



**Reaching Vulnerable Populations with Critical Health and Medical
Information: Media Formats and Mediums**

**Developed and revised by the Florida Vulnerable Populations Communications
Work Group on April 26, 2013.**

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How to Use this Document

This document is a resource guide for public health educators and preparedness and response professionals who seek to provide vulnerable populations with critical information during a disaster or incident. It provides information on how to shape messages, preferred modes of delivery and recommended mediums for each audience.

This document is not intended to be a guide on how to communicate with the media (i.e. reporters). Public health educators and preparedness and response professionals should seek the advice of their local Public Information Officer (PIO) or communications professional for advice on how to deal with the press and their requests for information and interviews.

General Considerations for Vulnerable Populations

- Identify effective channels of communication to send and receive information, including trusted messengers, preferred modes of delivery, culturally appropriate messages, and special format, requirements based on universal design.
- Establish a database of providers, trusted community representatives and natural leaders.
- People within this population may have specialized medical needs.
- Collaborate with organizations involved in emergency preparedness planning and service delivery to coordinate efforts and provide training to the community.
- Reach out to appropriate service agencies related to the target population (i.e. faith-based, cultural organizations, AAA, senior centers, Communities for a Lifetime) and develop MOUs to provide messaging in case of emergencies and discuss opportunities to reach the population.
- Communicate messages at a fourth to sixth grade reading level. Microsoft Word has a “readability” function that will display information about the reading level of the document, including readability scores, after it finishes checking spelling and grammar.
- Use universal symbols to convey information, directions, and instructions. Refer to the file Shelter Message Board.
- Make sure each message includes actionable information (i.e. contact your family physician, report to location X, etc.)
- Messages should identify resources consistent with group’s needs.
- Secure a translation service and select approved messaging to be translated into predominant languages prior to an event.
- Prior to an event, identify staff with foreign language proficiency to communicate messages to small groups (i.e. media and community leaders).
- Make sure all messages posted electronically are appropriately tagged for screen readers.

Elderly Populations

General Considerations

- Be mindful of the snowbird (seasonal resident) population.

Shaping the Message

- Format messages in a logical sequence—don't start talking about one thing and then jump to another.

Mediums

- For print messages, use large print (14 point or larger).
- Repeat messages in broadcast format.
- Make sure all messages posted electronically are appropriately tagged for screen readers.
- Target appropriate electronic media outlets/social networking sites that reach the general and targeted population (i.e. blogs, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace).

Disabled Populations

General Considerations

- If a person has a mental disability, speak slowly and in a normal speaking voice. Keep your communication simple, clear and brief. Do not give multiple commands – state one thing at a time. Be empathetic and reassuring.
- If a person has a visual impairment, announce your presence when entering an area. Speak naturally and directly to the individual – do not shout. Offer assistance but let the person explain what help is needed. Remember to communicate written information orally.
- If a person has a hearing impairment, establish eye contact with the person – not the interpreter. Use facial expressions or hand gestures as visual cues. Offer paper and pencil writing slowly so the individual can read as you write. Written communication may be particularly important if there is a speech impairment as well. Do not allow others to interrupt when communicating. Be patient.

Shaping the Message

- The best way to communicate with the hearing impaired during an emergency is to have someone on the TV screen translating messages into sign language. If captions are used, sentences should be simple. Visual aids like maps would also be helpful.

Mediums

- Appropriate emergency communications for the blind would include radio and sirens.
- Communication methods must be legally compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which calls for government agencies to make electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities.
- Populations with visual, hearing, and cognitive limitations may use alternative Web browsing methods to assist them, such as screen readers and screen pointers; therefore, planners should ensure content on Web sites can be accessed effectively by people with disabilities.

- Another suggested technology for emergency messages is the television “crawler” or “ticker,” which are lines of text that scroll at the bottom of the television screen (current uses of the crawler include news headlines and severe weather warnings). A limitation of the crawler is that it could block closed captioning text – Federal Communications Commission (FCC) guidelines require (with some exceptions) that closed captioning be available. Planners should ensure when using such technologies that FCC guidelines are met. For more information, visit <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/emergencies.html>.

Communication and Notification Methods and Tools

Limitation: Hearing

Tools/Methods:
TTYs/TTDs
Amplified phones
Listening systems
Sign language interpreters
Captioning (open/closed)
PSAs
Emergency e-mail
Wireless network alerts
2-1-1
Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS)
711
Voice carryover (VCO)
Electronic messaging
Cell phone/text messaging

Visual

Braille
Large print
Disks
Audiocassettes
Audio-described videos

Speech

Sign language interpreters
TTYs/TTDs
Hearing carryover (HCO)
Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS)

Non-English Speaking Populations

General Considerations

- Prior to an event, identify staff with foreign language proficiency to communicate messages to media and community leaders.

Shaping the Message

- Secure a translation service and select approved messaging to be translated into predominant languages prior to an event.

Mediums

- Make sure all messages posted electronically are appropriately tagged for screen readers.
- Target appropriate electronic media outlets/social networking sites that reach the general and targeted population (i.e. blogs, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace).
- Consider communicating messages through churches, community centers, community newspapers and local ethnic media outlets.

Populations Residing in Shelters (e.g., battered spouses, runaways, homeless, etc.)

General Considerations:

- This population may not have access to transportation.
- This population is difficult to track because their location changes frequently.
- Concerns about privacy and fear of discrimination may make it difficult to interact with this population.
- Shelter populations may be made up of several different cultural/socio-economic backgrounds.

Shaping the message:

- Messages should be adapted to the cultural practices of each target audience, particularly as they relate to seeking help, healing, and coping with loss, grief and death.
- Messages should be translated into appropriate languages consistent with the identified populations residing within shelters.

