

# Serving People:

# Ethics and Risk Communication in Disasters

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# Learning objectives

1. Introduce the broad psychosocial components of disaster management & crowd science
2. Identify reasons for providing the public with information before, during & after disasters and major incidents
3. Identify the principles of risk communication & developing the content of communications in order to move towards more effective interventions
4. Comment on what we know of the effectiveness of practical risk communication interventions
5. Review the need for an ethical approach to managing risk

# Risk communication

“Risk communication is the process of providing people, communities and decision makers with the formation needed to make sound choices”

Gluckman, 2016

# The core reason for communicating risk

- Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) is using risk communication in emergencies to inform the public about an event or issue to empower members of a community to protect themselves

- *“Without good communication, people may find themselves living with choices they do not understand or want. Feeling they have been denied critical information further complicates an already difficult situation. If things go badly ... having misunderstood the risks ... citizens’ dissatisfaction may extend to leaders and officials ... ”*

*“Reducing these social risks means providing citizens with relevant information in a credible comprehensive form”.*

*“Just as citizens need information in order to respond effectively, policymakers need to understand citizens’ beliefs in order to create behaviourally realistic policies”.*

from Fischhoff, Gonzalez, Small, Lerner. Evaluating the success of of terror risk communications. Biosecurity & Bioterrorism 2003; 1; 4:255-8.

# Wider reasons for risk communication

## Reasons for Risk Communication

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| <b>1</b> | Ensuring the public receives information before exposure to a threat that is intended to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reduce public fear or apprehension</li><li>• Align the public to wise courses of response</li><li>• Align the public to evidence-informed responses and interventions</li><li>• Avoid the corrosive effects of rumour</li></ul> |
| <b>2</b> | Keeping people well by sustaining and building the resilience of persons and communities  |
| <b>3</b> | Promoting agency through community and personal self-efficacy   |
| <b>4</b> | Providing information after events as a component of psychosocial interventions that are based on the principles of psychological first aid (PFA)   |
| <b>5</b> | Providing information as part of intervention programmes for people who develop mental disorders  |
| <b>6</b> | Meeting a 'right' (e.g. for freedom of information)   |
| <b>7</b> | Recognising the importance of taking positive, co-operative stances to respond well to media enquiries  |

# Crisis and emergency risk communication (CERC)

**CERC = Risk Communication + Crisis Communication**

- **Risk communication** employs persuasion to change understanding & behaviour in the light of culturally grounded transmissions of information about the probability of harm & methods for reducing it
- **Crisis communication** relates to specific events, is short term & provides information about what is & what is not known about the specific event

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# CERC

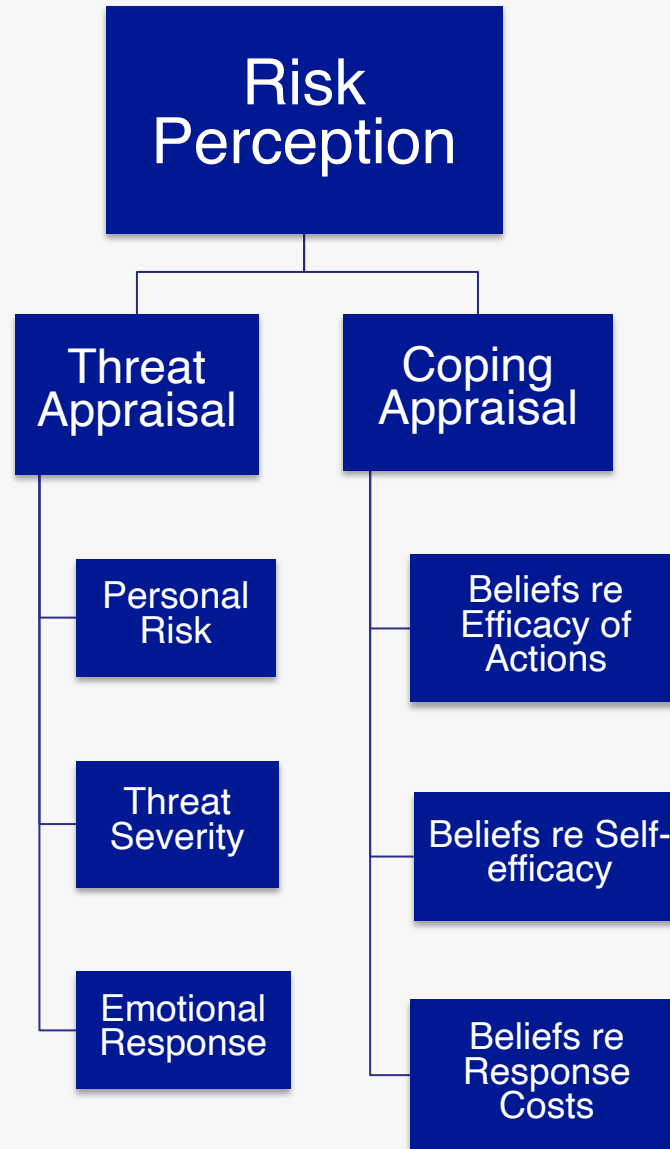
People's responses to CERC divide into:

