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Fostering Trust Through Risk Communication During Respiratory Pathogen Emergencies: Evidence-Informed Considerations for Public Health

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Public Health Ontario (PHO) Rounds: October 13, 2026

Disclosures

- Taheera Walji has no potential conflicts of interest to declare.

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Land Acknowledgment and Positionality



Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

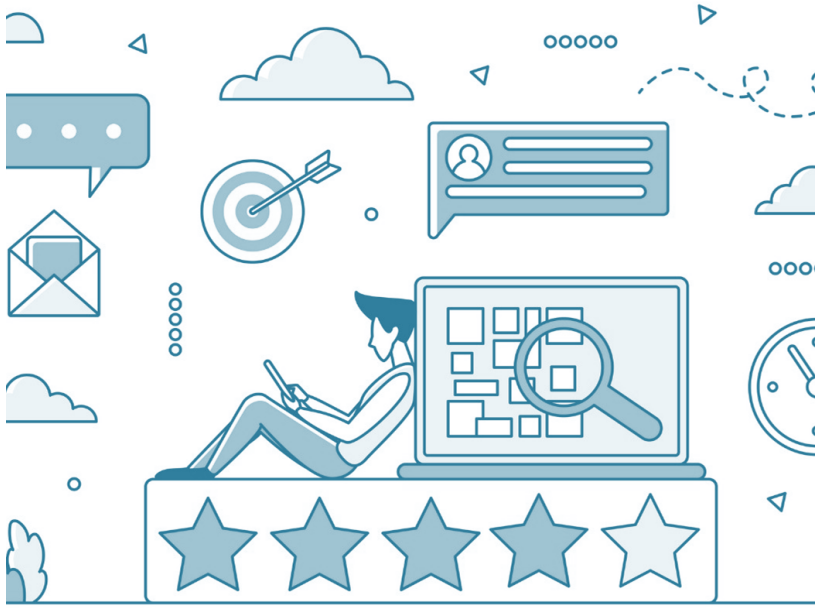
1. Describe the role of risk communication as a core public health intervention during respiratory pathogen emergencies, with a particular emphasis on trust building.
2. Summarize evidence-informed strategies for fostering trust in public health messages and messengers through risk communication during respiratory pathogen emergencies.
3. Identify promising practices for implementing risk communication concepts and principles during emergency preparedness and response.

