

INTERNATIONAL



# CRISIS & RISK COMMUNICATION

CONFERENCE • 2015

# Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication



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# Crisis- & Emergency-Risk Communication

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# Protecting People



CDC works 24/7 to save lives and protect people from health threats.

**RIGHT**

The right message at the right time from the right person  
can save lives...

# Hong Kong H5N1 Outbreak, 1997



# CDC Epidemiologic Investigation



# Surveillance & Control



## Ebola Response 2014



***24 hours after returning from West Africa (Sept. 2, 2014):***

***“The sooner the world comes together to help West Africa, the safer we all will be. We know how to stop this outbreak. There is a window of opportunity to tamp this down—the challenge is to scale up the massive response needed to stop this outbreak.”***

*CDC Director, Tom Frieden, M.D., M.P.H. - Sept. 2, 2014*



# Headlines

Up to 1.4m people could be infected with Ebola by January, CDC warns

**U.S. Official Warns Ebola Outbreak Will Get Worse**

**CDC Director: Ebola Is 'Worse Than I'd Feared'**

Window to control Ebola rapidly closing, CDC director warns

**CDC Director: Ebola in Africa now an 'epidemic,' 'completely out of control'**

CDC director: Ebola 'still has upper hand'

**Obama at CDC warns Ebola outbreak 'spiraling out of control'**

CDC Director Warns 'Must Act Now' on Ebola Epidemic on CBS THIS MORNING

**CDC director calls for worldwide effort to stop Ebola**

CDC warns Ebola epidemic in West Africa is outpacing current response

## West Africa Ebola Response 2014



**Two weeks later , President Barack Obama said:**

*“We know that if we take the proper steps, we can save lives. But we have to act fast. . . . We have to move with force . . . given that it has already broken out in ways that we had not seen before.”*

# More Headlines

Ebola cases plummet in Liberian hot spot as aid groups gain community trust

Ebola Is Down, But Not Out, In Liberia

Nigeria is now free of Ebola virus transmission

**Officials: Number of New Ebola Cases in W. Africa Declining**

New Frontier for Ebola

**Ebola Infections Fewer Than Predicted by Disease Models**

Ebola forecast in West Africa looks brighter, CDC chief says

**Ebola slowing down in Liberia, war on virus far from over**

The Shifting Ebola Epidemic

Worst-Case Ebola Scenario Won't Happen: CDC



## **9/11 and Anthrax Attacks**

With HHS support, launched CERC to describe how to speak about the unthinkable . . .

# When the unthinkable happens. . .

## Bacteria tied to baby's death linked to formula?

*The case of 10-day-old Avery Cornett, who died Dec. 18, caused a flurry of news media attention on the cronobacter bacteria.*

Tragedies can be singular events or mass disasters—all require communication to cope, save lives, and recover



# Communicating in a crisis is different

- CERC principles work to help people make the **best possible decisions** for themselves and their loved ones, recognizing that during crises, there can be impossible time constraints and we must **accept the imperfect** nature of our choices.

# What the public seeks from your communication

## 5 public concerns. . .

1. Gain wanted facts
2. Empower decisionmaking
3. Involved as a participant, not spectator
4. Provide watchguard over resource allocation
5. Recover or preserve well-being and normalcy

## 5 communication failures that kill operational success

1. Mixed messages from multiple experts
2. Information released late
3. Paternalistic attitudes
4. Not countering rumors and myths in real-time
5. Public power struggles and confusion

# Communicating in a Crisis Is Different

- Public must feel empowered – reduce fear and victimization
- Mental preparation reduces anxiety
- Taking action reduces anxiety
- Uncertainty must be addressed

# Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

## Allow people the right to feel fear

- Don't pretend they're not afraid, and don't tell them they shouldn't be.
- Acknowledge the fear, and give contextual information.

## Six Principles of CERC

- **Be First:** If the information is yours to provide by organizational authority—do so as soon as possible. If you can't—then explain how you are working to get it.
- **Be Right:** Give facts in increments. Tell people what you know when you know it, tell them what you don't know, and tell them *if* you will know relevant information later.
- **Be Credible:** Tell the truth. Do not withhold to avoid embarrassment or the possible “panic” that seldom happens. Uncertainty is worse than not knowing—rumors are more damaging than hard truths.

## Six Principles of CERC

- **Express Empathy:** Acknowledge in words what people are feeling—it builds trust.
- **Promote Action:** Give people things to do. It calms anxiety and helps restore order.
- **Show Respect:** Treat people the way you want to be treated—the way you want your loved ones treated—always—even when hard decisions must be communicated.

