

hot topics in practice

A Public Health Webinar Series by

Northwest Center
FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICE

False Information

The year has been marked by widespread
misinformation.

Join Now

Save Place

Rumor Has It: Communication in an Environment of Misinformation

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www.nwph.org/hot-topics

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What is the wildest public health rumor you have had to deal with?

Please share your answer in the chat!

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Understanding the Health Information Environment

Practical Resources to Address Rumors

Acting to Address Rumors

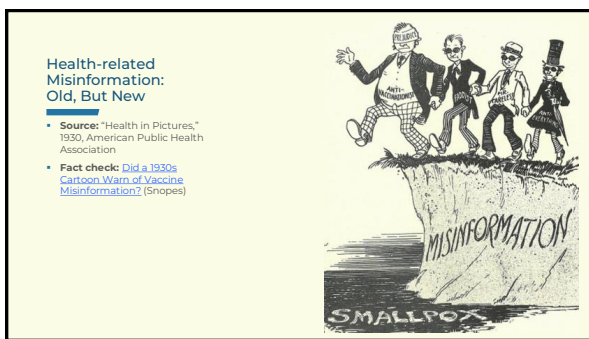
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Infodemic

- Rapid, large-scale spread of health information and misinformation through a variety of media and informational channels
- This overabundance of information—some accurate and some not—makes it difficult for people to differentiate between false and true information

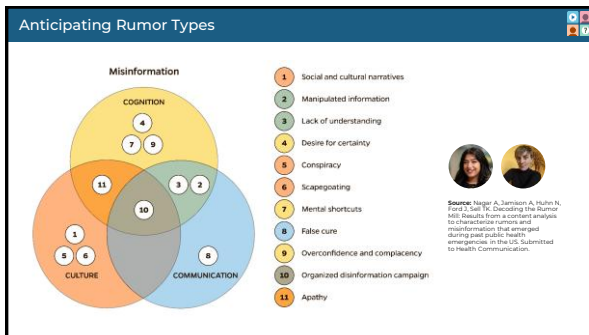
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Effective Communication Critical During Emergencies

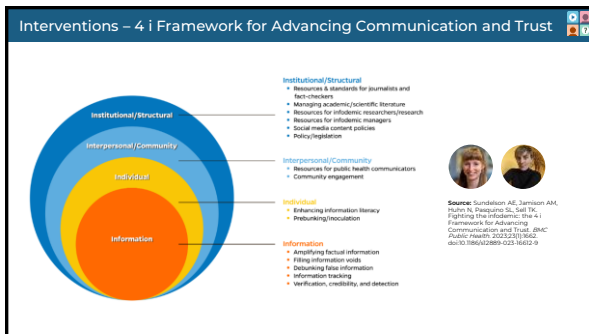
No matter what the politics are, people need (and want!) information to protect their health

- Not just about providing information
- Ensure uptake and belief
- Build trust for now and the future

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TRUST in Public Health

A website that provides tools, resources and guidance to support practitioners as they work to proactively address health rumors and build, strengthen, and maintain trust in public health



Source: <https://centerforhealthsecurity.org/trust>

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TRUST in Public Health: Video Series

Practitioner Perspective Videos





TRUST Team Videos








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Checklist to Build Trust, Improve Public Health Communication, and Anticipate Misinformation During Public Health Emergencies



A resource to help public health practitioners set up systems, relationships, and activities to improve risk communication and trust




Source: Potter C, Nager A, Fink E, et al. Checklist to Build Trust, Improve Public Health Communication, and Anticipate Misinformation During Public Health Emergencies. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security; 2024.

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Checklist to Build Trust, Improve Public Health Communication, and Anticipate Misinformation During Public Health Emergencies

Provides public health communicators with tools, resources, and internal advocacy opportunities organized across 5 priority sections:

1. Focusing on internal operations
2. Building connections with the community
3. Establishing opportunities with "secondary messengers"
4. Anticipating misinformation and loss of trust in a PHE
5. Creating meaningful and accessible messages

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What are your current approaches to managing rumors?

Select all that apply:

- A. FAQs
- B. Directly refuting rumors
- C. Filling information voids
- D. In-person community engagement activities
- E. Other (please type in chat)

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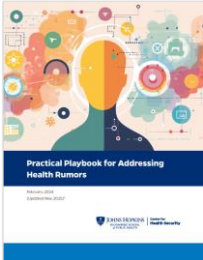
Which of the following communication actions would you like to be able to focus on more?

Select all that apply.

- A. Prioritizing specific types of misinformation to target
- B. Finding the right messengers and channels for our message
- C. Creating the right messaging to connect with our audience(s)
- D. Sustaining our communication efforts over the long term
- E. Other (please type in chat)

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Practical Playbook for Addressing Health Rumors



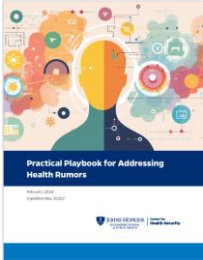
- Guidance for addressing rumors
- Provides tools, templates, and examples
- No perfect solution



Source:
<https://playbookforhealthrumors.org/>
our guide to rumors in your community
to address rumors in your community
rumors@lsu.edu, playbook

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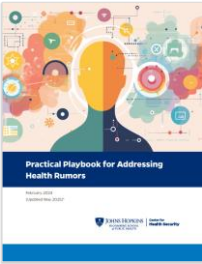
Practical Playbook: Follow Along!





