Recommendations for Messaging and Media Inquiries

Behavioral Health

Behavioral Health plays an integral role in protecting the health and safety of the general public.

Having a communications response plan BEFORE and DURING the onset of an emergency or disaster is an important tool when responding to inquiries from staff, the public and media.

The following checklist has been created to assist businesses in developing and/or improving plans to prepare for and respond to an influenza outbreak:

Staff

- Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering such fundamentals (e.g., signs and symptoms of influenza, modes of transmission), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g., hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette, contingency plans).
- Anticipate employee fear and anxiety, rumors and misinformation and plan communication accordingly.
- Ensure that communication is culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Disseminate information to employees about your preparedness and response plan.
- Provide information for the at-home care of ill employees and family members.
- Promote County/Public Health platforms (e.g., hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating status and actions to staff, vendors, suppliers and customers in and outside the work environment.
- Identify community resources for timely and accurate information.
- Create plans for addressing staff absenteeism due to illness (e.g., staffing, hours).
- Establish an emergency internal communications plan.

Public

Informed messaging is a vital component of ensuring the public’s best health and well-being. The following are sample key messages for public information representatives to utilize during an outbreak:

- We know this is an anxious time for our community and our hearts go out to those who are ill. We are working closely with local health officials to deal with the situation and will keep our staff updated with any important information.

- Families can help protect themselves and prevent the spread of flu/coronavirus by taking the following precautions: Wash hands often and with soap and water for 20
seconds; cover coughs and sneezes with tissue or by coughing into the inside of your elbow; stay at least six feet away from people who are sick; stay home and away from other people when you are sick.

- To avoid flu or illness, avoid shaking hands. Go with a fist bump or a simple verbal greeting instead.

**Media**

While the future cannot be predicted, having some prepared messages can provide essential information and guidance on whatever the current event entails.

The following are resources to consult in the development of your messages:

**Web**

- [www.rivcoph.org/coronavirus.aspx](http://www.rivcoph.org/coronavirus.aspx)
- [www.rivco-diseasecontrol.org](http://www.rivco-diseasecontrol.org)

**Social media**

- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/countyriversidedepartmentofpublichealth/](http://www.facebook.com/countyriversidedepartmentofpublichealth/)
- Twitter: @rivcodoc and @rivhealthdir1

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*During large-scale events, be sure to coordinate messaging with the Joint Information Center.*

Building a strong relationship with the local health department is critical for developing a meaningful plan. The key planning activities in this checklist build upon existing contingency plans recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at [https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/index.htm).