Mediums:

Pre-event: Establish pre-existing citizen networks and community outreach activities to help inform and prepare these populations for disasters. This network would include shelter administration and outreach workers. These networks can be utilized during the event as well as during recovery.

- Pre-event: Meet with shelter(s) administration and provide written information on preparedness, evacuation, maintaining reliable communication venues, and if applicable, information on “sheltering in place”

Dialysis Clients

General Considerations

- People within this population may have specialized medical needs that need to be considered during an emergency. For example, most patients on dialysis need to know if their provider is operating; what the alternate plans are to receive services in the event that their usual provider is not in operation.
- Dialysis clients may receive an extra treatment before an impending event. This will be a medical decision made by the client's healthcare provider who will also advise them prior to evacuating.

Mediums

- Make sure all messages posted electronically are appropriately tagged for screen readers.
- Target appropriate electronic media outlets/social networking sites that reach the general and targeted population (i.e. blogs, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace).
- Public Information Officers would convey information through hospitals or dialysis centers. Smaller clinics could call their patients. Some larger clinics may use automated calls to alert patients or send general patient instructions to the media.

Developmentally Disabled

General Considerations

- If a person has a cognitive disability, provide identification and project a calm and competent demeanor. Allow extra time for the person to process what you are saying. Show respect for the dignity of the person as an equal and an adult. Use accurate and honest information with short, simple and concise sentences.
- People who might be directly approaching the developmentally disabled during an emergency should also use simple words and short sentences. This population may understand only one word the first time they hear it in a sentence.
- Evacuation drills for large buildings would be useful. Ongoing practice is necessary.

Shaping the Message

- Developmentally disabled people trust authorities and recognize them as people to go to when they need help. When communicating information about bioterrorism to the developmentally disabled, the message should refer to a familiar emergency experience, for example, a fire drill.
- Symbols should be used for fire, police and medical personnel. A flashing light and a siren are familiar emergency symbols. Sirens would be especially helpful in radio warnings. Words and sentences should be simple. Pictures will be very helpful. Enactments of instructions will also be helpful e.g., show people leaving their homes and going to a local school to be vaccinated.
- Repetition is helpful; repeat the same idea using different words. Questions should have only one part. It may take them a long time to process information. Patience is important.

Mediums

- Communicate messages through social service and faith-based organizations in the community.
- Engage those organizations that house or provide shelter to the developmentally disabled.

- Messaging should be conveyed through local Agency for Persons with Disability (APD) offices to personal care attendants. Contact information for these can be found at <http://apd.myflorida.com/area/>

Community-based Technology Dependent

General Considerations

- Community-based Technology Dependent populations include those depending on equipment that relies on electricity including but not limited to home based ventilators, feeding pumps, oxygen concentrators, hemo dialysis.
- Reach out to appropriate service agencies (including home health, hospice, and visiting nurses) related to the target population (i.e. faith-based, cultural organizations) and develop MOUs to provide messaging in case of emergencies and discuss opportunities to reach the population.
- Identify effective channels of communication to send and receive information, including trusted messengers, preferred modes of delivery, culturally appropriate messages, and special format, requirements based on universal design.

Mediums

- Make sure all messages posted electronically are appropriately tagged for screen readers.
- Target appropriate electronic media outlets/social networking sites that reach the general and targeted population (i.e. blogs, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace).
- Primary medium would be home health network i.e. home health network, hospice, and visiting nurses.

Specialty Care Populations

General Considerations

- Specialty care populations include but are not limited to clients of radiation/oncology clinics, methadone clinics, etc.
- Due to the fractured nature of the populations in terms of socioeconomic status, etc. messages must be broad enough in nature to encompass multiple needs.

Shaping the Message

- Behavioral health messaging should be included because stress will affect their health or recovery process.

Mediums

- Make sure all messages posted electronically are appropriately tagged for screen readers.
- Target appropriate electronic media outlets/social networking sites that reach the general and targeted population (i.e. blogs, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace).
- Convey messages through clinic administration and local agencies to clients.

Migrant Populations

General Considerations:

- Migrant populations may not have access to transportation.
- Locations of these populations change frequently. The migratory routes of these communities should be determined and mapped prior to an event.
- Concerns about privacy and fear of discrimination may make it difficult to interact with this population.
- This population may have limited English proficiency. Work closely with language and cultural-media outlets.

Shaping the message:

- Messages should be translated into appropriate languages.
- Messages should be adapted to the cultural practices of the identified migrant population(s), particularly as they relate to seeking help, healing, coping with loss, grief and death.

Medium:

- Pre-event: Identify the cultural communities in migrant populations and involve cultural leaders/brokers in planning and outreach activities designed to help inform and prepare this population for disasters. This involvement fosters the development of formal and informal communication networks.
- Disseminate written preparedness material among migrants via formal and informal communication networks.
- Secure a translation service and select approved messaging to be translated into predominant languages prior to an event.
- Prior to an event, identify staff with foreign language proficiency to communicate messages to small groups (i.e. media and community leaders).

Economically Disadvantaged Populations

General Considerations:

- This population may not have access to transportation.
- Concerns about privacy and fear of discrimination may make it difficult to interact with this population.
- Some groups within this population will probably have limited English proficiency. Work closely with language and cultural-media outlets.

Shaping the message:

- Messages should identify resources consistent with group's needs.
- Messages should be adapted to the cultural practices of each target audience, particularly as they relate to seeking help, healing, and coping with loss, grief and death.
- Messages should be translated into appropriate languages consistent with the identified groups within this population.

Medium:

- Pre-event: Establish pre-existing citizen networks and community outreach activities to help inform and prepare this population for disasters. This network might include existing neighborhood watch networks, local community centers, social service organizations, etc.
- Disseminate written preparedness material among this population via formal and informal communication networks.