

**Sample Focus Area
Worksheet:
Completed by Public Health
Seattle-King County**

FOCUS AREA 3: COMMUNICATION

Complete this worksheet if “Communication” is a high priority Focus Area for efforts to improve foodborne disease outbreak response in your agency/jurisdiction. (NOTE: The term “agency/jurisdiction” refers to the entity for which your workgroup is making decisions. See your completed “Document D: Preliminaries” worksheet for a definition.)

List the individuals participating in the discussion of this Focus Area (and their affiliations).

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To help you understand what is included in this Focus Area, review the following goals and keys to success.

GOALS FOR COMMUNICATION:

Agency/jurisdiction lays groundwork for good communication with key individuals, both internal and external to the agency, before an outbreak occurs.

KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR COMMUNICATION:

“Keys to success” are activities, relationships, and resources that are critical to achieving success in a Focus Area. Determining whether an agency/jurisdiction has a particular key to success in place is somewhat subjective. Metrics, such as measures of time (e.g., rapidly, timely, and quickly), have not been defined. Your workgroup should provide its own definitions for these terms, as is appropriate for your agency/jurisdiction, and use its best judgment in deciding whether a particular key to success is fully or partially in place.

Contact lists

- Agency/jurisdiction identifies key individuals and organizations related to outbreak response before an outbreak occurs including members of the outbreak response team, officials inside the agency, contacts at external agencies (i.e., other local, state, and federal agencies), and the media.
- Agency/jurisdiction establishes and frequently updates contact lists for key individuals and organizations.

Communication practices

- Agency/jurisdiction has procedures for communicating with key individuals and organizations. Procedures are written and easily accessible by staff.
- Agency/jurisdiction has staff trained in communicating with the media and risk communication.
- Agency/jurisdiction identifies a person(s) responsible for external communication on behalf of the agency/jurisdiction during each outbreak response.

Making changes

- Agency/jurisdiction conducts a debriefing among investigators following each outbreak response and refines outbreak response planning based on lessons learned.
- Agency/jurisdiction has performance indicators related to communication and routinely evaluates its performance in this Focus Area.

1. DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES IN THIS FOCUS AREA.

Considering the keys to success on the previous page, describe your agency's/jurisdiction's current activities and procedures in this Focus Area. Refer to written protocols, if available, and materials related to ongoing efforts in capacity development or quality improvement (e.g., FDA Retail and Manufactured Food Regulatory Program Standards). As you list current activities and procedures related to this Focus Area, indicate those which could be changed to improve your agency's/jurisdiction's response to foodborne disease outbreaks.

Activity/Procedure	Needs Improvement? ✓
Primary partners in foodborne outbreak response include PHSKC epidemiology investigation team, PHSKC Environmental Health Division, WA DOH Public Health Laboratory and Communicable Disease Epidemiology Section, PHSKC Communications Team, PHSKC Preparedness Section, FDA, Washington Department of Agriculture, Washington Shellfish Program. Secondary partners: local healthcare system, other Washington regulatory agencies and CDC.	
CD section staff have good relationships/communications with primary partners; section staff cross-trained in foodborne illness investigations and outbreak investigation so all have a good understanding of the response.	
Recent transfer of confirmatory laboratory testing of enteric pathogens from PHSKC to WA DOH PHL has resulted in PHSKC CD not receiving preliminary results for high-priority organisms (to allow early action by CD team if necessary); communication/collaboration with WA DOH laboratory might benefit from more frequent meetings.	✓
Staff less familiar with WA Department of Agriculture and U.S. FDA	
Section maintains contact list for key individuals/organizations but list is not updated at specified intervals.	✓
Criteria for engagement/notification of partners outside CD Section determined by Section staff based on "non-written protocol" as indicated on a case by case basis.	✓? (Not sure written protocols are necessary except for training)
No formal communication protocols exist. Section has many disease investigation protocols/procedures, some of which include communications considerations.	
CD section has access to communications experts at PHSKC. PHSKC Communication experts have good relationships with WA DOH communications staff. PHSKC Communications Team not as familiar as they would like regarding respective roles and responsibilities of various players in outbreak response.	✓
Some CD staff have had training in communications. Significant experience among staff in communication procedures based on frequency of outbreaks and longevity of senior staff	
Section routinely designates one individual for external communications during an outbreak response.	
Coordination and information-sharing among various external initiatives and special projects (e.g., FERN, FDA's RRT, LRN, CIFOR) not clear.	✓

2. PRIORITIZE CIFOR RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS NEEDED IMPROVEMENTS.

Having identified activities and procedures in need of improvement, review the CIFOR recommendations related to this Focus Area (listed below). Rate the priority for implementing each recommendation based on its likely impact on foodborne outbreak response at your agency/jurisdiction and available resources. Use a scale of 1 to 5 to rate each recommendation (1=Low priority for implementation and 5=High priority for implementation). If a recommendation is already in place in your agency/jurisdiction, check the appropriate box. If a recommendation is not relevant to your agency/jurisdiction, select N/A. **Refer to the blue underlined section number following each recommendation to view the recommendation as it appears in the CIFOR Guidelines.**

