



False Information

This post has been reviewed by independent
fact-checkers

See Why

See Post

Rumor Has It: Communication in an Environment of Misinformation

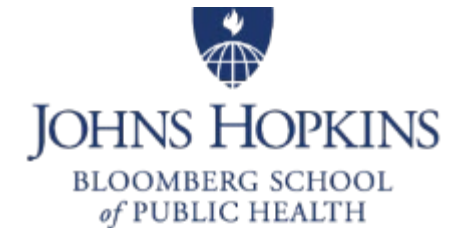


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Center for Health Security



Center for Health Security



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

Please share your answer in the chat!

[illegible]



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Understanding the Health Information Environment

Health-related Misinformation: Old, But New

- **Source:** “Health in Pictures,” 1930, American Public Health Association
- **Fact check:** [Did a 1930s Cartoon Warn of Vaccine Misinformation?](#) (Snopes)



Today's Information Environment



Source: Getty Images, zubada, 1213869400, licensed by of JHU Bloomberg School of Public Health (2021).

- 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

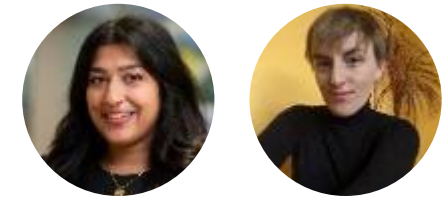
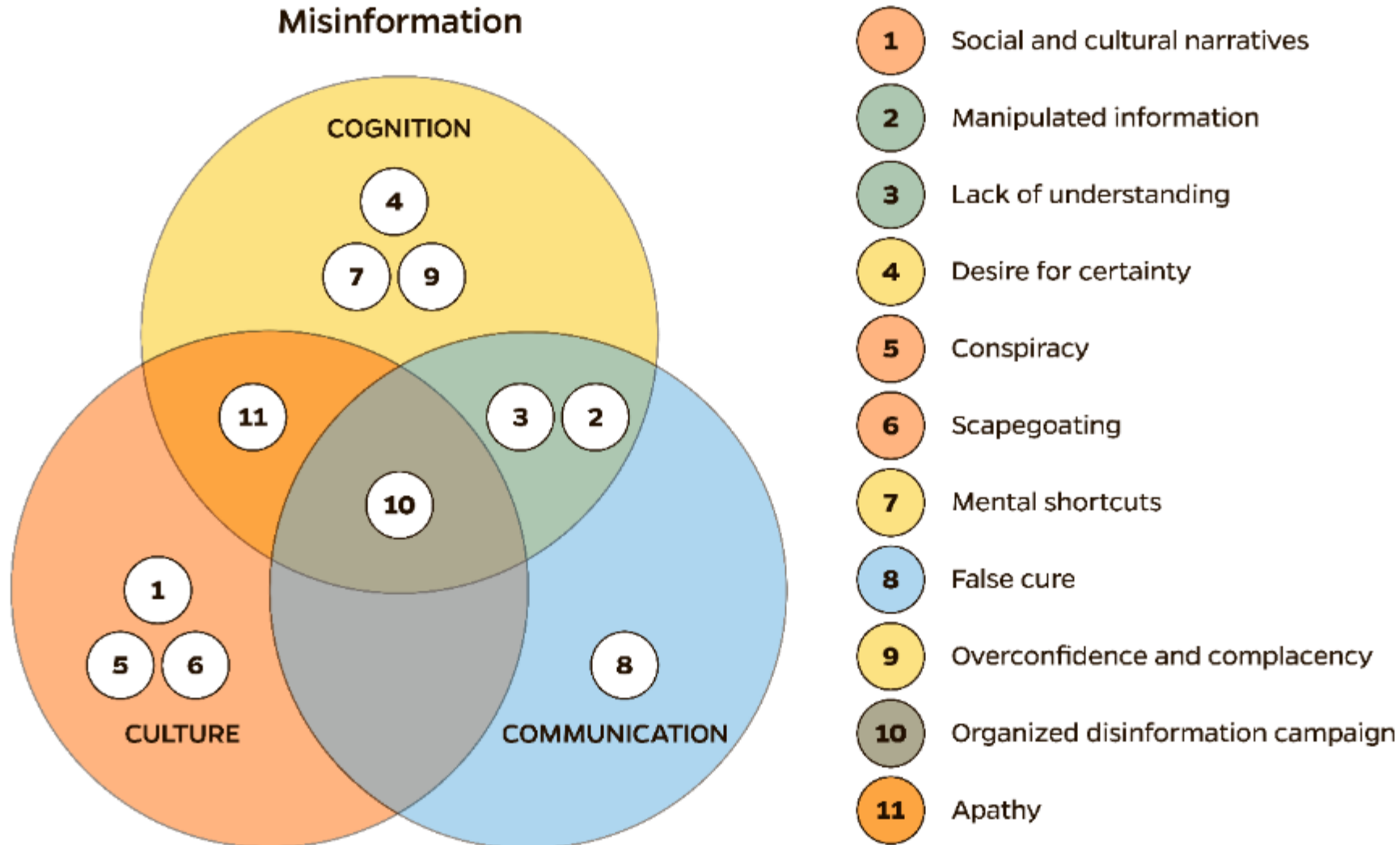


