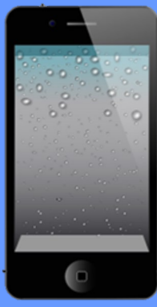




Communications Toolkit | Media Relations

Much of your communication with the public is done through the media, so it is important to maintain a positive relationship with them. This toolkit compiles communication tips, tools and templates to be used or modified when working with the media during foodborne illness outbreaks.



If you have a public information officer or communications specialist, they should be your primary resource for reporters. Immediately refer reporters to them if possible and work with them to craft your messaging.

Before an interview ✓

Ensure you are the right person to do the interview, and ask the reporter:

- What they want to cover.
- The format and duration. If it will be for TV or radio ask:
 - Will it be live or taped?
 - How long is the segment?
- If you can help them get more information to prepare for the interview.
- The focus of the article and who else they may interview.
- For example questions

In this toolkit

[Preparing for media interviews tip sheet](#)

[Communications Plan Template](#): A thoughtful communication plan can help get everyone on the same page. Modify this one to meet your needs.

The [Outbreak Talking Points Template](#) has key points for talking to the public and the media.

The [Periodic Table for High-Concern Communication](#) helps frame critical messages.

A [message map](#) can help you organize messages.

[77 example questions](#) can be useful when planning risk communications.

[Sample news releases](#) can be modified to meet your needs.

More resources

- ASTHO's [Communication in Risk Situations](#) manual
- CDC's [Interview Tips Handout](#)
- CDC's [Crisis Emergency Risk Communication Checklist](#)
- CDC's [Everyday Words for Public Health](#)



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Preparing for media interviews

1. Review materials related to the outbreak including:

- Case information
- Dates
- Location
- Politics/other factors

Work with regulatory partners to determine if the facility has had outbreaks in the past or if there's a history you should be aware of.



Body language is the first thing people notice and can outweigh verbal communication. Ensure your body language is appropriate for your message.

2. Understand the focus and format of the interview (on-camera, print, in-person, phone, radio, video, etc.).

3. Write 3 key messages – the 3 things you want the reporter (and audience) to take away.

Key messages for a raw milk outbreak may be:

- *Drinking raw milk can pose severe health risks.*
- *The risk is greater for infants and young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems.*
- *The health department cannot assure the safety of any unpasteurized milk.*

4. Craft a sound bite/quote and make sure you use it during the interview.

A sound bite for a raw milk outbreak may be:

- *“The health department cannot assure the safety of any unpasteurized milk product.”*

5. Prepare 2-3 meaningful facts/attention grabbing statistics about the outbreak.

Raw milk outbreak examples may be:

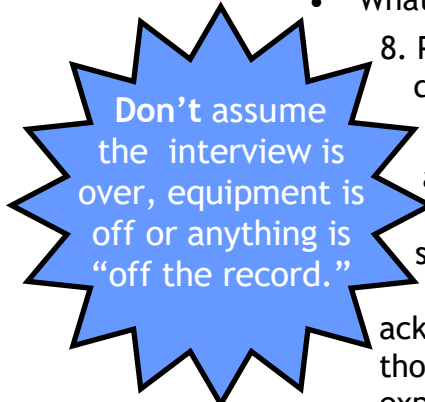
- *Health officials have identified 15 confirmed human cases of Salmonella since May 8th.*
- *All the individuals who were sickened reported drinking raw milk from Blue Farm.*
- *Pasteurization, is the only way to kill Campylobacter.*

6. Understand recent stories on the topic.

- Have there recently been other similar outbreaks in the state?
- Is there relevant legislation?
- Have there been any recent studies on the pathogen that have gained attention?

7. Practice answering the who, what, where, when, why, and how that relate to:

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- What does it mean?



8. Practice answering tough questions **aloud**.

9. Practice your opening and closing statements. Remember to always speak plainly and with compassion and acknowledge the hardship those affected are experiencing.

10. When a reporter asks at the end of an interview if there is anything you'd like to add, repeat your main message, even if you've already said it.