- Their PERCEPTIONS of the risk
- Their RESPONSES to the information transmitted



# Risk perception

- Quantitative evaluation - focused on by science and professional practitioners
- Qualitative evaluation - focused on by the public
- Three levels of evaluation:
  1. Risk as feelings (intuition) - often the initial response
  2. Risk as analysis (logic)
  3. Risk as politics - e.g. when there are clashes between intuition & analysis



“Facts alone have literally no meaning until our emotions and instincts and experiences and life circumstances give rise to how we feel *[and think]* about those facts”

Ropeik, 2014

# Principles of effective communication in crises

(compiled from Fischhoff et al., Fischhoff & Wessely, Bish, Mitchie & Yardley)

- Communication must be a two-way process: listen to what people say in order to discern what they know and their values
- Recognise and describe people's existing beliefs & values
- Base the content on facts but also on planners' understandings of people's values, attitudes culture and the state of public trust in the authorities because demographic & attitudinal factors influence people's protective behaviour
- Characterise the decisions that people are likely to face
- Develop & evaluate communications that are designed to bridge the critical gaps between the what people know and what they need to know if they are to have the best chance to make choices that achieve what they value
- Communications that raise people's perception of risk should be combined with advice on how the threat can be lessened
- Communication plans should maximise public trust and satisfaction with the information they are given (i.e. they see the communication as relevant)
- Trust in the responsible authorities is especially important in uncertain situations
- Recognise that there are four sources of expertise required: subject matter experts; risk & decision analysts; behavioural scientists; communication practitioners

# Designing the content of risk communications

(based on Bish, Michie & Yardley)

1. Involve people by:
  - a. Acknowledging the gravity of events and the tragedy for people affected
  - b. Recognising public concern & their efforts to manage the risk
  - c. Assuring the public that responsible persons are doing all they can, but only if that is true
2. Use a coherent & consistent approach
3. Be open & transparent about:
  - a. The likely course of the incident
  - b. How it is being handled
  - c. What people can do to protect themselves
4. Provide clear, simple & brief communication by:
  - a. Ensuring new terms are explained
  - b. Being sensitive to cultural differences
  - c. Ensuring messages are scientifically accurate
5. Provide summaries of possible protective actions
6. Acknowledge uncertainty
7. Commit to earning and keeping public trust

# Effectiveness

- Bradley *et al*<sup>[\*]</sup>. conducted a systematic analysis of 27 studies of CERC:
  - Effectiveness of CERC can be evaluated by assessing many possible outcomes. This paper focuses on:
    - Knowledge
    - Behaviour
    - Health outcomes
  - Very little robust research
  - Methods varied widely & most used groups and communities [with little evidence in many cases of clear thought about groups processes, identities etc - RW's observations]
  - Many interventions in the mitigation & preparedness phases improved knowledge and behaviour relating to risks of natural and communicable disease disasters
  - Little robust evidence of effectiveness of CERC for disaster knowledge, behaviour and health outcomes in the response & recovery phases

[\*] Bradley DT, McFarland M, Clarke M. The effectiveness of disaster risk communication: a systemic review of intervention studies. PLOS Currents Disasters August 22, 2014.