No matter what the politics are, people need (and want!) information to protect their health

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

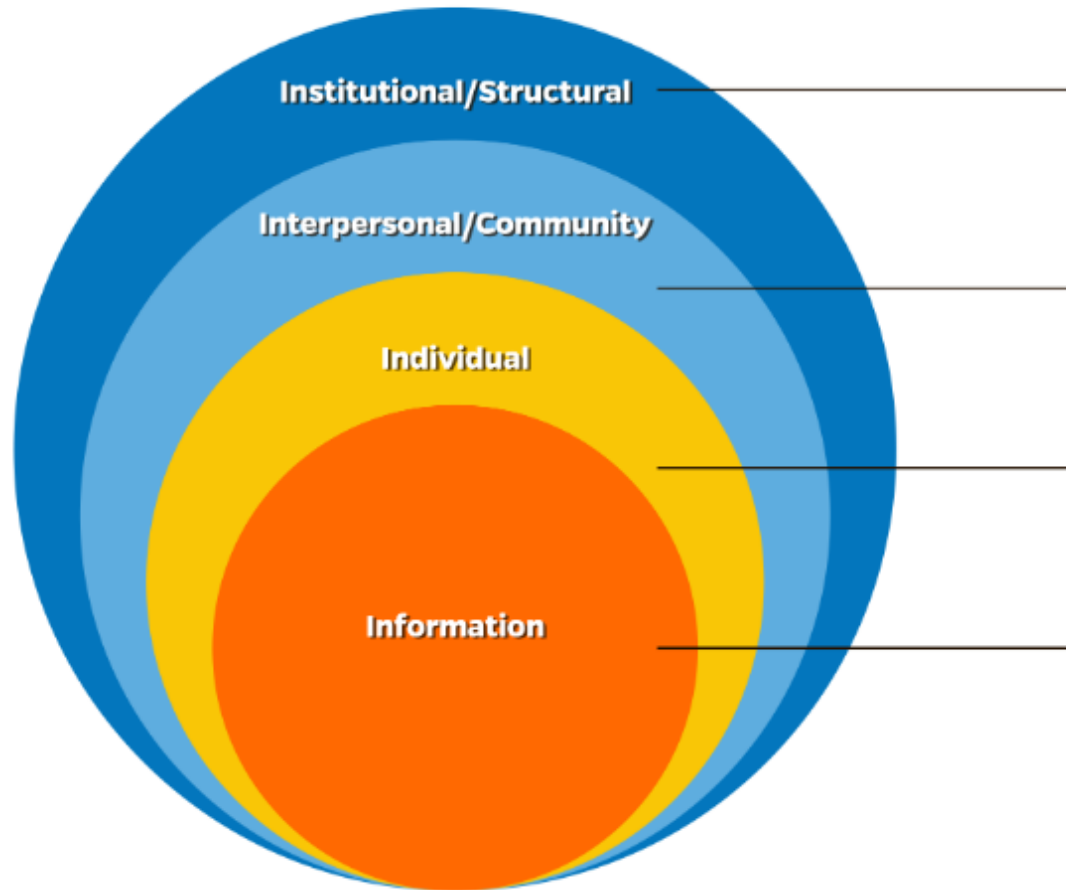


Anticipating Rumor Types



Source: Nagar A, Jamison A, Huhn N, Ford J, Sell TK. Decoding the Rumor Mill: Results from a content analysis to characterize rumors and misinformation that emerged during past public health emergencies in the US. Submitted to Health Communication.

