

How to prepare a message map



How to use this document

This document introduces the 'message map' as a tool to develop clear messages. It also includes a model message map as a case example for inspiration.

Clear messages help you be precise with a complicated topic, keep focus when under pressure and manage difficult questions and challenges. They will help your preparation efforts by initiating the consideration of difficult questions from the media and public while allowing you to ensure aligned messaging across many stakeholders.



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**

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Well-prepared, accurate and sympathetic messages and aligned messaging across stakeholders are critical elements to ensure trust during any crisis.

A message map is a tool to help align messaging among many stakeholders, test messages with members of the target audience and help spokespersons prepare for an interview or a press conference. Even if the map contains a great deal of information, its illustrative format and clear structure make it easy to remember messages.

The process of developing message maps, in itself, can also prove fruitful. It helps your team prioritize and structure messages, and it identifies gaps in your knowledge.

Define three key messages

Start by defining three overall messages. Only three! You will not be able to remember more than three, and the audience will not be able to grasp more.

Then substantiate each message with three supporting messages.

Insert the messages in one table, using the message map.

Message maps help you...

Agree on messages and ensure aligned messaging across stakeholders

Test messages with members of the target audience to determine comprehension and potential barriers to recommendations

Be precise with complicated topics

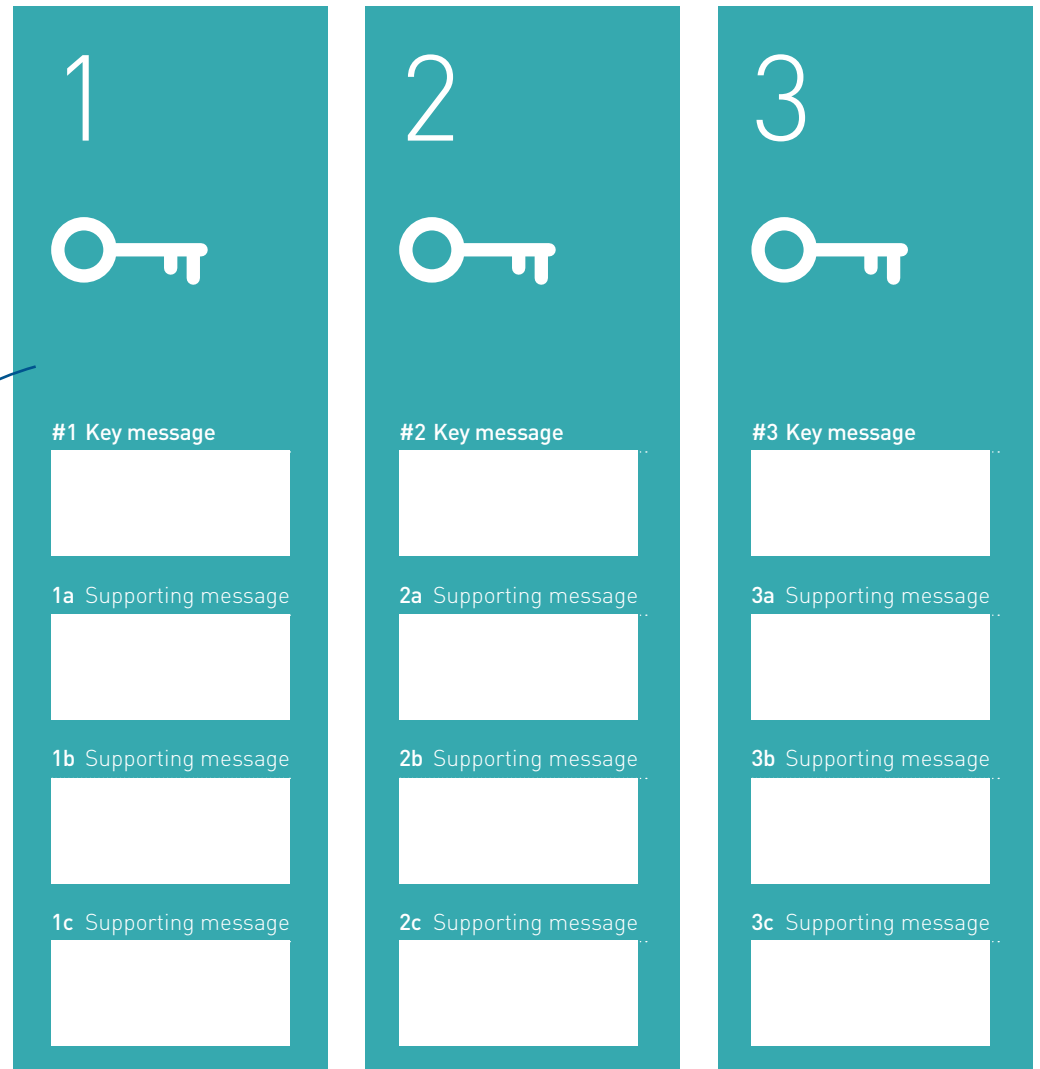
Keep focus when under pressure

Be consistent and repeat key messages

Manage difficult questions and challenges

Be more confident and thereby convincing!

Message map



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Shape your messages

The contents of your messages will depend on the context. However, the tone of your messaging should follow some basic rules.



Overall principles for your messages

- **Be simple.** Use clear non-technical language and no acronyms.
- **Be honest.** Do not try to conceal facts.
- **Be accurate.** Cite evidence, facts and data. Use graphs and illustrations.
- **Show empathy and understanding.** Acknowledge and address concerns.
- **Acknowledge uncertainty.** Tell them what you do not know, what is being done to know more, and when you expect to share more information.
- **Emphasize the value of immunization.**

To **READ MORE** refer to:

- *Tips for spokespersons*
- *Strategies used by journalists*
- *The questions journalists always ask in a crisis*

euro.who.int/vaccinetrust



Common questions that you should prepare for

Regarding a vaccine safety event

- What happened?
- Who is affected?
- Where did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- Will it happen again?