Accuracy of  
Information  
—  
Speed of  
Release

**CREDIBILITY**

+

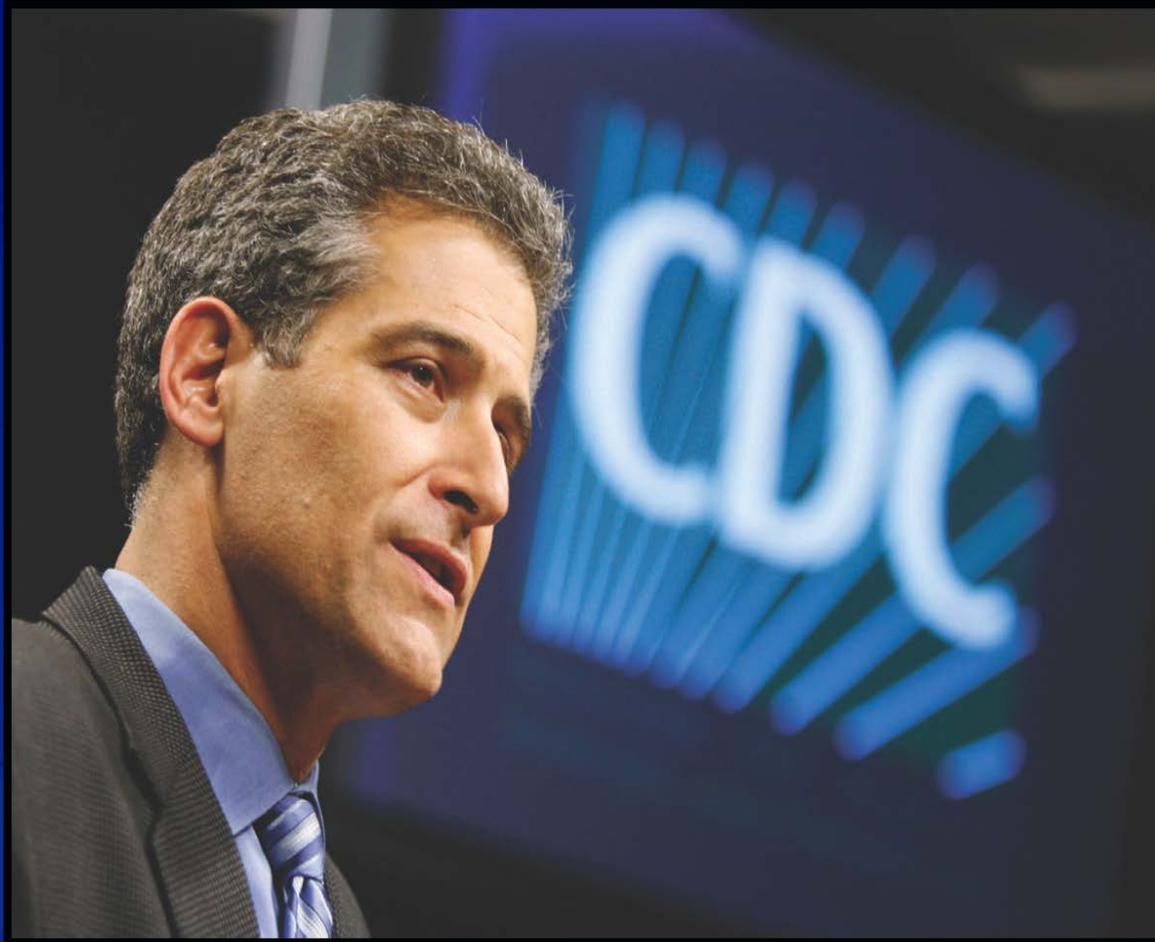
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**Successful  
Communication**

Empathy  
+  
Openness

**TRUST**

# Crisis Communicator



“Richard Besser led the United States’ top public-health agency as swine flu broke out on its doorstep. And his communication shaped the early days of a pandemic”

## CERC Communication Principles

- In his office at ABC News in New York, Besser talks about the principles he looked to when talking about the H1N1 pandemic.
- He refers to a CDC pamphlet on crisis and emergency risk communication with the subtitle:  
**'Be First, Be Right, Be Credible'.**
  - 13 January 2010 | Nature 463, 150-152 (2010) | doi:10.1038/463150a

# Questions?



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