Interventions – 4 i Framework for Advancing Communication and Trust



Institutional/Structural

- Resources & standards for journalists and fact-checkers
- Managing academic/scientific literature
- Resources for infodemic researchers/research
- Resources for infodemic managers
- Social media content policies
- Policy/legislation

Interpersonal/Community

- Resources for public health communicators
- Community engagement

Individual

- Enhancing information literacy
- Prebunking/inoculation

Information

- Amplifying factual information
- Filling information voids
- Debunking false information
- Information tracking
- Verification, credibility, and detection



Source: Sundelson AE, Jamison AM, Huhn N, Pasquino SL, Sell TK. Fighting the infodemic: the 4 i Framework for Advancing Communication and Trust. *BMC Public Health*. 2023;23(1):1662. doi:10.1186/s12889-023-16612-9

Practical Resources to Address Rumors



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



Practitioner Perspective Videos



TRUST Team Videos

Overview of
the TRUST
project &
website

TRUST
Checklist:
Part 1

TRUST
Checklist:
Part 2

Introduction to
misinformation

Breakdown of
the 4 "i" FACT
model

Highlights
from the
Playbook

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, Nagar 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.

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



Checklist Contents

How to Use the Checklist	iii
Glossary	vii
Priority 1: Build Critical Communication Capacities	1
□ Activity 1: Build and maintain a PHEPR communication workforce that is well-prepared and reflective of the community it serves	1
□ Task 1.1: Identify and characterize existing PHEPR communication workforce assets	1
□ Task 1.2: Establish and pursue avenues to remedy workforce gaps	2
□ Task 1.3: Recognize and address threats to building and maintaining a PHEPR communication workforce	3
□ Activity 2: Ensure that existing budgetary, operations, and financing approaches for PHEPR communication activities reflect prospective needs during an emergency	3
□ Task 2.1: Understand current PHEPR communication funding	3
□ Task 2.2: Curate alternative resources that may be deployed before or during a public health emergency	4
□ Task 2.3: Prepare administrative strategies in anticipation of just-in-time emergency disbursements	4
□ Task 2.4: Streamline bureaucratic and administrative processes that hinder responding in "feast or famine" financing conditions	5
□ Activity 3: Know your audience and their history with public health	5
□ Task 3.1: Discern audience characteristics	5
□ Task 3.2: Understand intended audience's history with public health and related institutions	6
Priority 1 References	6
Priority 2: Develop Meaningful & Lasting Relationships with Your Community	9
□ Activity 1: Establish public health personnel as trusted members of the community	9
□ Task 1.1: Assess readiness for community relationships	10
□ Task 1.2: Identify key principles and norms for engaging with communities	10
□ Task 1.3: Be immersed in community spaces and present at local events, initiatives, and meetings	11
□ Task 1.4: Build in mechanisms for sharing decision-making processes with communities	12
□ Activity 2: Make strategic and intentional investments in building community	13
□ Task 2.1: Conduct assessments to understand community networks and needs to inform a plan of action	13
□ Task 2.2: Establish a track record of supporting the community in a range of ways, even if small	15

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

Acting to Address Rumors





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)