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Practical Playbook: Guidance

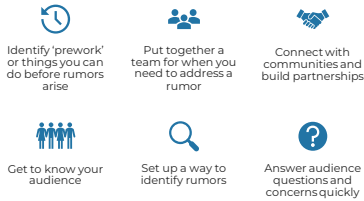


The playbook provides guidance on ways public health and medical professionals can:

- Prepare for health-related rumors
- Decide when to act to address rumors
- Determine which actions to take to address rumors
- Develop messages to address rumors
- Gather feedback on messages

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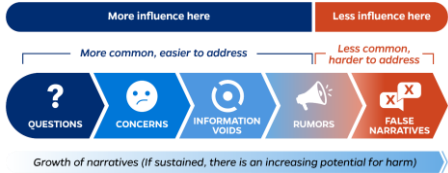
Setting Yourself Up For Success Before Rumors Spread



- Identify 'prework' or things you can do before rumors arise
- Put together a team for when you need to address a rumor
- Connect with communities and build partnerships
- Get to know your audience
- Set up a way to identify rumors
- Answer audience questions and concerns quickly

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It's About More Than True vs. False



More influence here | Less influence here

More common, easier to address | Less common, harder to address

QUESTIONS → CONCERNS → INFORMATION VOIDS → RUMORS → FALSE NARRATIVES

Growth of narratives (if sustained, there is an increasing potential for harm)

Source: Adapted from WHO Infectious Disease Management, Unit for High Impact Events Preparedness and Prevention

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Step 2.2 — Take Action to Address Rumors

Characterize your priority audience and your communication goals for them

Increase people's ability to **detect false information**
 General audiences
 People disproportionately impacted by rumor
 Partner organizations
 Increase understanding of factual alternatives to misleading information
 People most likely to believe rumor
 People spreading rumors
 Increase awareness of accurate health information

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Step 2.3 — Take Action to Address Rumors

Choose an Action Approach

Amplify accurate information
 Fill information voids
 Leverage trusted messengers and engage communities
 Refute, fact-check, or debunk
 Prebunk and inoculate
 Improve health and science literacy

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Step 2.4 — Take Action to Address Rumors

Select communications channels and trusted messengers

The best communication channels for a message that addresses rumors are the platforms on which the rumors are spreading:

- In-person activities**
- Social media**
- Traditional & digital media**

- How accessible is the message for target audiences?
- Which channel will maximize message reach?
- Which channels are popular, user friendly, and trustworthy?
- How time-consuming and costly is this for you?
- Do you have the right relationships in place?
- Could you accidentally spread rumors?

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Step 2.5 — Take Action to Address Rumors

Choose strategic ways to frame your messages

Moral reframing Align messages with your target audiences' motivations and moral values.	Promotion framing Appeal to improving a positive outcome during crisis.
Gain framing Focus on desirable outcomes or benefits to the audience.	Prevention framing Appeal to preventing a negative outcome during non-crisis times
Self-oriented framing Appeal to self-serving benefits.	Health consequences framing Appeal to health-related consequences of changing behavior.

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Step 2X (Bonus!) — Take Action to Address Rumors

Even if you can't act, address rumors in other ways

Leverage strategic partnerships Collaborate with internal and external partners who can address rumors as a part of their work.	Amplify (trusted) influential voices Help local or national influencers to amplify anti-misinformation messages shared by other trusted organizations.	Attend community outreach events Show up at community events and be available to your community as a resource for addressing rumors in a more casual setting.	Track consequences of not taking action Watch for negative impacts via social listening/ reporting from community partners. Some negative impacts warrant response.
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Step 3 — Evaluate Messages

Conduct user testing and test whether your messages are appropriate	Track how well you distributed your message and who it reached	Ask partners about their thoughts on your messaging and its impact on the target audience
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WHAT COULD YOU DO IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME AND RESOURCES?

- Use key performance indicators or other measures of your progress
- Conduct more methodical message testing
- Evaluate the extent to which messages have led to short-term or long-term changes, especially in the behaviors, beliefs, or practices

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Final Thoughts

- ✓ Anticipate loss of trust and spread of rumors – Prepare!
- ✓ Ground communication in transparency and trust
- ✓ Be willing to say that we don't know

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A Chat With Tara Kirk Sell



Betty Bekemeier



Tara Kirk Sell

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To ask a question, please click the Q&A icon in your Zoom toolbar!



Tell us what you think about today's webinar:



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Resources & Further Reading

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health – Center for Health Security

Tackling Rumors and Understanding & Strengthening (TRUST) in Public Health

<https://centerforhealthsecurity.org/trust>

Checklist to Build Trust, Improve Public Health Communication, and Anticipate Misinformation During Public Health Emergencies

<https://centerforhealthsecurity.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/2025-05-Checklist.pdf>

Practical Playbook for Addressing Health Rumors

<https://centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/research-projects/trust-in-public-health/tackling-rumors/trust-playbook>

Public Health Communications Collaborative

<https://publichealthcollaborative.org/>

Infodemiology

<https://www.infodemiology.com/>