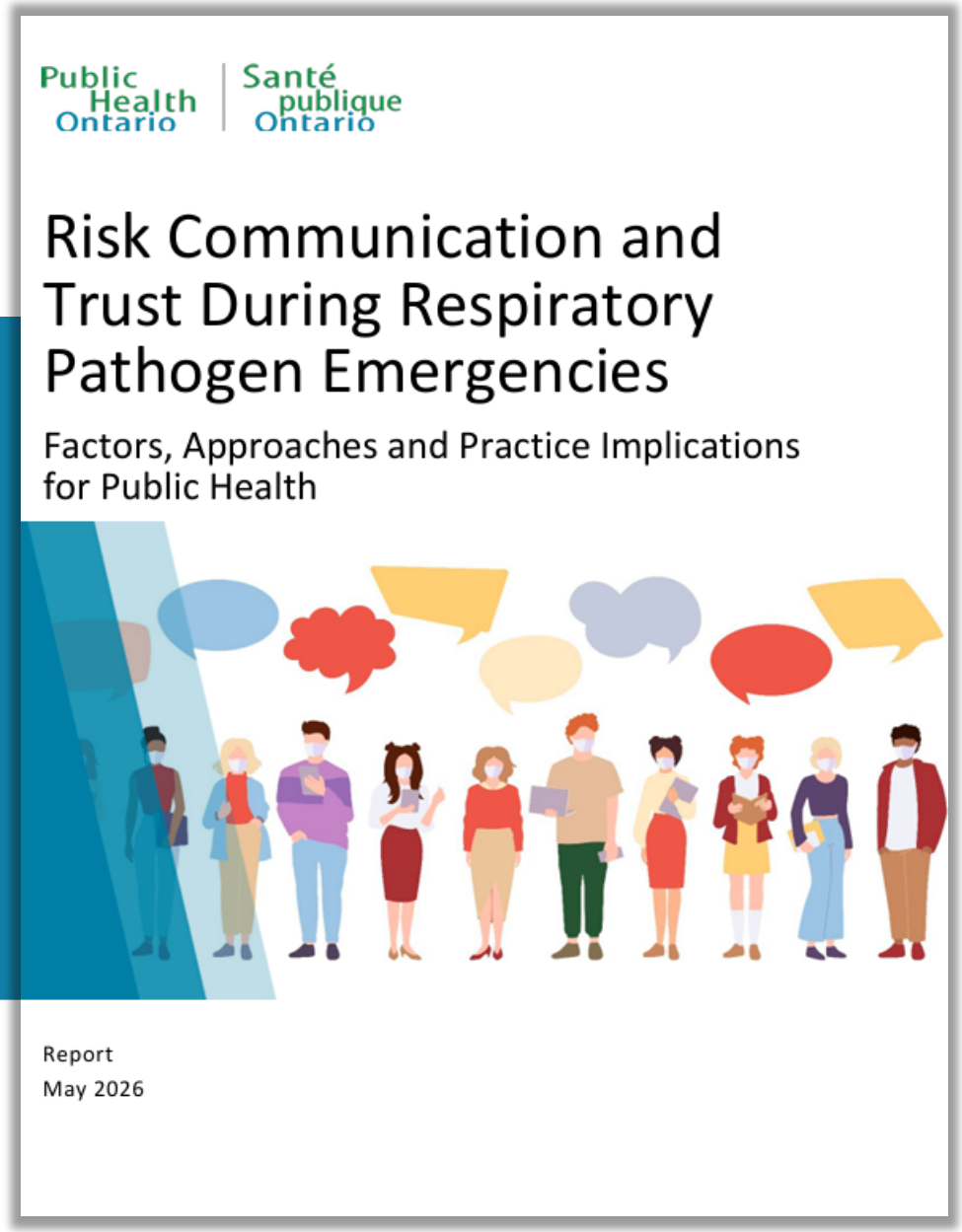
Overview

- Introduction and Context
- Rapid Evidence Review
- Implications for Public Health Practice
- Reflections and Q&A

PHO's Role in Emergency Preparedness

- Public Health Ontario's (PHO) mandate is to provide scientific and technical advice and support to clients working in government, public health, health care, and related sectors.
- Emergency preparedness and response is a core part of PHO's mandate and connected to many of our core services.
- PHO conducts research, synthesizing knowledge, building capacity, and providing scientific and technical advice in this area.





PHO Rapid Evidence Review

Key Terms

- **Trust** is the belief from the public that a message is true and reliable and that the messenger (individually or institutionally) is trustworthy through their demonstration of personal and structural characteristics of trust, including competence, honesty, integrity and civic-mindedness.[1,2]

- **Risk communication** involves the sharing of information, guidance, and perspectives between experts or government officials and the public during times of uncertainty.[3]

Risk Communication Across the Emergency Management Cycle



Risk communication is a core element of public health emergency management, supporting preparedness, response, recovery, and continuous improvement.

Current Context



- Past public health emergencies have underscored the need for coherent, consistent and transparent risk communication.[4]
- Building and maintaining trust with the public is emphasized as a central element of effective and equitable risk communication.[5]
- Risk communication is a key component within provincial and federal pandemic preparedness plans efforts.

Research Question:

What risk communication strategies are shown to **foster trust in public health** during a respiratory pathogen health emergency with pandemic or epidemic potential?

Methods

- Rapid evidence review of indexed and grey literature
- Inclusion criteria:
  - Intervention: risk communication strategies related to public health measures, policies and event updates intended to inform the public during emergency response
  - Outcome: evidence of effectiveness or impact on public trust
  - Context: public health in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries
- Included records were extracted for key study and intervention characteristics
- Thematic analysis performed on key findings

Characteristics of Included Records



- Most records focused on public health communication in the context of COVID-19 (n=42, 91%).
- Government and/or elected officials, and public health experts, officials or agencies, were the first and second most frequently reviewed messengers of risk communication, respectively.
- Nearly two-thirds of records reported on communication at the national level (n=32, 70%).
- Approximately one-third of records (n=14) included commentary on equity considerations.

Overview of Results

1. Contextual factors for influencing trust
2. Message characteristics for fostering trust
3. Risk communication strategies and approaches for fostering trust



Contextual Factors Influencing Trust (1 of 2)



Health Equity

- Mistrust in risk communications can stem from, or be exacerbated by, historical and contextual factors, including longstanding discrimination that has shaped experiences within institutions and health systems.

Contextual Factors Influencing Trust (2 of 2)



Ideological Contexts

- Risk communication strategies may be more successful in communities where trust in institutions is already high.
- Public trust and uptake of public health measures are influenced by satisfaction with and perception of government officials.
- An individual's political ideology may play a role in shaping their trust in health messaging.