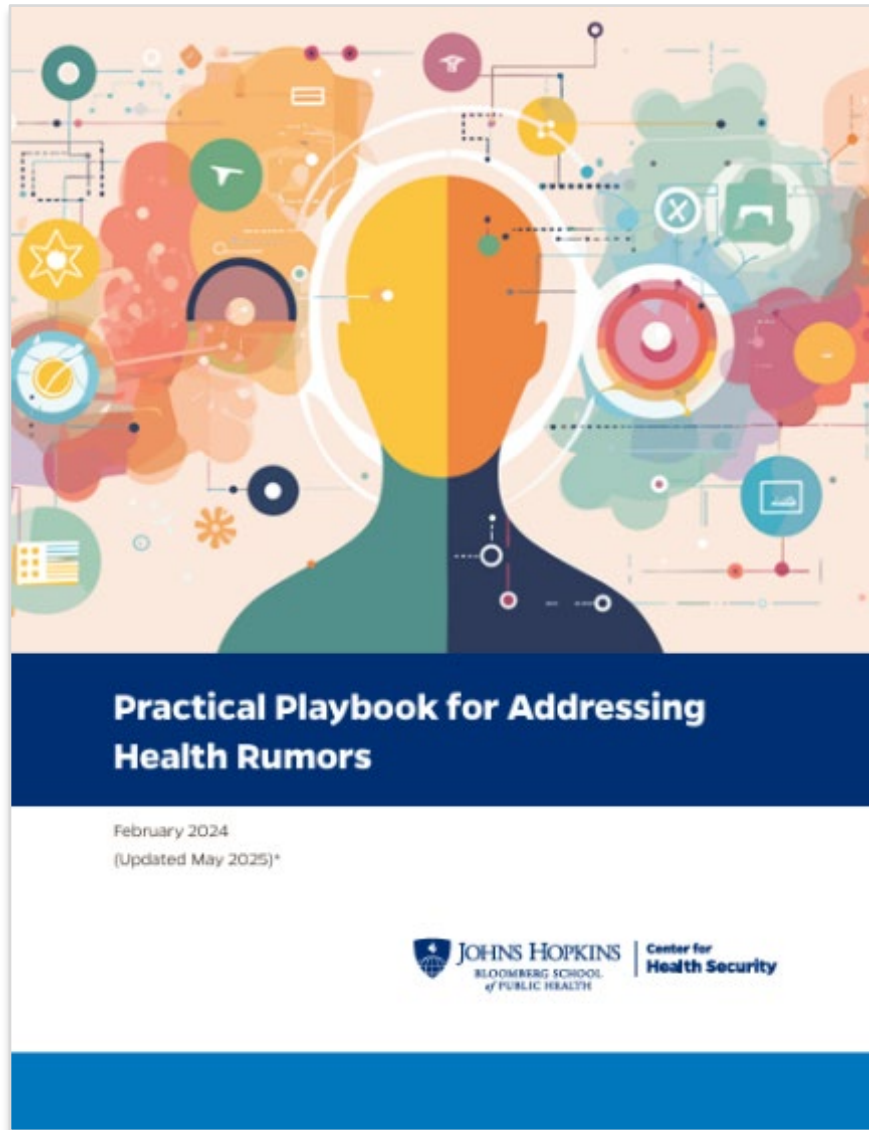


Which of the following communication actions would you like to be able to focus on more?

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)

