

Four immediate steps when responding to an event that may erode trust



How to use this document

This document suggests four immediate steps when responding to vaccine safety-related events or other events that may erode trust in vaccines or the health authorities delivering them.



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.



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1 Gather your inner circle



Coordination is critical during all phases of crisis response. If it is believed that the event may damage trust in vaccines and cause a negative media response, your inner circle of allies should be gathered immediately.

Consider the following

- Establish a coordination and working group (if not already established).
- Engage relevant partners across institutions, e.g. ministries of health, education and social affairs; regulatory authorities; centers for disease control, health promotion, communication, press and emergency response; vaccine experts; professional associations.
- Agree how you will continue to coordinate, communicate and share information within the group.
- Agree on roles and responsibilities.

2 Understand the problem



Not all events that may potentially erode confidence in vaccines and vaccination require a communications response. Not responding may impair trust in vaccines and health authorities. Over-communicating may cause unnecessary public concern. Thus, it is important – throughout the process – to analyse events and plan the communications response accordingly.

Consider the following

- Obtain as much information as possible about the event(s) that took place.
- Analyse the situation: what is the potential level of impact on trust in vaccines and the immunization programme?
- Shape your communications response according to your conclusions.

3 Liaise with key stakeholders



A critical first step in such events is to liaise with key stakeholders. Good stakeholder relations are critical to ensuring trust during a crisis.

Consider the following

- Consult your list of key stakeholders.
- Liaise with stakeholders to benefit from the support of advocates.
- Share information with stakeholders to avoid confusion and distrust and to avoid any negative interference from adversaries.

4 Communicate externally



The right response may limit the negative consequences of the crisis or even prevent the situation from escalating into a crisis. Honest and open communication is crucial for maintaining and building trust.

Consider the following

- Decide whether the event warrants external communication and plan your response based on your analysis of the event.
- Revisit your crisis communication plan and prepare a plan for external communication.
- Communicate broadly and to selected target groups; communicate often using consistent messages through many channels.
- Communicate where there are uncertainties and what you are doing to reduce them.