Message Characteristics for Fostering Trust

- Transparent
- Clear and Unambiguous
- Evidence-informed
- Action-oriented
- Timely

Risk Communication Strategies and Approaches (1 of 4)



Using Trusted Messengers

- Frontline healthcare professionals remain among the most trusted messengers.
- Community leaders or other intermediaries are key to engaging groups with historical and ongoing distrust of health and government institutions.

Risk Communication Strategies and Approaches (2 of 4)



Selecting Appropriate Communication Channels

- Traditional media remains important.
- Digital channels contributed to the COVID-19 infodemic, which undermined trust through the spread of misinformation and overwhelming information.

Risk Communication Strategies and Approaches (3 of 4)



Guiding with Empathy

- Messengers or messages that empathize with the intended audience, are non-judgmental, and clear foster trust.
- Messages that are alarmist and sensationalize risk can undermine trust.

Risk Communication Strategies and Approaches (4 of 4)



Incorporating Relational Approaches to Risk Communication

- Tailor message content, format and delivery channels.
- Two-way communication approaches include working with community-based organizations and leaders and establishing formal structures.

Emergency Preparedness Practice Implications



Devote time to building and sustaining relationships in non-emergency periods.



Include specific strategies in risk communication and pandemic plans.

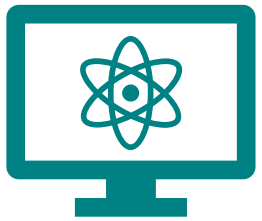


Equip trusted messengers with risk communication skills.

Emergency Response Practice Implications



Implement context-specific two-way communication strategies.



Apply an equity-informed and action-oriented lens to message development and dissemination.



Monitor, evaluate and adapt risk communications during emergencies.

Limitations



- Most records employed a cross-sectional study design:
  - Correlation vs. causation
  - Temporal context of COVID-19
- Context-specific findings from primary studies may impact relevance and transferability
- Evidence is lacking on the experiences of many populations who live with social and structural inequities
- Methodological limitations

Key Takeaways



- Findings align with well-established risk communication frameworks and principles.
- Literature supports that trust is built over time and requires sustained investment in trust-building efforts with the public.
- Application of strategies requires reflection and action on the structural and systemic causes of mistrust.
- Limited population-specific evidence was identified for building trust with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations and equity-denied groups.

Authors and Acknowledgments

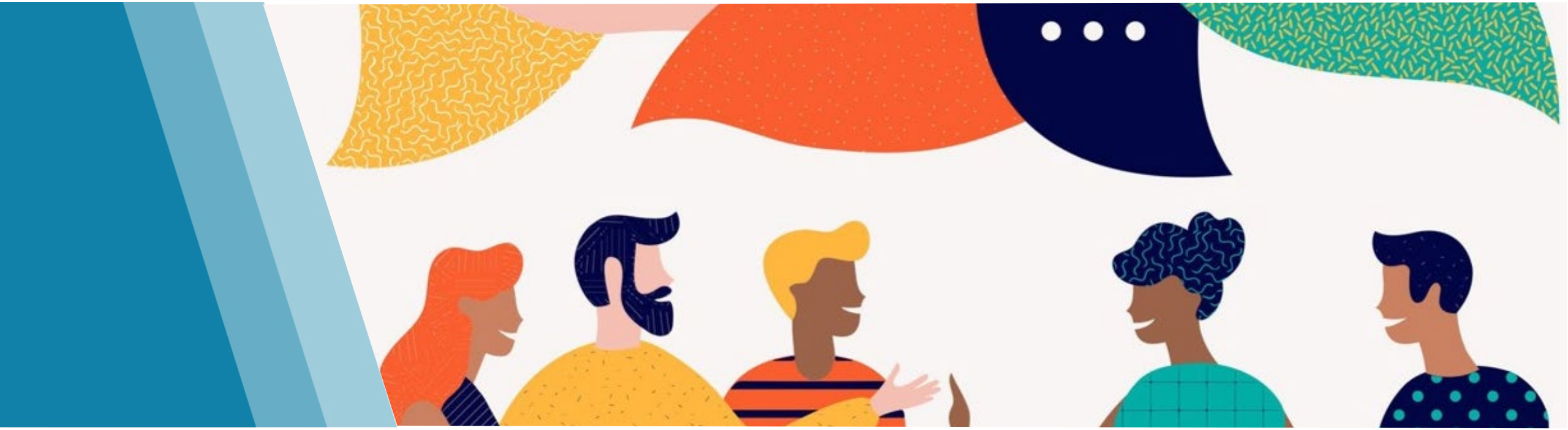
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Q&A Period



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