Practical Playbook for Addressing Health Rumors



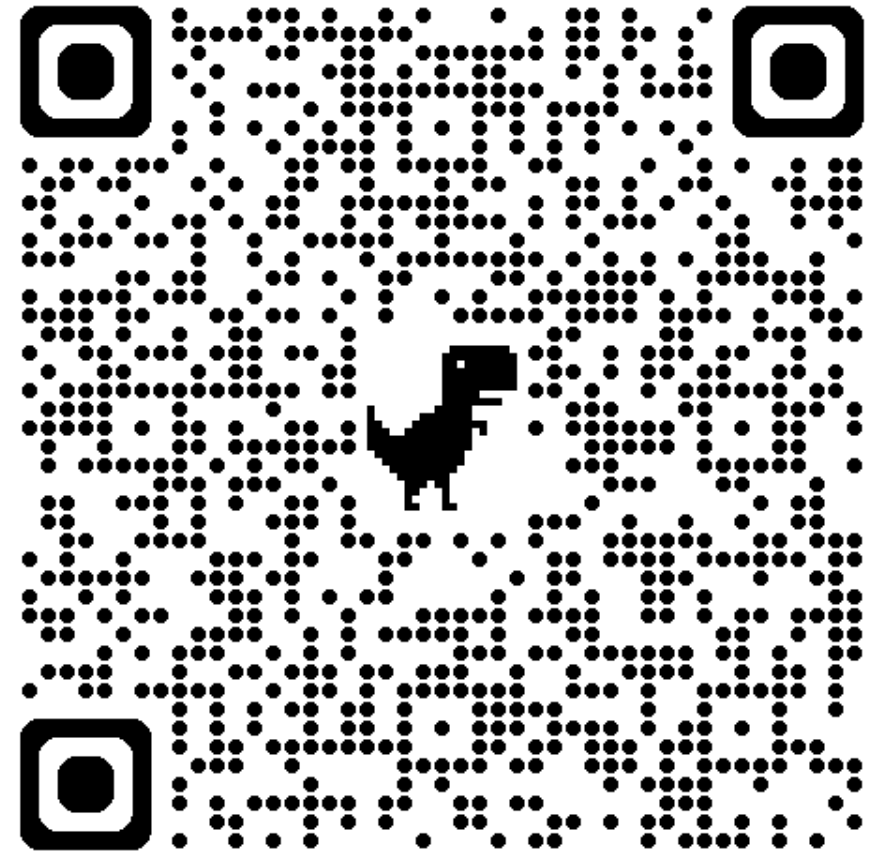
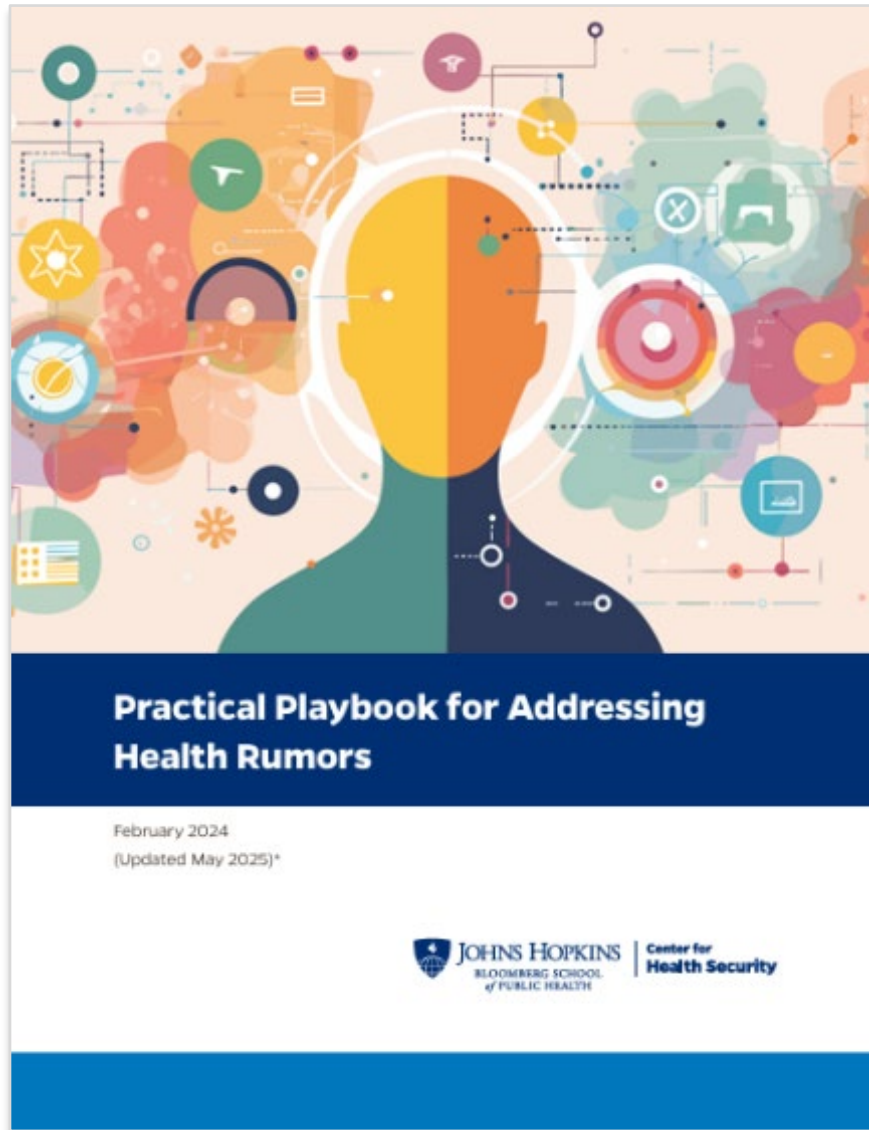
- Guidance for addressing rumors
- Provides tools, templates, and examples
- No perfect solution

