



The Risk Communiqué

Fall 2008

Welcome to this edition of *The Risk Communiqué*, a quarterly newsletter devoted to sharing insights about risk communication policies, philosophies, and practices. If you received this issue, you probably bought a copy of *Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety, and Health Risks* or met the

primary author at a conference, training session, or consultation. This newsletter is being provided to help you communicate complex scientific and technical information.

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Officials Try Innovative Methods to Educate about Pandemic Flu

When you need to educate and motivate people to act on risk information, sometimes you have to be innovative. That's the lesson learned from two new publications about pandemic influenza.

Pandemic influenza has been the buzz word in public health for several years now, with agencies at all levels of government and industry developing plans to respond. In 1918, the last pandemic flu outbreak killed 50 million people around the world. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts that as much as 25% to 30% of the United States population could be affected by the next pandemic. In King County, Washington, with a population of 1.8 million, a severe pandemic flu could make 540,000 people ill, over 59,000 would need hospitalization, and 11,500 could die in the first six weeks of an outbreak. Yet the public seems disinterested at best and oblivious at worst.

That concerned Seattle and King County Public Health, and they decided to do something about it.

The agency created a free 12-page comic book, *No Ordinary Flu*, to educate people about the pandemic flu. Aimed especially at immigrants and youth, the comic is produced in 12 languages. Over 500,000 copies will be distributed across the state and nation.

The narrative follows the fictional account of a young World War I veteran and his family as their world is transformed overnight by the arrival of the deadly flu virus. *No Ordinary Flu* also describes the current threat of a flu pandemic and includes information on how to prepare, such as storing food and medical supplies and planning ways to work and stay at home.

"A severe pandemic would affect the lives of everyone in our community, and this comic book helps people to visualize pandemic flu's speed and impact, which can be difficult to grasp," explained Dr. David Fleming, Director and Health Officer for Public Health – Seattle and King County, in the press release accompanying the book's publication. "Everyone needs to prepare for the health and economic impacts of a pandemic, so we're delivering the message in

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Officials Try Innovative Methods to Educate about Pandemic Influenza

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a way that reaches diverse communities.”



Panel from *No Ordinary Flu*

Local immigrant groups gave the agency the idea to create emergency preparedness materials that use pictures to communicate. Public health educators chose the comic book format because comics are widely read by people of all ages in parts of Latin America and Asia. Seattle artist David Lasky illustrated the work, and health communication specialist Meredith Li-Vollmer authored it. The work was funded by the National Association of County and City Health Officials, which plans to distribute 160,000 copies nationally. Request your copy at <http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/pandemicflu.aspx>

CDC also recognized the need to educate people about pandemic influenza. The agency published the *Pandemic Influenza Storybook* as a resource tool for emergency communicators. The online storybook contains narratives from

survivors, families, and friends who lived through the 1918 and 1957 pandemics. Stories from the 1968 pandemic will be added as they become available. CDC will continue to accept stories for all areas and add them to the book at quarterly intervals.

“Complacency is enemy number one when it comes to preparing for another influenza pandemic,” said CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding in the press release that announced the storybook’s debut. “These stories, told so eloquently by survivors, family members, and friends from past pandemics, serve as a sobering reminder of the devastating impact that influenza can have, and reading them is a must for anyone involved in public health preparedness.”

CDC hopes that the first-person and family accounts will provide an intimate, personal view of the 1918 and 1957 pandemics that goes beyond the staggering statistics associated with those events. The goal is to help planners re-energize their efforts and fight preparedness fatigue and apathy. The traditional press covered the story extensively, and the online media adored the idea. Read the storybook for yourself at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/storybook/index.html>.

FDA Panel Issues Recommendations to Improve Risk Communication

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) Risk Communication Advisory

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FDA Panel Recommendations

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Extra! Third Edition Available in Print on Demand!

The fourth edition of *Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety, and Health Risks*, is in production, but IEEE/Wiley, our new publisher, is making the third edition available via print on demand. That means books are printed as you order them instead of sitting in a warehouse waiting. You can learn more on [their site](#) at www.wiley.com.

