

Stakeholder management



How to use this document

This document presents a list of key vaccine-related stakeholders along with some principles for how you may establish and maintain relations with them.

Stakeholder management is highly context-specific. However, by understanding who your key stakeholders are, and engaging with them, you may be able to strengthen the public's trust in immunization and in health authorities. Ideally, you will be able to limit negative interference based on misconceptions, and benefit from the support of advocates.

Stakeholder relations need to be established long before any crisis occurs. Use the document as a starting point for discussion and planning of stakeholder management and relations.



How was this document developed?

This document is part of a WHO series of supporting documents concerning events that could erode confidence in vaccination. Such events can be related to vaccine safety, adverse events following immunization, changes in the vaccination programme, negative public debate, outbreaks or pandemics.

All documents were developed based on scientific evidence, laboratory research and fieldwork within psychology, social and behavioural science and communication and lessons learnt in countries. For an introduction to the theoretical background and evidence, refer to the WHO publication *Vaccination and trust*, available here: www.euro.who.int/vaccinetrust.

The supporting documents are intended for use by national

- ministries of health
- centers for disease control
- immunization programmes
- regulatory authority institutions.



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR
Europe

Stakeholder management

Stakeholder management is an important element in building and maintaining trust in immunization and in health authorities.

By understanding who your key stakeholders are, and by engaging with and establishing strong relations with them you may be able to:

- strengthen the public's trust in immunization and in health authorities.
- limit negative interference based on misconceptions.
- benefit from the support of advocates.
- assist your stakeholders in their preparedness and response efforts.

How you establish and maintain relations with stakeholders is highly context-specific. However, some general principles apply and are described in the following.

Who are your stakeholders?

Prepare a list of key stakeholders. Prioritize between them, so that you know who are more important.

Who the key stakeholders are depends on the national context and the nature of the crisis. Below is some inspiration to help you define your key stakeholders.

Key point
Build strong relationships in peace time. A crisis is not the ideal time to start establishing new relations.

To know who your stakeholders are, ask yourself:



- Who may be a strong advocate or be able to lend you a helping hand, e.g. in sharing your messages or in reaching other stakeholders?
- Who are the most trusted sources of information for your target audiences e.g. for health care workers or for the public?
- Who may be a strong adversary and e.g. engage in a debate on immunization safety on the anti-vaccination side?
- Who needs to be informed in case of a vaccine-related crisis?
- Who may be asked questions about such an event by the media or members of the public?
- Who may be adversely affected by the crisis and could benefit from your support and partnership?

Suggested stakeholders



Involved authorities, management and staff

- your senior management
- immunization programme communications, public relations, public information, health promotion
- sub-national public health and immunization authorities
- national emergency/crisis response team
- regional paediatric, obstetricians or neurological directors
- Ministry of Health
- Institute of Public Health
- Institute of Public Information
- Ministry of Social Affairs
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Health Board
- State Agency of Medicines
- Health Insurance Fund
- other ministries or institutions involved in [communication for] immunization and vaccination



Experts

- members of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG)
- leading paediatricians, obstetricians and neurologists
- opinion leaders within immunization, health, children



Health workers

- doctors
- nurses
- pharmacists
- emergency medical personnel
- community health mediators



Influencers

- parliament members
- bloggers
- interest groups
- civil society organizations
- local opinion leaders
- community groups
- business sector
- travel sector



Media

- print, web, social media agencies
- influential bloggers who write about immunization
- media/journalists with a topic interest in health, children, parenthood, pregnancy



Public

- those who have just been vaccinated
- those who are soon to be vaccinated
- population at large



People directly affected by the events

- person(s) vaccinated and family
- immunocompromised individuals
- health workers and health facility involved
- health mediators
- school involved
- local community

The following pages give advice on how to manage stakeholder relations

- in the ongoing work
- during crisis

Build strong relations with key partners

Authorities Experts Influencers

Liaise with vaccine advocates

Liaise with people, institutions or organizations which may become strong advocates for vaccination. They may be willing to help you reach important stakeholders or communities. They may also be drawn upon as credible third parties for media interviews or public events; especially in situations where public confidence in health authorities has been damaged. Work closely together with them to ensure aligned messaging, keep them informed, build their knowledge, and agree with them that you will keep each other informed about inquiries from the media.

Authorities Experts Influencers

Reach out and build awareness

Liaise with media, internal and external allies, vaccine advocates as well as vaccine opponents. Build and maintain strong relations with them. Take initiatives to increase their knowledge and understanding of the benefits and risks associated with vaccines and immunization and with vaccine-preventable diseases.

To **READ MORE** refer to:

- *Setting the media agenda*
euro.who.int/vaccinetrust

Authorities Experts Influencers

Establish collaboration mechanisms

Establish a vaccine communications working group or similar collaboration mechanism to strengthen confidence-building and ongoing communication and to prevent or respond to vaccine safety crises.

To **READ MORE** refer to:

- *Template terms of reference for vaccine communication working group*
euro.who.int/vaccinetrust

Authorities Experts Influencers Health workers

Train key stakeholders

Make sure key stakeholders have sufficient knowledge about vaccines and immunization. Consider spokesperson training and training of frontline health workers and other key stakeholders to make sure they fully understand issues related to immunization and vaccine safety.

