Crafting the Right Message

April 5, 2016
9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

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Crafting the Right Message: CDC’s Perspective

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April 5, 2016
CDC’s Role in Foodborne Outbreaks Communications

- Similar to coordinating the epidemiologic investigation, CDC serves as the “spokesperson” for multistate outbreaks

- Since 2006, CDC has posted over 90 foodborne outbreak announcements on its website

- CDC website serves as the central hub for the latest information about the outbreak:
  - Case count and states affected
  - Advice to consumers and retailers
  - Investigation details
Why does CDC communicate about outbreaks?

Specific source identified **AND** public can take action

Other reasons CDC may communicate include:

- State health department(s) communicate
- High risk group involved
- Deaths, high hospitalization rate
- Media interest, misinformation being circulated
When does CDC communicate about an outbreak?

- Communication to the public may be needed at any point, or it may never be needed
  - In 2015, over **220 multistate clusters** (potential outbreaks) were investigated by CDC
  - 14 outbreaks communicated about on the CDC website

- The decision about “when” typically occurs quickly
  - During an investigation, evidence about what the food source is accumulates and changes, as does the need to communicate
  - New information can **trigger communication** at any point in an investigation
# Five Common Communication Scenarios

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario 1</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster of illnesses with no specific source identified</td>
<td>20 people infected with one strain of <em>E. coli</em></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario 2</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>Generic food type identified as likely vehicle</td>
<td>Signal for ground beef</td>
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<tr>
<th>Scenario 3</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>Specific food product, brand identified as likely vehicle</td>
<td>Company X ground beef is likely vehicle</td>
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<th>Scenario 4</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local outbreak, locals and/or state release press</td>
<td>Outbreak of <em>E. coli</em> infections in Ohio</td>
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<tr>
<th>Scenario 5</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pathogen identified in food independent of any human illness</td>
<td>Ground beef recalled for <em>E. coli</em> contamination</td>
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### Five Common Communication Scenarios

#### Reasons NOT to Communicate:
- Will communicating create message fatigue?
- Is there no clear action step for the public?
- Is there insufficient evidence?
- Is the food vehicle generic in nature?
- Is the outbreak over?

#### Reasons to Communicate:
- Is the pathogen causing severe illness?
- Is there a high number of cases?
- Is the outbreak ongoing?
- Is the food vehicle novel?
- Does the product have a long shelf life?
- Is a large group of people potentially exposed?
- **Can the public take specific actions to protect themselves?**
Crafting the CDC Message

- Once the decision is made to communicate, the process to craft a message that will be heard is complex:
  - What cases and states are we including?
  - What will our advice to consumers be?
  - What evidence do we have linking illness to food X?
  - What can we say about the ongoing investigation?

- Crafting the CDC message involves input from various partners:
  - State and local health and regulatory officials
  - Federal regulatory agencies (FDA, USDA-FSIS)
  - Food industry
Crafting the CDC Message

- Because our goal is to prevent additional illnesses, CDC’s most important message is crafting the advice for consumers.

- In order for our advice to lead to action, it needs to be:
  - Specific
  - Clear
  - Complete
Crafting the CDC Message

Advice to Consumers & Retailers

- We recommend that consumers do not eat and retailers do not sell recalled pistachios produced by Wonderful Pistachios.
  - These products have a long shelf life and may still be in people's homes.
  - Products can be identified by a lot code number that can be found on the lower back or bottom panel of the package.
- Return recalled pistachios to the place of purchase for a refund.
  - Even if some of the pistachios have been eaten and no one has gotten sick, don’t eat them and return the product.
- Contact your health care provider if you think you may have become ill from eating contaminated pistachios.
  - Most people infected with Salmonella develop the following signs and symptoms 12-72 hours after being exposed to the bacteria:
    - Diarrhea
    - Fever
    - Abdominal cramps

Recalled products can be identified by a lot code number that can be found on the lower back or bottom panel of the package.
Balancing Priorities

- As the nation’s public health agency, CDC represents public health officials around the country when it communicates about an investigation.

