

# Risk Communication Strategies for Future Pandemics

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

An effective pandemic response relies not only on sound public health measures but also on clear, consistent, and trusted communication. As part of our research into public perceptions of regulatory action for pandemic preparedness, we **reviewed existing literature and health communication guidelines** of the major international organisations including the United Nations and the World Health Organization, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the European Union and the OECD.

This executive summary presents the **key findings and strategic recommendations** focused specifically on the responsibilities of **health authorities and policy makers** (hereafter ‘regulators’) and the necessary coordination between regulatory bodies, scientific institutions, and public communicators. The goal is to strengthen public trust, ensure coherent messaging, and enhance the overall effectiveness of pandemic response efforts.



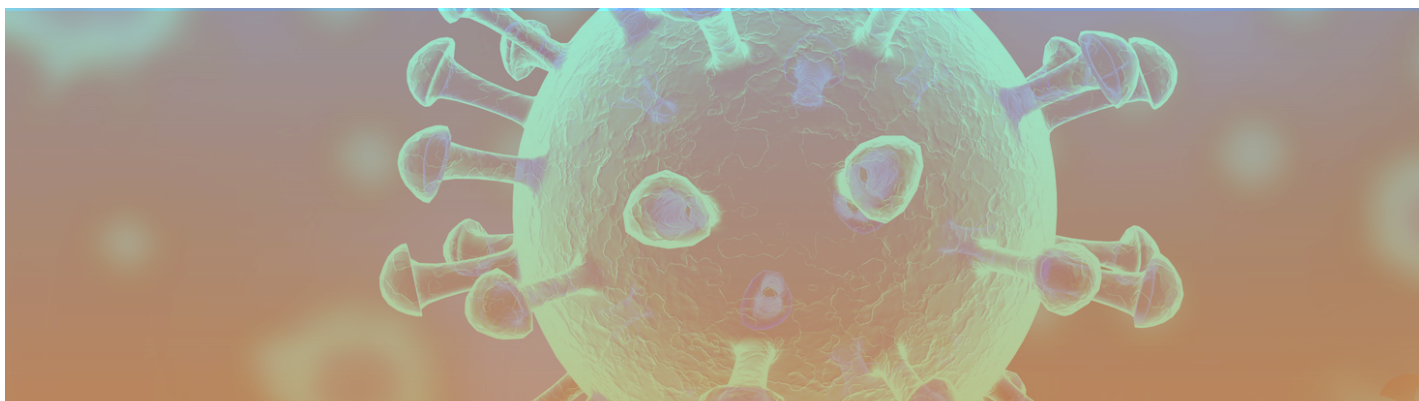
### 1. Centralise communication & messaging

First, governments in liaison with health authorities and public policymakers (‘authorities’) should establish a centralized communication framework at the outset of a public health emergency. This framework should identify all relevant stakeholders – ranging from local health departments and hospitals to national health ministries and scientific advisory bodies –and provide a unified set of communication principles. Such principles must allow for consistency in messaging while providing flexibility for local adaptation to cultural, social, and economic contexts.



### 2. Communicate beyond biomedical concerns

Second, authorities must recognize that public trust is built not simply through the dissemination of scientific facts but through empathetic, culturally sensitive, and relatable communication. Regulatory action should mandate that risk communication incorporates real-life concerns, including the economic and social impacts of public health measures. Communication strategies must be prepared to address difficult realities – such as financial hardships due to public health interventions – openly and with empathy, while coordinating mitigation efforts alongside risk communication.





### 3. Engage communities

Third, authorities should require that all public communication moves away from a top-down, purely instructive model. Instead, communication should be framed as an ongoing dialogue between scientists, regulators, and the public. Authorities should mandate the creation of feedback mechanisms that allow individuals and communities to voice concerns, receive responses, and access accurate, up-to-date information. These mechanisms should be formally integrated into pandemic preparedness plans and maintained throughout the crisis to adapt strategies dynamically based on community input.



### 4. Ensure harmonised messaging across platforms (and borders)

Moreover, authorities must ensure that communication efforts are not fragmented. During a pandemic, the media landscape can easily become saturated with conflicting messages, creating confusion and mistrust. Regulatory agencies should coordinate a unified public communication strategy across different levels of government and ensure that scientific findings, regulatory updates, and public health advisories are disseminated in a consistent, accessible, and culturally appropriate manner.



### 5. Build expertise and media partnerships in advance

Another critical action is the training and preparation of spokespersons. Authorities should oversee the development of trained communication teams capable of working with the media to translate complex scientific information into lay terms, avoid technical jargon, and engage proactively with public concerns. Media partnerships should be formalized in advance, ensuring that public broadcasters and other major outlets are prepared to support official messaging during emergencies.



### 6. Invest in a knowledgeable citizenry

Finally, regulatory frameworks must institutionalise ongoing public education efforts beyond the immediate crisis. Investing in medium- and long-term public education about science, health systems, and social stigma will build resilience and reduce the impact of misinformation in future emergencies. Vaccine communication strategies must move beyond biomedical data to address broader social concerns and demonstrate tangible benefits for individuals and communities.

## Conclusion

Future pandemic preparedness requires that public authorities view communication not as an ancillary function, but as a core component of the public health response. Coordination among regulatory bodies, health authorities, scientific institutions, and public communicators is essential to maintaining public trust, ensuring compliance with health measures, and protecting both public health and social stability. Through early, transparent, and inclusive communication strategies, regulators can play a decisive role in strengthening societal resilience against future global health threats.