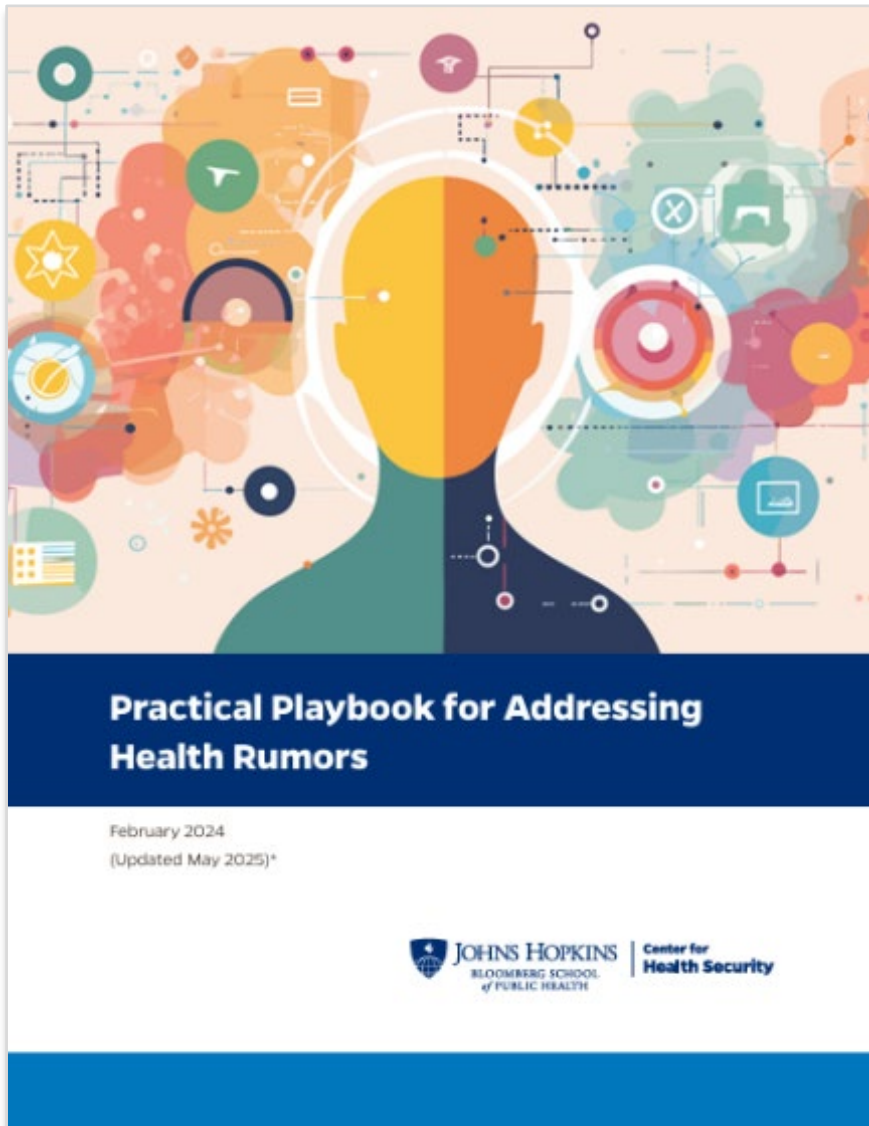


Source:

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

Practical Playbook: Follow Along!





