



EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION

INFECTIOUS DISEASE MESSAGE WORKSHEET

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our experience with infectious disease risk in the workplace profoundly. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that “epidemics of infectious disease are occurring more often, and spreading faster and further than ever, in many different regions of the world.” If this trend is to continue, it is important to prepare.

The truth is, any contagious illness costs employers significantly in terms of employee lost time and productivity. Even something we have years of experience with, such as influenza, has staggering costs. Pre-pandemic, the 2018-2019 productivity loss estimate due to influenza was \$17.6B, based on a 4-day work loss assumption per sick employee. ([source](#))

There are many ways to prevent the spread of illness, but it is inevitable to avoid an outbreak entirely, and therefore emergency communications and alerts are a must. These communications can impact how employees react to the incident - and if they feel afraid or confused, as opposed to informed and safe. Drafting messages prior to the situation helps reduce stress and confusion, as well as mitigate the spread by providing clear and accurate information.

Examples of Infectious Diseases in the Workplace

While it's easiest to only consider communication around COVID-19, there are actually many other situations that would require action and messages from you:

- COVID-19
- Food safety- e. coli, listeria, salmonella, botulism, campylobacter, vibrio, and shigella
- Hand Foot Mouth
- Influenza
- MRSA
- Meningitis
- Monkeypox
- Norovirus
- SARS
- Staph
- Vaccine or other clinic announcements
- West Nile Virus

Your industry, work setting, and location may influence which of these you would be most likely to encounter. Identifying company and public policies on those will help you draft effective templates about prevention, exposure, and resources.



DRAFTING COMMUNICATION TEMPLATES

Writing critical messages as an event is unfolding causes unnecessary stress, and can result in an unclear message and confusion.

Having templates already drafted ensures a clear, thoughtful message can be updated and sent out in seconds. When preparing your communications, you'll want to consider these questions below. Use the spaces provided to brainstorm and write out details per scenario that pertain to your specific organization.

How will you send your messages?

Email, phone/voice, SMS, push notifications are some options. A Mass Notification System can be set up to accommodate all channels you might utilize. Additionally, consider which situations would merit a poll, acknowledgement, or two-way communication (chat).

Who needs to get the messages?

For example, an initial alert may need to be broadcast to all employees, but follow-up messages may only need to be sent to a smaller group – for example, those that have been exposed. A Mass Notification System also has the ability to segment contacts by location, role, or many other aspects, ensuring the right messages reach the right people.

What does your message need to include?

Use clear, concise language but include enough detail for staff to take the appropriate action: Describe the situation; what, when and how to take action (work from home, get tested, isolate or quarantine), and what's next. For public health scenarios, you should always include reputable sources (such as the CDC or WHO) to direct employees to. And finally, include any company or public policies that apply.

When should communications happen?

Before the event with instructions on how to prevent the spread; during the event with updates and new instructions; after the event with additional information and resources. Again, keep in mind scenarios when you might want to interact more with the recipients using polls, responses, or chat.

TEMPLATE FORMATTING

Depending on your industry and employee roles, ensuring your message is read might require using multiple communication channels. Consider who works at a desk with a computer, versus in the field or traveling. Here are some examples of what could be included in a public health event communication template before, during, and after an event.



GENERAL ILLNESS EMAIL/SMS/MICROSOFT TEAMS ALERT

BEFORE

Subject: Preventing [illness] at [company name]

This is a [company name] company-wide notification.

Based on information from [agency name], [illness] will be more severe this [season]. Please remember to wash hands frequently, stay home if you are sick, and practice social distancing.

Vaccines are also available through [health insurance provider]:

- [Vaccine name]
- [Location]
- [Date/times or hyperlink to schedule]

For further information on [illness], visit the [agency] website. If you have any questions, please contact [manager's name and phone number].

DURING

Subject: [Illness] cases reported at [location] - Instructions

This is a [company name] company-wide notification.

The [location] office has reported positive cases of [illness]. If you were directly exposed, you will receive a communication with further instructions.

For further information on [illness], visit the [agency] website. If you develop any symptoms of [illness], such as [symptoms], please stay home until you recover. Feel free to communicate with our team via chat with any questions or concerns [chat phone number].

Additional company resources are available at [website].

AFTER

Subject: UPDATE: FAQs about [illness]

This is a [company name] company-wide notification.

As the situation around [illness] unfolds, we have compiled an FAQs page [link]. Please visit this page to find answers to common questions, and as always reach out to [person] at [contact information] with further questions.

As always, frequent hand washing, staying home when ill, and social distancing help prevent the spread of [illness].



GENERAL ILLNESS - VOICE

BEFORE	Hello. This is [name, title] with a mass alert from [Organization]. The severity of [illness] is forecasted to be high this [season]. Vaccines are available through our health insurance at [location]. Please visit [web address] for specific information. This message will now repeat.
DURING	Hello. This is [name, title] with a mass alert from [Organization]. You have been exposed to a positive case of [illness] on [date] at [location]. Please check your email for specific next steps regarding quarantine and who to contact with questions. This message will now repeat.
AFTER	Hello. This is [name, title] with a mass alert from [Organization]. The [agency/company] has updated policies around [illness]. Please check your email or visit [web address] for specific information. If you have questions, please contact [contact name/number]. This message will now repeat.



FOOD-BORN ILLNESS - ALL CHANNELS

BEFORE	Reminder: There has been an outbreak of [food borne illness] in [state/region]. The [agency] recommends avoiding [items]. Please report any suspected infection to [agency]. Visit [website] for more details and updates.
DURING	Announcement: [Location] has had an outbreak of [food borne illness] from [item]. If you have any of [item] please dispose of it. If you have become sick, please complete the following poll: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I am not experiencing any food-illness related symptoms and have not been in contact with the item2. I have been in contact with the item but am not experiencing any symptoms3. I have been in contact with the item and am experiencing symptoms
AFTER	[Food borne illness] Update: [Agency] has announced all suspected [items] have been removed from supply chains and any remaining are safe to consume. Visit [agency site] for more information.

THOUGHTFUL PREPARATION CAN CHANGE THE OUTCOME

*“Disease outbreaks are inevitable, and often unpredictable, events. The environment surrounding an outbreak is unique in all of public health. Outbreaks are frequently marked by uncertainty, confusion, and a sense of urgency. Communication, generally through the media, is another feature of the outbreak environment. Unfortunately, examples abound of communication failure which have delayed outbreak control, undermined public trust and compliance, and unnecessarily prolonged economic, social, and political turmoil. **The World Health Organization (WHO) believes it is now time to acknowledge that communication expertise has become as essential to outbreak control as epidemiological training and laboratory analysis.**”*

— WHO Outbreak Communication Guidelines

Communicable diseases will continue to impact our lives. How your business communicates about them when they happen can drastically change the impact. Well-planned, thoughtful communication can reduce infection, promote employee satisfaction, and save money.



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

You can easily deliver action oriented notifications
to groups of any size via text, voice, email,
Microsoft Teams, and more.

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