

Pneumonic Plague Creative Brief – 11/22/04, Saint Louis University

1. Target Audience(s)

General public present in the area where a terrorist attack using pneumonic plague has happened.

Within the general public audience, there are two specific audiences:

- People who have been exposed, think they might have been exposed, or have flu-like symptoms (who need to seek medical care).
- People who have NOT been exposed and are NOT exhibiting flu-like symptoms at this time (who do not need to seek medical care at this time).

2. Objective(s):

Immediately following an event:

- For everyone present in the immediate area, emergency response communication (ERC) will:
 - Announce that an attack has taken place and inform the public with event specific information about where and when the attack took place.
 - Raise awareness about how to assess exposure to plague (proximity to the agent, contact with other exposed individuals, symptoms, and incubation periods).
- To individuals who have been exposed, think they might have been exposed, or have flu-like symptoms ERC will:
 - Raise awareness about urgency, efficacy, availability and cost of treatment, and locations where treatment can be sought.
- To individuals who have NOT been exposed and are NOT exhibiting flu-like symptoms ERC will:
 - Raise awareness about preventive actions people can take to protect themselves and their families (avoiding people with flu-like symptoms, staying home, and keeping pets inside).

As an event unfolds:

- To the general public ERC will:
 - Raise knowledge and awareness about pneumonic plague including: description of the disease including its symptoms, method of transmission, biology of the disease, long-term effects, and how plague is similar or dissimilar to other infections and illnesses.
 - Raise awareness of the specific details of the attack including information about the source of the reported information, details about the release, information on continuing threats, steps local and national authorities are taking to respond to the emergency, as well as information regarding the investigation of the event.

3. Obstacles

Obstacle: In the event of a plague outbreak, people will feel afraid, anxious, frustrated and helpless.

Suggestion: Provide people with easily understood action steps. Provide as much information as possible, and convey honesty and full disclosure.

Obstacle: Plague symptoms are very similar to flu symptoms, a consistent concern brought forth in audience testing.

Suggestion: Provide people with tools to determine exposure, and advise anyone with flu-like symptoms to seek medical treatment. In an outbreak situation, advise that anyone in the threat area with flu-like symptoms will receive treatment.

Obstacle: The general public does not have a good understanding of technical and medical terms such

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as: vaccine, antibiotic, infection, respiratory droplets, shock, and oral. If these words are misunderstood, then it is difficult to recognize symptoms and take action steps.

Suggestion: Use simple terms. If technical or medical terms must be used, define those terms in the text.

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Obstacle: There is a general lack of trust in government, more so with the federal government (except the CDC) than local agencies. Civil servants are more trusted than elected officials.

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Suggestion: Include local authorities when providing information to the public. Local agencies and workers, as well as those from the national level, should display dedication to their community by listening to the concerns and questions of the community and addressing them.

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Obstacle: The general public perceives there is a lack of resources to deal with a bio-terrorism emergency, which leads to lack of confidence regarding protective actions and concerns of access to medication and its effectiveness.

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Suggestion: Explain what is being done to address the problems, as well as the resources the community has. May be reassuring to mention the Strategic National Stockpile, which includes medicine and other necessary equipment. Utilize trusted spokespersons such as physicians to address public concerns about treatment.

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4. Key Promise

- For the general public:
 - Assessing exposure status. By understanding their own exposure status, the general public will be able to take appropriate actions.
- For people who have been exposed, think they might have been exposed, or have flu-like symptoms:
 - Treating infection. If a person is exposed to plague there are steps that he or she can take to prevent infection and death.
- For people who have NOT been exposed and are NOT exhibiting flu-like symptoms:
 - Avoiding exposure. By following the recommended actions, the general public can protect themselves and their families from being exposed to or infected by plague.
- For the general public as the event unfolds:
 - Understanding plague. By understanding the basics about plague, symptoms and progression, similarities to flu, and transmission the general public may be able to avoid exposure.
 - Event specific information. By understanding the steps being taken by the various government agencies and being given details of the investigation, the general public will be more confident in what is being done to deal with the situation.