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

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

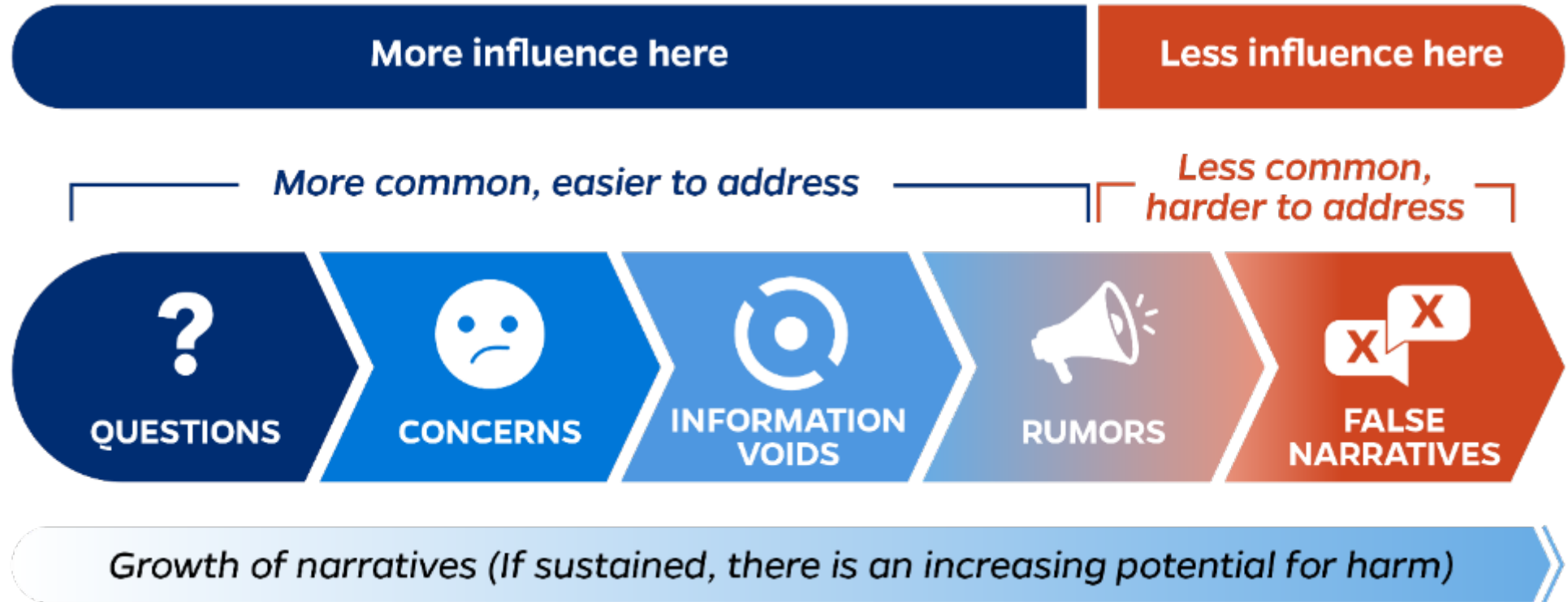


Set up a way to
identify rumors



Answer audience
questions and
concerns quickly

It's About More Than True vs. False



Step 1 — Decide Whether to Address the Rumor



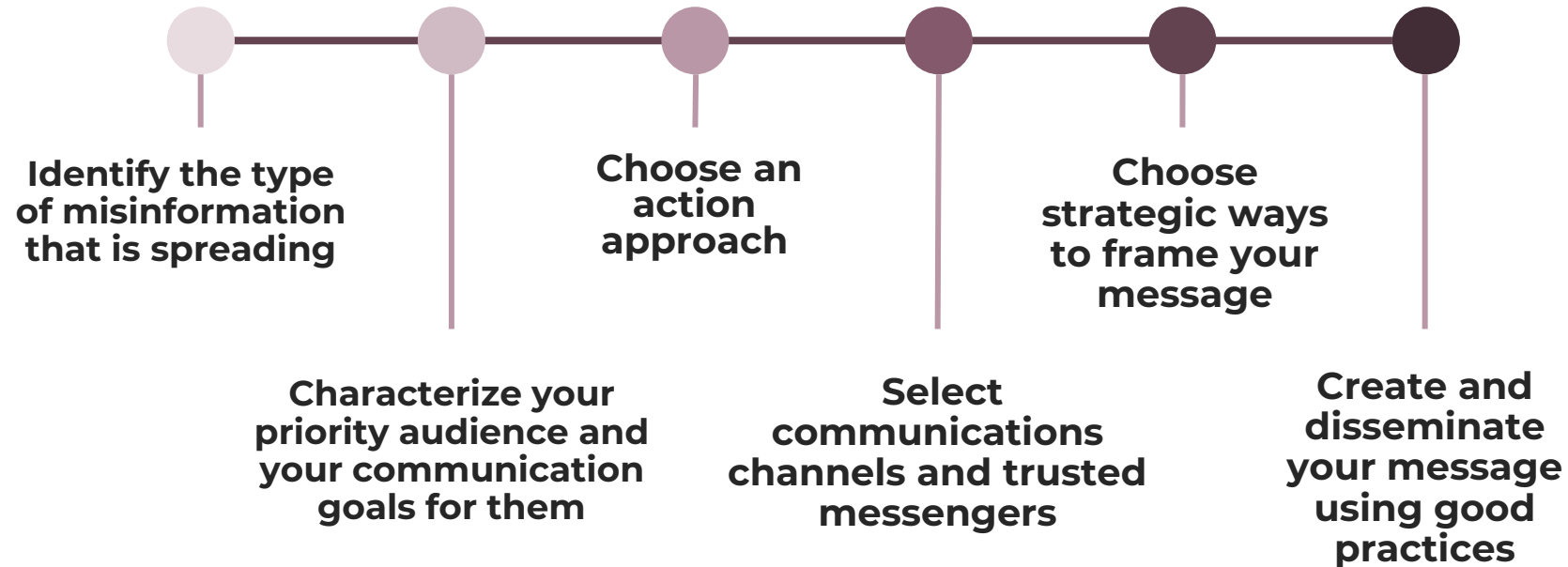
Identify your goal for responding to a rumor

Identify what influences your decision to respond

Decide whether you will address the rumor

Decision criteria	Criteria definition	Benchmark	Benchmark met?	Importance	Composite score
Seriousness					
Spread of misinformation					
Impact on public trust					
Population affected					
Where the rumor is circulating					
Impact on institutional reputation					
Type of actor spreading misinformation					
Believability of the rumor					
Impact on health					
Add additional criteria here					
Capacity to act					
Workload of responders					
Value generated by acting					
Funding available for acting					
Availability of evidence needed to act					
Access to trusted communicators					
Amount of time available to act					
Availability of expertise in current team					
Knowledge level of audience					
Support from leadership					
Whether clearance is needed to act					
Level of cultural competency					
Add additional criteria here					
Potential consequences					
Amplifying misinformation					
Alienating audiences					
Making inequalities worse					
Becoming a target of harassment					
Being unable to address uncertainty					
Political ramifications					
Being wrong about the facts					
Add additional criteria here					
Other					
Add additional criteria here					
Total composite score					

Step 2 — Take Action to Address Rumors



Step 2.1 — Take Action to Address Rumors



Identify the type of misinformation that is spreading



Safety of approved, authorized, or unapproved interventions



Efficacy of approved, authorized, or unapproved interventions



Changing guidance



Risk or severity of a health condition



Cause of a health condition



Trustworthiness of health agency or organization



Trustworthiness of implementers



How people understand the world around them



Blaming or stigmatizing a population as the cause or spreader of a health condition



Confusion around previous messaging



Desire for certainty when the situation is uncertain

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
disproportionally
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

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

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?

Choose strategic ways to frame your messages



Moral reframing

Align messages with your target audiences' motivations and moral values.



Gain framing

Focus on desirable outcomes or benefits to the audience.



Self-oriented framing

Appeal to self-serving benefits.



Promotion framing

Appeal to improving a positive outcome during crisis.



Prevention framing

Appeal to preventing a negative outcome during non-crisis times



Health consequences framing

Appeal to health-related consequences of changing behavior.

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.

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

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



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



Betty
Bekemeier



Tara Kirk
Sell

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



Tell us what you think about today's webinar:



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/>