To **READ MORE** refer to:

- *Tips for spokespersons*
euro.who.int/vaccinetrust

Build confidence of the public



Public

Build a trusting relationship with the public

People who understand the benefits and risks associated with vaccines and diseases and who trust authorities are believed to be more resilient to vaccine scares, rumours and misconceptions about vaccines. Consider how you can build this understanding and trust. Make sure the public knows and trusts your spokespersons. Use research methods to understand them and their behaviours. Ensure they have access to high-quality information about vaccines and diseases, e.g. via training of health workers, media training, trusted websites and information materials in health facilities.

To **READ MORE** refer to:

- *How to present data*
euro.who.int/vaccinetrust



Media Public

Monitor opinions and shape communications accordingly

Monitor public opinion on vaccines and immunization, rumours and misperceptions, e.g. through social media monitoring, media monitoring or an established public hotline for questions and answers on vaccination where questions are filed and analysed. Respond to any new safety-related issues that are detected.

To **READ MORE** refer to:

- *How to monitor public opinion*
euro.who.int/vaccinetrust

Liase to be prepared for a crisis



Engage allies in crisis response planning

Engage allies who support vaccination in developing your communications/crisis communications plan. If it is not possible to engage them in the development process, ask them to review it and provide feedback, or share the plan with them upon finalization.

To **READ MORE** refer to:

- *Template crisis communication plan*
euro.who.int/vaccinetrust



Define roles and responsibilities in a crisis

Use the crisis communications plan to define clear roles and responsibilities during a crisis. Describe coordination and collaboration mechanisms between stakeholders with different areas of expertise (epidemiologists, vaccinologists, spokespersons, community engagement experts, media/press officers). A crisis is not the right time to define this.



Authorities

Obtain management endorsement

A crisis is not the time to discuss or get approval of your plans and strategies. Make sure to get the endorsement of senior management (in all relevant ministries and national institutions) of your crisis communications plan, of prepared materials and defined roles and responsibilities beforehand. Also, agree on expedited approval mechanisms during a crisis (e.g. issuing a press release or Tweet).



Plan immediate information dissemination activities in case of crisis

Consider which methods of information dissemination to stakeholders can be applied within a few hours (e-mail groups, phone lists, web, social media and press releases) and agree who is responsible for each. Decide in advance who will deliver what kind of messages (e.g., vaccine safety, vaccine distribution, healthcare workers protection, public protection, etc.).



Conduct an exercise to test crisis response plans

Design and conduct a realistic exercise that tests response measures from stakeholders. Identify weaknesses and gaps and re-write plans, agreements, message and materials as appropriate to improve response activities.



Prepare crisis response materials

Prepare a set of materials with consistent messages that can be applied in the case of a crisis, including a list of credible experts who would be effective information sources for the media (e.g. NITAG members); a list of media contacts and log; a list of key stakeholders who need to be kept informed; key messages or holding statements; a list of frequently asked questions with answers along with fact sheets on key issues, e.g. on vaccine safety, vaccine-preventable diseases. Test these materials and messages in advance with members of the target audience to ensure comprehension and avoid potential barriers to recommendations.

Work closely when responding to a crisis



Be accessible

Crises are hectic, so you need to establish mechanisms to ensure accessibility. Consider establishing a public hotline for questions and a 24-hour mechanism for media enquiries. Make sure your stakeholders know whom to contact if they need to share vital information or ask questions. Consider preparing a list of contact details and share it internally and with selected engaged experts/influencers.



Respond immediately



How soon you communicate can be decisive for how the crisis develops. You need to set the scene – or someone else will (perhaps a vaccination opponent). Use your prepared materials and lists to communicate immediately to all of your stakeholders.



Benefit from the support of advocates

Consider who may be credible advocates for immunization, supporting health authorities in promoting vaccination. Reach out to them and ask for their support. Aligned messaging is critical to maintain the trust of the public. Share your messages with these advocates and ask them to use the same messages. Ask them to refer to your spokespersons when approached by the media – and ask if you can refer to them as well.

Reach out to the public during a crisis

Keep the public informed

Keep the public informed, and be transparent. Provide regular updates and tell them when and where (website, press brief, etc.) you will provide the next one. If you have nothing new to share – tell them that. Also share what you do not know, and how you are investigating it. Use multiple channels that suit different audiences and keep all information consistent across these multiple channels. Consider quick updates through Twitter, blogs or e-mails.

To **READ MORE** refer to:



- *Tips for spokespersons*

euro.who.int/vaccinetrust




Ensure special consideration for local communities and those involved

Uncertainty and frustration might flourish among those who are closest to the events. Consider targeted activities for them, including face-to-face information. Prepare and utilize community engagement experts (such as community health mediators) to specifically focus on these individuals.

Monitor opinions and shape response accordingly

Continue or increase monitoring of public opinion on vaccines and immunization and shape your response activities accordingly.



Focus on health workers

As your primary representatives, health workers are vital in building and maintaining trust in vaccines and immunization authorities among the public. In any vaccine-related crisis, health workers are the first to be asked for guidance by the public. Keep them informed, and share key messages with them about the events and about vaccine safety.