	Already in place	Priority for Implementation or Improvement in Your Agency/Jurisdiction					
		LOW			HIGH		
Contact lists							
Prepare contact information (including after-hours information) for people in the agency who should be contacted in the event of an outbreak, including backups. (3.6.2.1)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Prepare contact information (including after-hours numbers) for contact people in external agencies (e.g., other local, state, and federal agencies). (3.6.2.1)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Prepare contact information (including after-hours numbers) for important food industry contacts, including trade associations. (3.6.2.1)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Ensure that all contact lists are updated at least twice yearly and, when feasible, made available to all stakeholders in both electronic and hard copy formats. (3.6.2.1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	<u>5</u>	N/A
Distribute a list of your agency's contacts to other agencies, and obtain a list of their contacts. Provide the contact list in electronic and hard copy formats. (3.6.2.1) (3.6.2.3)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Develop a group electronic distribution list for rapidly information sharing with those who should be contacted in the event of an outbreak.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Additional ideas:

[PHSKC Environmental Health Services and WA DOH have contact lists for important food industry contacts.](#)

Communication practices – Internal (outbreak response team and their organizational units and agencies)

Ensure that members of the outbreak response team know each other before an outbreak occurs. (3.6.2.2)*	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Establish and use routine procedures for communicating among outbreak response team members and their units and agencies before an outbreak occurs. (3.6.2.2)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Define a formal communication process for agencies of the outbreak response team for use during outbreaks. Options include daily phone calls and routine e-mail alerts. (3.6.2.2)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

	Already in place	Priority for Implementation or Improvement in Your Agency/Jurisdiction					
		LOW			HIGH		
Communication practices – Internal (cont’d)							
Decide who will be notified when an outbreak is suspected on the basis of roles, including any changes in notification according to the nature of the outbreak (e.g., pathogen type, involvement of commercial product) and timing (weekends and holidays versus week days). (3.6.2.2) **	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Determine whether and how confidential information (e.g., from forms and questionnaires) can be shared within the outbreak response team before an outbreak occurs. (3.5.2) (3.6.2.2)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
During an outbreak response, maintain close communication and coordination among response team members. (5.1.2.3) (5.2.5)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
During an outbreak response, identify persons who will be responsible for external communication on behalf of their organizational unit and for the outbreak response team. (3.6.2.2)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
During an outbreak response, communicate actions taken and new outbreak information to all members in the outbreak response team. Make sure public information officer is routinely updated to ensure appropriate messaging to the public and media. (6.4.1) (5.2.5)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
During an outbreak response, arrange for the outbreak response team to meet daily to update the entire team in a timely manner. (5.2.5) ***	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Additional ideas:

*Provide Communications team information regarding roles, responsibilities, and procedures for investigations.

**Develop checklist of key agencies that can be used by staff to keep track of who has been contacted.

***Consider using web tools such as Twitter to keep outbreak response team up-to-date on new findings.

Communication practices – External agencies (other local, state, and federal agencies)

Develop standardized processes (including notification triggers and timelines) for sharing information with other local, state, and federal agencies, including who will notify the next level of public health, environmental health, or food-regulatory agencies. Commit to notifying collaborating agencies as soon as possible in the outbreak investigation process. (3.6.2.3)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Identify an agency lead on interactions with other agencies, ideally the lead investigator. Establish procedures for coordinating communication with these entities to provide consistent messaging and accurate information flow. (3.6.2.3)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Foster working relationships with other agencies, holding joint meetings and planning sessions before an outbreak occurs. (3.6.2.3)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Establish processes for participating in multiagency, multijurisdictional conference calls and train staff in conference call etiquette. (3.6.2.3) . <i>WA DOH responsibility</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	<u>N/A</u>
Determine whether and how confidential information can be shared with other local, state and federal agencies. (3.6.2.3)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Planning and Preparation

Focus Area 3: Communication

	Already in place	Priority for Implementation or Improvement in Your Agency/Jurisdiction					N/A
		LOW				HIGH	
Communication practices – External agencies (cont’d)							
Identify and regularly communicate with agencies or organizations that receive possible foodborne illness complaints (e.g., agriculture agencies, facility licensing agencies, poison control centers) and ensure that they have current contact information for your staff. (4.3.9.7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	<u>5</u>	N/A
Rapidly post subtyping results to PulseNet and report newly detected clusters to PulseNet and Foodborne Outbreak listserves. (4.2.10.5) <i>WA DOH responsibility</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	<u>N/A</u>
Document every outbreak investigation using a standard form to facilitate inclusion in state and national outbreak databases. (5.2.9)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Additional ideas:

Communication practices – Public

Establish standard channels of communication with the public before an outbreak occurs and use those same channels each time a public health issue arises about which the public may seek information. (3.6.2.5)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Identify an agency lead on interactions with the public, ideally someone trained in communication. Establish procedures for coordinating communication with the public to provide consistent messaging and accurate information flow. (3.6.2.5)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Create templates for communication with the public (e.g., fact sheets), focusing on the most common foodborne diseases before an outbreak occurs. (3.6.2.5)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Establish relationships with consumer groups that might be helpful in disseminating information about foodborne disease outbreaks and disease prevention messages. (3.6.2.5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5	N/A
Periodically issue foodborne disease prevention messages or press releases to ensure that the public knows with whom to communicate and from where information will come during an outbreak. (3.6.2.5)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Since the public obtains news from multiple sources, use all available sources to disseminate information (e.g., the Internet, television, radio, newspapers, and social media). (6.5.3)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Create and test web-based tools for communication with the public (e.g., blast e-mails, survey instruments). (3.6.2.5)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Adopt a standard format for reporting risk information to the public. (6.5.3) Decide in advance how to communicate the naming of implicated establishments based on local legal guidelines and whether risk of transmission is ongoing.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Already in place
Priority for Implementation or Improvement in Your Agency/Jurisdiction

LOW HIGH

Communication practices – Public (cont’d)

Adopt standard scripts for reporting complex procedural or technical information to the public. (6.5.3) 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

In communicating with the public during an outbreak provide practical measures that the public can take to decrease risk for illness (e.g., avoidance of known high-risk foods or special instructions for their preparation), as well as basic food-safety messages and information about how to contact public health authorities to report suspected related illnesses. (6.2.1) 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Test messages to the public with representatives of the target population before releasing them. (6.5.3) 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Guide staff on how to respond to and communicate with upset members of the public. (3.6.2.5) 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Make copies of summary reports from each outbreak response available to members of the public who request them. (5.2.10) 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Additional ideas:

Communication practices – Media

Identify an agency lead on media interactions, ideally someone trained as a public information officer. (3.6.2.7) 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Obtain media training for primary agency spokespersons. (3.6.2.7) 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Establish procedures for coordinating agency communication with the media. (3.6.2.7) 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Establish standard channels of communication with the media (e.g., website, telephone number), and use those same channels each time a public health issue arises about which the public might seek information. Identify primary contact persons from major local media outlets. Know routine deadlines and time frames for reporting news through major local media outlets (e.g., the deadline for having news from a press release appear in the evening newspaper). (3.6.2.7) 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Periodically hold a media education event to teach new media professionals in the community’s media market about public health and response to foodborne disease outbreaks. (3.6.2.7) 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Additional ideas:

Priority for Implementation

	Already in place	or Improvement in Your Agency/Jurisdiction					N/A
		LOW			HIGH		
<u>Making changes</u>							
Conduct a debriefing following each outbreak response with all members of the outbreak response team to identify lessons learned. (6.7) (3.2.3.4) (5.2.8)****	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	<u>4</u>	5	N/A
Prepare summary reports for all outbreaks consistent with the size and complexity of the response. Use the reports as a continuous quality improvement opportunity. (3.7.2) (5.2.9) (6.8)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Make copies of summary reports available to all members of the outbreak response team and their units and agencies and persons responsible for implementing control measures. (5.2.10) (6.8)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Additional ideas:

****Debriefings are part of CD's Incident Command System (ICS) but need to be done more consistently.

3. MAKE PLANS TO IMPLEMENT SELECTED CIFOR RECOMMENDATIONS.

For each CIFOR recommendation selected in the previous step (or idea formulated by the workgroup), identify who will take the lead in implementing the recommendation and the timeframe for implementation (e.g., a specific completion date or whether the change is likely to require short, mid- or long-term efforts). If certain actions must precede others, make a note of this and adjust the timeframe. In addition, consider factors that could positively or negatively influence implementation of the recommendation and ways to incorporate the recommendation into your agency's/jurisdiction's standard operating procedures.

One person should be given responsibility for monitoring progress in implementing the above CIFOR recommendations. Follow-up should occur at specified checkpoints (e.g., 3, 6, 9, and 12 months after the start of the Toolkit process) and results should be shared with the entire workgroup.

CIFOR recommendations or other ideas from previous step	Lead person	Timeframe for implementation	Notes (e.g., necessary antecedents, factors that might influence implementation, ways to incorporate the recommendation into standard operating procedures)
Ensure all contact lists are updated at least twice yearly and, when feasible, made available to all stakeholders in both electronic and hard copy formats.	Jenny & Laurie	September 30	
Conduct a debriefing following each outbreak response with all members of the outbreak response team to identify lessons learned	Tao	As needed	
Identify and regularly communicate with agencies or organizations that receive illness complaints (e.g., agriculture agencies, facility licensing agencies, poison control centers) and ensure they have current contact information for your staff	Craig	September 30	
Develop a checklist of key agencies and communication considerations during outbreaks	Laurie	October 31	
Provide information to PHSKC communications team regarding roles, responsibilities and procedures for outbreak investigations	Tao	October 31	

DATE WORKSHEET COMPLETED: [July 20](#)

NEXT DATE FOR FOLLOW-UP ON PROGRESS: [November 15](#)