



Providing Health Protection Information During Emergencies

During a public health emergency, there is often uncertainty and concern about how the public can stay safe. Local and state officials must respond to the emergency, while also providing accurate, rapid, and consistent information to help people protect themselves and others. Officials in Alamosa, Colorado experienced this challenge in spring 2008, as they responded to a situation where hundreds of people became ill from salmonella in their municipal water system.

To assist Alamosa officials, CDC provided information in English and Spanish about salmonella, infection control, and water safety to local and state public information officers so that residents received credible, science-based information. Because many Alamosa residents only speak Spanish, CDC deployed Spanish-speaking health communication experts to work directly with local authorities to educate residents about water safety and how to stop the spread of infection when schools and other public places reopened. Finally, CDC translated many materials into Spanish, and posted them on its website so they were immediately accessible in Alamosa.



As a result of the close collaboration between local public health officials and CDC's Emergency Risk Communication staff, human resources were maximized to meet the challenges of the salmonella response. CDC's ability to identify and deploy communication staff who had the right language skills was essential in bringing relevant risk communication expertise to the local health department. As a result, Alamosa residents received accurate information about how to protect themselves from salmonella.

The incident in Alamosa is just one example where CDC assisted local officials in conveying important health information to their communities. While the Alamosa outbreak required very targeted outreach, other outbreaks often require broad communications across multiple channels. Using well-established, active channels, CDC is able to rapidly and effectively provide essential public health emergency information to public information officers, clinicians, public health professionals, the media, community organizations, businesses, schools, and others across the country.



CDC's risk communication staff developing messages during a health emergency

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