how to enhance your message.

- Take advantage of every question to deliver a message about public health and preparedness and the integral role public health plays in keeping our nation safe. You could remind the reporter how budget cuts are negatively affecting our nation's preparedness.
- Use your experiences as a physician or your work on behalf of public health to drive your answers or the conversation. Use your work or examples of what you have seen through your work in interviews. Be sure to use your experiences throughout the interview as you may be on the front lines of battling public health problems or issues.
- Remember who your ultimate audience is and be sure to speak in terms that audience will understand. Define terms such as preparedness or other medical terms so that an average viewer or reader will understand. They may not all understand what these terms mean so be sure to break it down for the audience.
- Use examples and stories to help the audience visualize what you're saying. The audience will likely remember you longer with a story or image they can visualize. Stories about how you were helping communities cope with a listeria outbreak or cope with a tornado disaster are very compelling. Share your experiences on the front lines of public health.
- Remember to use the message diamond for every answer in interviews. Be sure to make your main point first, include a compelling example in the second point and close out your message diamond with the third point.
- Take advantage of open-ended questions like "Is there anything else you'd like to add?" These types of questions offer the perfect opportunity to include any point you want and often offer the best opportunity for sound bites or quotes as you're more likely to be comfortable taking advantage of what you want to speak about. This is the last opportunity to reinforce a message.
- Remember catchphrases to help you pivot, such as "the bottom line is" or "what I think is important is..." Those are great opportunities to bring you back to your message. If you find yourself going on and on in an answer you can quickly adjust by saying something like, "... what I think is really important is the fact that we need continued funding to ensure that we keep our local communities safe."

- Never answer with a simple, “No comment” or “I can’t comment on that.” Use a question that you can’t or don’t want to answer as an opportunity to pivot to your message. Use statements like, “but if what you’re asking is...” to help pivot. For example, if you get a hypothetical question about whether there will be more pandemics if you lose federal funding you could answer it by saying, “Well, we can’t say for sure if there will be more pandemics with decreased funding, but if you’re asking me, will we be less prepared to respond to outbreaks if we lose funding, the answer is yes.”
- Before your next interview or meeting, think of what you want to share with the reporter or meeting participant. If you were to write the story, what would your headline be? What would you like your quotes to be? This will help focus you and your answers. Think about those first-hand stories you want to share. What examples from your work would be compelling? What do you want to walk away from the interview having said?

## General Media Tips

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The following tips offer advice on how to deliver your message when being interviewed. They include do's and don'ts for interviews that occur on camera or radio.

- Keep using your hands if it is more natural for you. Consider where the camera is capturing you and be sure to keep your hands down below the shot.
- Be sure to keep eye contact with the reporter and not the camera.
- Have a brief conversation with the reporter before you start the interview – ask what they are looking for, the story angle, and where you should look during the interview. You want to be ready and armed before the interview begins. It also allows an opportunity for you to share with the reporter what you would like to cover in the interview.
- Pay close attention to the reporter's pre-interview questions. They are often exactly the same, or at least similar to, the questions asked in the real interview. Pre-interview questions will certainly give you a sense of the overall theme of the interview.
- On the air, never over-explain. Most sound bites are edited down to about ten seconds for television and even shorter for radio (except NPR). In some cases, your sound bite may only form one part of a reporter's package so it is vital to be as concise and clear as possible.
- Prior to your media appearance, practice the message points several times aloud. It also helps to have a colleague conduct a mock interview which allows you to test the messages.
- Be sure to stay in your seat until you are cleared. The natural instinct is to run as soon as you are done, but producers often need that extra couple of seconds. And always remember that your microphone can be on!

## **Sharing the Stage**

- Always find out if you will be interviewed alone or will be expected to take part in a panel discussion. Many TV and radio producers like to book two people of opposing views for the same segment to make shows as topical and engaging as possible. Make sure you know who the other interviewees are and have an idea of their position/arguments. Google them before the show.

## **Television**

### **The Outer You:**

- Wear dark, solid colored suits. Do not wear anything (i.e. bright colors, patterns) that may distract the viewers. You do not want the audience to focus on your clothing; you want the audience to receive your message.
- Never eat right before going on air.
- Sit up straight, towards the front of the seat, with perfect posture. Sitting up straight at the back of the seat can still make you look like you're slouching. Arrive in plenty of time for hair and makeup, or carry a powder compact or cosmetic blotting paper with you. Viewers may be distracted by a shiny face.
- When you sit down, tuck your suit jacket under your rear end to give your shoulders a smarter line, and make sure your jacket is buttoned and your lapels are straight. On the air, do not fiddle with your hair, face or clothes.

### **Microphone and Camera Technique:**

- Remember that microphones are always on even when equipment is being set up. By all means chat with the crew, but do not say anything that could live on tape forever. From the moment you enter the building until the moment you leave, act as if you are conducting the interview.
- If a reporter wants to interview you outside, take a moment and look at the background. You do not want your backdrop to be too bright or you will look washed out, and you don't want to be squinting into the sun. Ideally you should stand in front of a wall or tree, with the sun behind the cameraman but not in your eyes.
- When you are on a TV set, assume that you are always on camera, even when the host is speaking with another guest. Keep your face as relaxed and pleasant as possible.
- When you are doing interviews on camera from a remote location with an anchor that is in-studio, look directly into the camera and never look or glance away until your interview is complete. Remember not to look at the TV in the room as there is likely to be a one to two second delay of your image, which could cause confusion. It is wise to ask that any monitors in the room be turned off during your interview; it is not important for you to be able to see what is happening in the studio. You will hear your cues through your ear piece.
- However, when you are on the set with a reporter/anchor, the opposite advice from above will apply. DO NOT look at the camera; look into the eyes of the anchor/reporter. Sit up straight, and do not worry about which camera is on you. The camera operators are focusing on that, and they will find you.
- If you naturally talk with your hands then do so, even if your hands are not in view.

## **Radio**

### **Vocal Delivery:**

- If you are doing a radio interview by phone, do it standing up. Your voice will sound clearer and more energetic, and you will find it easier to breathe. It may seem strange for radio, but try to smile when you're speaking to the reporter because the lighter tone can be heard in your voice and you will come across as a pleasant character.
- If possible, try to do radio interviews in-studio; your voice will sound better and you will establish a rapport with your interviewer and producers.

### **Microphone Technique:**

- If in-studio, do not sit too close to the microphone. If you are too close, your voice will make "popping" sounds.
- Similarly, try not to swallow too much as microphones are highly sensitive to noise.
- Always assume the microphones are live and recording, even if the technician is just checking the sound level of your voice. When in the studio, do not say anything you would not want to be played on air; inappropriate comments captured on tape could follow you the rest of your life.

### **Interview Content:**

- Radio interviews tend to run longer than those for television, and all taped interviews are edited down. Keep this in mind when answering questions to ensure your message is conveyed to your audience.