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5. Support Statements / Reasons Why

- For the general public:
 - Assessing exposure status. Knowing exposure risk levels can help alleviate unnecessary fears and concerns, and allows people to take appropriate action steps.
- For people who have been exposed, think they might have been exposed, or have flu-like symptoms:
 - Treating infection. Plague can be treated with antibiotics; providing people with directions on getting timely treatment can prevent death. Early recognition of plague symptoms can prevent death.
- For people who have NOT been exposed and are NOT exhibiting flu-like symptoms:
 - Avoiding exposure. There are steps people can take to protect themselves and their family from plague.
- For the general public as the event unfolds:
 - Understanding plague. Having background knowledge of plague can help people avoid exposure, recognize symptoms, and stay calm during emergencies.

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- o Event specific information. Knowing there are things being done by the local and federal government agencies to contain the outbreak, including capturing who was responsible, and preventing future events, will help the public stay calm; the improved confidence will allow for greater adherence to the safety directions being provided by first responders.

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6. Tone

- Urgency. Emphasize the urgency and seriousness of the event, without causing unneeded fear and anxiety. It is important to convey to the public that waiting any amount of time could be detrimental to their health. Messages should make the treatment timeline meaningful, clear, and consistent.
- Action Steps. Always include steps that people can take to protect themselves when presenting information about an event. Action steps will give them a sense of control.
- Event Specific Information. As much information as possible about the event should be revealed, as well as steps the government is taking to respond, including successes and failures. Convey that the government is “leveling” with the public, short of jeopardizing efforts to locate and thwart attackers.
- Disclosure. Be especially careful about being honest and forthcoming with minority and other disadvantaged groups who are suspicious of the government.
- Disadvantaged Populations. Make sure that ESL populations, and people with lower literacy and educational levels are able to understand any information provided.

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7. Media

- Video specific recommendations include: having a diverse cast, providing maps to show affected areas, using bulleted list for key points, having targeted and relevant graphics, and providing contact information throughout.
- Radio specific recommendations include: slowing down information delivery, repeating contact information, having source of message, adding local treatment and contact information.
- Emphasize key actions steps in all media.
- In an emergency, most people will turn to the mass media for immediate information first, especially television.
- Many members of the public are aware of and will pay attention to the Emergency Broadcast System.
- People, in some cases immediately and others days after the event, will turn to the Internet for more detailed information about unanswered questions.
- People will turn to local media for information, especially if the event takes place in their area.
- They will also seek information from national media and print sources.
- People will corroborate and validate the information they find by using different channels.

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8. Openings

- Audience members also mention community locations they will turn to for information, including:
 - o Police stations, fire stations
 - o Highway signs, Amber Alert System
 - o City Hall, public library, and other public buildings
 - o Healthcare providers: hospitals, health departments, clinics, physician offices, and the Red Cross
 - o Schools
 - o Religious and community organizations
 - o Malls, grocery stores, and other retail venues.

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9. Creative Considerations

Message Recommendations

- Prioritize action steps. Action steps required for specific circumstances should be immediately apparent, as well as how to determine exposure status. The public needs to be given action steps to protect themselves and their loved ones.
- Message preparation. Some messages can be ready prior to an event, however, some event specific information will need to be provided by local authorities.
- Trusted agencies. Most populations trust the CDC, health departments, and other local agencies.
- Graphics. Messages should include graphics and relevant pictures. Using pictures, other visuals, and color can help increase the comprehension of print materials, although some pictures, such as cartoons, may cause a loss of credibility.
- Unnecessary actions. Information about unnecessary actions, to avoid encouraging misperceptions about transmission routes, should be included.
- Special populations. It is important to consider special populations such as those that are disabled or cannot speak English when designing materials and dissemination strategies. Messages should be written in plain language, preferably at a reading level no greater than sixth grade. People may experience a decrease in reading level due to increased stress. Non-native speakers of English may find print communication difficult to understand.
- Phone number/website. Messages should include a phone number for people to call if they have questions, as well as websites people can go to for more detailed information.

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Increased Credibility

- Event specifics. Include information specific to an event to increase credibility of the message especially the location of the event.
- Television specific. Television messages should not display dramatic acting and a local or more general backdrop.
- Affiliation of spokesperson. Spokesperson's affiliation needs to be evident. Recommended spokespersons include: medical experts, public health officials, local authorities and first responders, academic experts, CDC, Health Department workers, and celebrities in sports and music arenas for younger audiences.
- Message tone. Tone is key as sense of authority, urgency and importance increases credibility.

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