- The process of posting a notice on the CDC website about a foodborne outbreak involves balancing priorities:
  - Being “fast and right”
  - Input from partners
  - Science and plain language
Balancing Being “Fast and Right”

- We have to balance communicating quickly but also waiting until we have enough information to issue actionable advice.

- Often, CDC is not the first agency to “break the news”:
  - We may wait to communicate until a company issues a recall so we can link to it and give specific advice about what not to eat.
  - A state or local health department may issue press first.

- Messages are reviewed at multiple levels of CDC to ensure scientific and communication principles are being applied:
  - A template is used to expedite the process.
Balancing Input from Partners

- **State and local officials**
  - Case count and patient outcomes
  - Product testing completed by states

- **Federal regulatory agencies**
  - Regulatory investigation
  - Compliance actions

- **Food industry**
  - Details about the implicated food product
Balancing Science & Plain Language

- CDC is a **scientific** agency
  - Information must be scientifically accurate

- **Plain Writing Act of 2010**
  - Requires all federal agencies to write "clear government communication that the public can understand and use"

- Our outbreak communications must **balance** being scientifically accurate and understandable
What We Say Has Impact

- CDC is a trusted source of science-based health information

- That means **what** we say and **how** we say it has implications
  - “…is the likely source of this outbreak.”
  - “The outbreak appears to be over.”
  - “…closely related genetically…”
  - “This investigation is ongoing.”

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E. Coli Outbreaks At Chipotle Restaurants 'Appear To Be Over,' CDC Says

February 1, 2016 - 5:06 PM ET
Naming Companies to Protect Public Health

- It’s a general policy for CDC to identify commercial entities involved in ongoing outbreaks **IF** it protects public health
  - Company name appears in the title of the web posting as being “linked to the outbreak”

- Recently, CDC has been **challenged** by companies for the way in which firms are identified in outbreak web postings

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Chipotle is Blaming the Government and the Media for Their E. Coli PR Nightmare

“It’s been fueled by the sort of unusual, even unorthodox, way the CDC has chosen to announce cases related to the original outbreak in the Northwest,” Hartung told Wall Street analysts. “They’ve done that a couple of times now and they’re not announcing new cases – they’re simply announcing new reporting to them from local health agencies.”
Constantly Improving

- Using **social media** and **traditional media** to make changes in real time during investigations

- Making improvements to the web posting template
  - "What’s New" box
  - Shorter, reordered "Highlights" box

- Developing **focus groups** for message testing
  - User satisfaction with template
  - Understandability of scientific content
Summary

- Increasing demands for government to be **transparent**
  - Message fatigue is real, but should not be a major reason to delay public communication

- Decision about right time to communicate is **nuanced**
  - Must continuously weigh evidence to make decision

- **Crafting messages that will be understood is complex**
  - Involves balancing science, input from partners

- **Collaboration and trust in the process are key**
For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333
Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)/TTY: 1-888-232-6348
Visit: www.cdc.gov | Contact CDC at: 1-800-CDC-INFO or www.cdc.gov/info

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
Message Development:

Best Practices from an Industry Perspective

AMY PHILPOTT, APR
WATSON GREEN LLC
Messages Should Address:

- What happened
- What the audience(s) need to do now
- How/Why it happened and your role
- What you are doing now
- What you will do (are doing) to prevent it from happening again
Don't write so that you can be understood, write so that you can't be misunderstood.

~William Howard Taft

Source: www.brainyquote.com
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
COMPANY CONTACT AND PHONE NUMBER

FOOD CO. RECALLS PRODUCT BECAUSE OF POSSIBLE HEALTH RISK

Company Name of City, State is recalling Quantity and/or type of Product, because it has the potential to be contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes, an organism which can cause serious and sometimes fatal infections in young children, frail or elderly people, and others with weakened immune systems. Although healthy individuals may suffer only short-term symptoms such as high fever, severe headache, stiffness, nausea, abdominal pain and diarrhea, Listeria infection can cause miscarriages and stillbirths among pregnant women.

Product was distributed Listing of the states and areas where the product was distributed and how it reached consumers (e.g., through retail stores, mail order, direct delivery).