Regarding the response

- Who is responsible?
- What is being done now?
- What can people do to protect their families, communities and themselves?
- What are you doing to prevent this from happening again?

Share your messages with key stakeholders

Consistency in messaging is critical during crisis. If different key stakeholders, for example spokespersons from two ministries or two members of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG), voice conflicting messages, it creates uncertainty and distrust. It will also be picked up by the media, which may depict responsible authorities as bewildered or inept.

- Make sure your colleagues and your key partners know the messages well.
- Messages are more powerful when carried by more than one person.
- With coordinated messages you will avoid confusion and loss of trust.
- Invite your allies to media and spokesperson training in order to practice key messages.

To **READ MORE** refer to:

- *Stakeholder management before and during a crisis*

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Message map example

1

Measles is dangerous

- 1a Measles kills. It is one of the leading causes of death among young children in the world. 1-3 in every 1000 infected individuals will die (Red Book 2015, data from the US).
- 1b The complications of the disease can lead to pneumonia, blindness, encephalitis (an infection that causes brain swelling), severe diarrhoea and related dehydration, ear infections or severe respiratory infections.
- 1c In 2013, there were almost 150 000 measles deaths globally – about 400 deaths every day or 16 deaths every hour.

2

The campaign is necessary

- 2a Our country has taken steps to avoid a future outbreak of measles by initiating a measles vaccination campaign.
- 2b The target group chosen for vaccination is the 15-19-year-olds in all 16 regions. The campaign intends to cover at least 80% of 1.2 million teenagers in this age group.
- 2c Not enough people are immune and in 2014 our country reported more measles cases than in previous years. There have been pockets where the coverage has not been as high and it seems some people have been missed.

3

The vaccine is safe

- 3a The vaccine saves lives and prevents suffering. The risk of severe side effects is minimal. Some mild and more frequent side effects that may occur include a light rash and fever. 1 in 1 000 000 individual who are vaccinated with measles vaccine may suffer from a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).
- 3b The measles vaccine procured for use in this campaign is very safe and very effective. It was produced in the State Serum Institute in India. It has been used in 45 countries around the world over the past few years, including the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation, Switzerland and the Netherlands.
- 3c The vaccine is pre-qualified, which means it has been approved by WHO. Before pre-qualification it was rigorously tested through clinical and field procedures. After pre-qualification, WHO regularly inspects the production facilities to ensure compliance with good manufacturing practice.