# The reason why ethics are an important component of risk management

“... there is no value-free way of framing a risk issue”

Gluckman, 2016

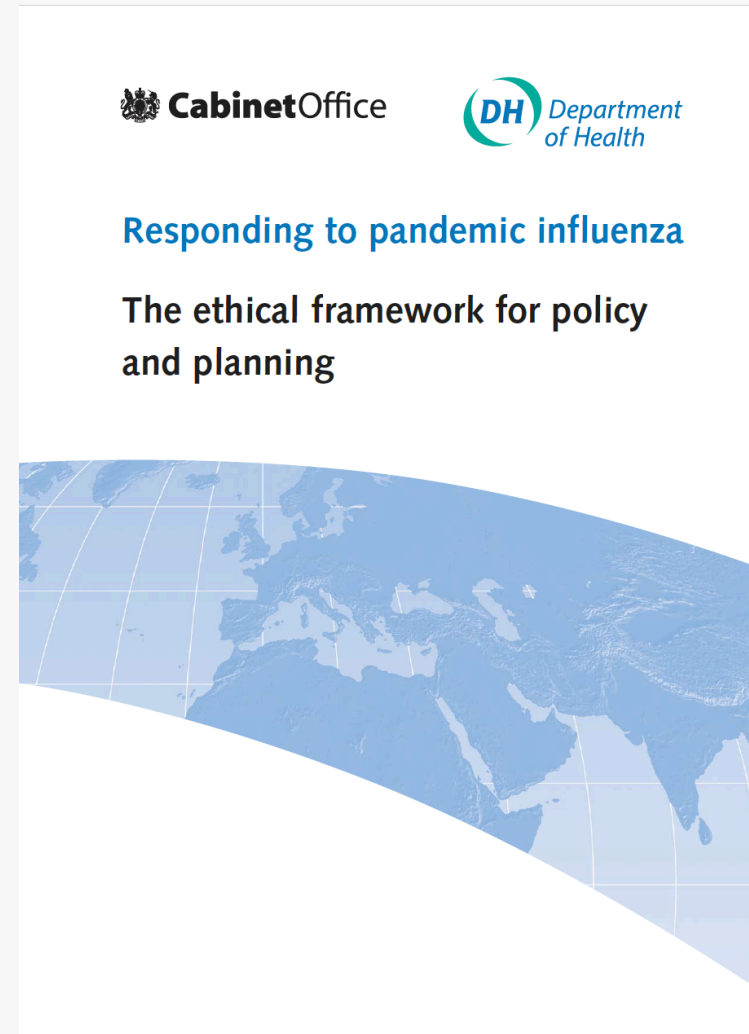
# The CEAPI Framework

- The UK's Committee on Ethical Aspects of Pandemic Influenza (CEAPI)
- CEAPI's Ethical Principles
  - 1 fundamental principle
  - 5 principles of ethical orientation
  - 3 process values
- The Fundamental Principle
  - Equal concern and respect
  - It means that:
    - Everyone matters
    - Everyone matters equally
    - The interests of each person are the concern of us all
    - The harm that might be suffered by every person matters



# Ethical Orientations & Process Values

- Ethical orientations
  - Respect
  - Harm minimisation
  - Fairness
  - Reciprocity
  - Proportionality
- Process values
  - Flexibility
  - Good decision-making
  - Working together





# Summary

*“Communication is essential to maintain trust & credibility. However, the window of opportunity is limited, especially with ... [a] stressed audience.*

*Messages that seem irrelevant or disrespectful can make people less likely to listen, especially if vital information seems to have been hidden”*

from Fischhoff & Wessely, Managing patients with inexplicable health problems. BMJ 2003; 326:595-7.