How Can Governments Effectively Use Public Communication to Inform and Enable Public Behaviours?

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Why is perception of risk important?

- Fear as a health risk → Risk perceptions inform behaviour.
  - Implications for physical health, as well as emotional health.
  - Spontaneous behaviours can lead to higher risk (e.g. fly vs drive).
  - Public behaviour can impact the effectiveness of healthcare systems (e.g. Tokyo Sarin Attacks; Goiania, Brazil radiological incident).
  - Communication can inform these perceptions of risk, which inform behaviour.
Expert vs Public Perceptions of Risk

Matrix A - Hazards, diseases, accidents, and societal risks

Figure 3. Percentage of focus group employees willing to report to work during a deliberate release of the pneumonic plague by sector

UK National Risk Register 2017 (pp. 9-10)

Deloitte 2015 (pp. 5)
Check your Assumptions at the Door:

- **Emergency planning assumptions:**
  - Often fail to incorporate human behaviour
  - Can be based on contradictory assumptions (e.g. panic followed by compliance).

- **Overwhelming evidence that people become interdependent and co-operative and panic is rare.**

- **Assumptions of panic can lead to a focus on reassurance.**

- **Understand public response along a spectrum where under response can be as problematic as over response.**
Encouraging protective behaviours

Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1975)
COM-B and The Wheel of Behaviour Change (McDonagh et al., 2018, p. 3):
Communicating Behaviours to Reduce Transmissions Between Social Networks Report to SAGE (p. 1).

Communicate two key principles:

1. People whose work involves large numbers of contacts with different people should avoid close, prolonged, indoor contact with anyone as far as possible.
2. People with different workplace networks should avoid meeting or sharing the same spaces.

These steps must be taken in order to communicate the key principles in this report effectively:

- Carry out an extensive education campaign for employers, employees, self-employed people and the general public.
- Co-create guidance and solutions with input from diverse members of the target user groups (both organisational leads and employees).
- Redesign shared activities and spaces to minimise contacts.
- Use existing organisational structures and processes for implementation.
- Monitor and feedback to all concerned to check and reassure that infection control is being implemented effectively.
Conclusions:

- **Public health communication throughout the lifecycle of events can be targeted to:**
  - Provide reassurance but not at cost of detailed, actionable guidance
  - Provide guidance via multiple modes of communication
  - Be explicit about protective behaviours AND behaviours to avoid
  - Take into consideration perceived response costs associated with following advice (Pearce et al., 2012; Rogers & Pearce, 2013).

- **Behavioural interventions must take into account perceptions about:**
  - The event
  - The efficacy of recommended behaviours
  - The ease of recommended behaviours
  - The cost of recommended behaviours
  - Those who are tasked with communicating the response (e.g. Trust)

The success of government interventions before, during, and after a crisis relies on the cooperation of the public. Evidence-based, co-designed communication enables members of the public to make informed decisions about protective health behaviours.
Responding to emergencies involving chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) hazards

Information for members of the public