Committee met for the third time this year on August 14 and 15. The Committee advises the FDA Commissioner and staff on strategies and programs designed to communicate with the public about the risks and benefits of FDA-regulated products. The focus at this meeting was to translate principles of risk communication into practice in situations of emerging and uncertain risk.

Randall Lutter, Ph.D., FDA's Deputy Commissioner for Policy, said in the agency's blog, "No matter how good FDA's science and our science-based decisions are, if we want to truly protect and promote [the public's] health, we must communicate our decisions in a way that [they] can understand. Because the science is complex and often uncertain, involving risks and benefits, communicating that science – risk communication – is as important and as challenging as any activity FDA undertakes."

Committee members, themselves experts in risk communication, gave presentations on the scientific basis for translating risk communication into practice and heard from FDA staff regarding risk communication and management strategies. Committee members then proposed, voted on, and adopted the following recommendations:

- Consider risk communication as a strategic function, to be included in designing the agency's core processes.
- Strategically plan risk communication activities.
- Find ways to research risk communication efficiently, ensuring that communications

are designed in a timely fashion to a scientific standard.

- Routinely present quantitative risk and benefit information, in formats consistent with regulatory constraints.
- Develop a participatory design and testing process for consumer communication and include vulnerable groups with barriers to understanding and access.

"The FDA has already taken the Committee's advice to heart and started on the path toward more effective communication," said Lutter. "We created an internal Communications Council to act on the Committee's advice and engage in much broader activity as well, and we are in the process of making our practices more consistent throughout the agency. It is vitally important that we find more efficient ways to ensure that needed research gets conducted, messages are tested with people before they are issued, and we evaluate the impact of our communications." He promised that FDA would find a way to ensure that families receive useful and understandable information about medicines from their pharmacist. The goal is to allow those at risk to understand the risks and benefits of regulated products like food, drugs, and cosmetics so they can make informed decisions.

Back Issues Now Available

I recently revamped my website at www.rlriskcom.com, and added PDF versions of every issue of *The*

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Available Online**
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If you need more assistance in risk communication, public involvement, or science and health communication, or need to train staff in these areas, please contact Regina Lundgren at lundgren@owt.com or 509-582-6995. For more information about risk communication, see <http://www.rlriskcom.com>.

Risk Communiqué since July 2007. I also added more links in the resources section. In addition, just for those in my trainings and who subscribe to this newsletter, I included something fun. Go to www.rlriskcom.com/videos.htm for four videos that have a unique way of showing risk communication in action. If you can't access YouTube at work, you may want to try these from home. Enjoy!

CDC Publishes New Risk Communication Newsletter

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently published their inaugural issue of a risk communication newsletter. *The Risk Communicator* is produced every other month by CDC's Emergency Risk Communication Branch to provide evidence-based, practical guidance for emergency risk communication strategy and operations. The newsletter includes practical tools and techniques, guest interviews with risk communication researchers and practitioners, and feature stories exploring issues related to applying emergency communications principles.

Available in both html and PDF versions, the first issue covered topics such as understanding your audiences, social media and emergency communications, the importance of trust in messages, risk communication in California Wildfires, summaries of recent research, and upcoming educational resources for emergency risk communicators.

Read all about it at <http://emergency.cdc.gov/ercn/RiskCommunicator.asp>.

Websites of Interest

Risk Communication Tutorials
http://www.foodrisk.org/exclusives/RC_tutorials/

Through the Food Safety Risk Analysis Clearinghouse, the Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition has kindly made available seven tutorials by renowned risk communication researcher Katherine McComas, Ph.D. The presentations, available in both PDF and PowerPoint, cover risk communication strategies, psychological factors influencing how people react to risk information, involving the public in risk communication, giving public presentations of risk information, working with the media, crisis communication, and evaluating risk communication.

Public Health Risk Communication Training Online
<http://www.jhsph.edu/preparedness/training/online/riskcomm.html>

Johns Hopkins Center for Public Health Preparedness is also willing to share. The university has made this training by Margo Edmunds, Ph.D, adjunct associate professor of the Department of Health Policy and Management, available for free. The online course covers the basics of risk communication, working with the media, developing public health preparedness communications plans, and more.