



EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & PUBLIC HEALTH **BLOOMINGTON**

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Risky Business: The Art of Risk Communication

Diann Kirby, Communication Administrator, City of Bloomington



Donating blood in times of crisis helps individuals deal with their fear. It builds camaraderie and gives people something constructive to do.

Food poisoning kills more Americans every summer than West Nile Virus. So why aren't more people afraid of a summer potato salad than the mosquito? It's all tied to the art of risk communication.

Risk communication is a science-based approach for communicating in high stress, emotionally charged situations. One of the biggest public health challenges since 9/11 hasn't been technical or medical – it's the challenge of communication.

A key concept of risk communication is this: *Perception equals reality.* People who are upset often think negatively, whether the situation is real or perceived. Their ability to hear, understand, and remember is severely impaired. *In a high stress situation, people are hearing less than twenty percent of the information being shared.*

The solution? Keep messages clear and simple. Translate complex information into material that is easy to understand and digest.

Risk communication is useful when people are afraid and you want to help them cope with or act on their fear. Risk communication expert Peter Sandman recommends six strategies for helping people deal with fears:

- Give people things to do - action helps reduce anxiety.
- Give people things to decide - decision-making provides more individual control.
- Encourage appropriate anger - the desire to get mad often outweighs the desire to retreat.
- Encourage camaraderie - for instance, donating blood in times of crisis.
- Provide candid leadership - people want leaders who are willing to be frank.
- Show your own fear and how you can bear it - fearless leaders are of little help to a fearful public.

The ultimate goal in risk communication is to build trust and credibility. That's not easy in a controversial or stressful situation. It takes time and effort to *earn* the public's trust. How you communicate during a crisis can have a lasting impact far beyond the crisis at hand. That's why it helps to know the fine art of risk communication.

Note: This information is based on materials developed by risk communication experts Dr. Vincent Covello and Dr. Peter Sandman

HAN database updated

Since 1999, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) have funded state departments to develop a Health Alert Network (HAN). The Minnesota Department of Health uses HAN to quickly distribute information to local health departments in the case of health outbreaks or emergencies.

As a local health department, Bloomington Public Health relays relevant and time-sensitive alerts to health professionals and others who protect the public during an emergency.*

The contact database for Bloomington, Edina, and Richfield has been updated and now includes eighty-two clinics and 14 local veterinarian clinics. The database has recently expanded to include pharmacies, nursing homes, assisted care providers, residential living facilities, parish nurses, school nurses, and other licensed providers.

For more information contact Denise Dunn at 952-563-4962 or ddunn@ci.bloomington.mn.us.

*The Edina Health Department is the backup HAN system should an emergency render the Bloomington system inoperable.



Health alerts are sent by email, fax, and phone.

Public health prepares for a “Worst Case Scenario”

Denise Dunn, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator

The need for emergency preparedness and planning has heightened due to a number of factors: worldwide terrorist threats, the spread of global disease and illness, and natural and man-made disasters. To prepare for these situations, public health is setting-up and practicing responses to “worst case scenarios.”

For example: a biological or chemical agent is released which requires quick access to large quantities of medical supplies. If this situation occurs, it will be absolutely essential that a *coordinated* public health response takes place— one that involves state, regional and local public health, local emergency management, private health care providers, and communities.

The Bloomington-Edina-Richfield public health community, in collaboration with other metro-wide partners, has developed a public health “All Hazard” plan. The Plan targets a scenario in which the entire population of the Twin Cities metropolitan area requires treatment over the course of five days.

If a “worst case” happens here, public health workers (along with a great many volunteers) would coordinate twenty-four mass dispensing sites through out the region (including one in Bloomington). Each site would dispense antibiotics or provide vaccines, up to 1,000 persons/hour. A regional full-scale exercise will be conducted in October to test aspects of the mass dispensing plan. (See [Mark Your Calendar: Volunteers Needed.](#))

There are many logistic considerations we are tackling in our planning process including:

- communication
- transportation needs
- security and training
- coordination of assets with hospitals and clinics
- managing volunteers
- controlling inventory

We are working to ensure that public health is prepared to meet the health needs of our community in the event of a disaster or emergency. For more information contact Denise Dunn, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, Bloomington Public Health at 952-563-4962 or ddunn@ci.bloomington.mn.us

A federal asset is available that will help in worst case scenarios. The Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) provides large quantities of essential medical items to communities during an emergency. A portion of the SNS, called a “Push Pack” is ready for immediate deployment and could be delivered to Minnesota within 8 hours after a request from the Governor.

If a worst case happens here, a “Push Pack” could be delivered to Minnesota within eight hours.

Each “Push Pack “ contains over 120 cargo containers (photo at right shows one cargo container).



DID YOU KNOW....

The SNS was deployed for the first time when it was sent to New York City after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. SNS assets were subsequently used during the anthrax attacks and in response to Hurricane Lili.

Medical Reserve Corps of Hennepin County

Are you interested in helping out in a public health emergency? Nurses and other health professionals who live in Hennepin County are being recruited and trained to respond. Volunteers may be asked to help in mass dispensing clinics, give immunizations, staff hotlines, or assist in other ways. For an application or to learn more call 952-351-5234 or visit the website at www.mrc-hennepin.org

MARK YOUR CALENDAR...

Clinic Partnership Meeting

Communicable Disease Reporting and HAN

Date: August 25th, 2004 - 8:00 - 9:00 a.m.

Place: Haeg Conference Room, Bloomington Civic Plaza

Contact: Diane Anderson, 952-563-8919

Volunteers needed for a Twin Cities Metro Regional Mass Dispensing Exercise. Help public health “practice” a vaccination rate of 1,000 person/hour. Volunteers will receive a free “flu shot” for helping.

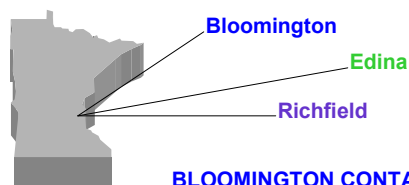
Date: October 29, 2004:

Site: Ramsey County (location to be determined).

Contact: Denise Dunn for more information: 952-563-4962

Information provided by Bloomington Public Health and funded through the Minnesota Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

Bloomington Public Health serves the communities of



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