Specific information on how to identify the product (e.g., the type of container [plastic/metal/glass], size or appearance of the product, product brand name, flavors, codes and expiration dates, etc.).

Status of the number of and types of related illnesses that have been CONFIRMED to date (e.g., "No illnesses have been reported to date.")

Brief explanation about what is known about the problem, such as how it was revealed, and what is known about its source. An example of such a description -- "the recall was the result of a routine sampling program by the company which revealed that the finished products contained the bacteria. The company has ceased the production and distribution of the product as FDA and the company continue their investigation as to what caused the problem."

Information on what consumers should do with the product and where they can get additional information (e.g., "consumers who have purchased Brand X are urged to return it to the place of purchase for a full refund. Consumers with questions may contact the company at 1-800-XXX-XXXX.")
“The product was distributed... (listing of the states and areas where the product was distributed, and how it reached consumers (retail, mail order, direct delivery))”

OR

The product was shipped directly to (types of customers) in (list states and areas).
Internal Communication Logistics

- Draft/Revise (NAMES)
- Provide Feedback (EVERYONE)
- Internal Approval/Legal Review (NAMES)
- Staff Disseminates (NAMES)
- Train Staff (NAMES)
Internal Communication Logistics

- **Draft/Revise (NAMES)**
  - **Provide Feedback (EVERYONE)**
  - **Internal Approval/Legal Review (NAMES)**
  - **Staff Disseminates (NAMES)**
  - **Train Staff (NAMES)**

Notes: This diagram illustrates the steps involved in internal communication logistics, including draft/revise, provide feedback, internal approval/legal review, staff dissemination, and training staff. The process is cyclic, with feedback leading back to the draft/revise stage.
Dear Mr. Boyce – apologies for the tardy reply, but even I take Sunday off :-) The answer to your questions is: all NAME brand products are perfectly safe to eat. ..... Out of the utmost caution and care for our customers STORE is voluntarily recalling its PRODCUT because of potential contamination with Salmonella.
Message Development

1. Start with the truth
2. Make it make sense
3. Add context & feelings
4. End with the truth

“Why shouldn't truth be stranger than fiction? Fiction, after all, has to make sense.”

-Mark Twain

www.fbs.me/DontEatThePasteQuotes
Message Development

• Anticipate a dialogue - watch for rabbit holes!

• Identify your nightmare question(s) and address it (them).
Message Development

And don’t give me some canned reply that has been vetted by a dozen lawyers!

Keep it REAL
Keep it FRESH
Keep it CONSISTENT
Message Development Final Tips

- Resonate with intended audience
- Consider how messages will be disseminated
- Find a balance between legal and communication goals
- Keep in mind those who will use them - different spokespersons/communicators like to have their messages in different formats:
  - parenthetical; bullet points; outline format
  - visual message mapping
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Primary Responsibility</th>
<th>Communication Options</th>
<th>Concerns</th>
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</table>
Message Mapping Template

Issue or question

Message 1

proof point

Message 2

proof point

Message 3

proof point

proof point

proof point

proof point
Thank you!

AMY PHILPOTT, APR
WATSON GREEN LLC
aphilpott@watsongreenllc.com
202-384-1840 (o)
703-472-6615 (c) because crises happen 24/7
Crafting the Right Message: The Consumer Perspective

Donna Emanuel Rosenbaum, M.S.
Consumer Communication Specialist
Food Safety Partners, Ltd.
Getting it Right

I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure that you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.

Robert McCloskey, U.S. State Dept.

It’s not what you say,
It’s what people hear.

- Frank Luntz
Introduction and Overview

- “Consumers are entitled to information that could affect their health and transparency helps them to make informed choices.” —Sir John Krebs (2003)
- Food risks are not perceived in the same manner as other risks due to the much more intimate relationship we all have with food.
- Every consumer has a unique relationship and attitude towards food and food safety based on their personal life history.
- Better understanding your audience results in more effective food risk messaging.
- Use the “Goldilocks Test”…not too simple, not too wordy, get it “Just Right”
Put People First

Communication is about people—a back and forth dialogue in order to attain understanding between those parties. Risk communication can often be sidelined by using risk “education” language.... I have facts to impart to you about the risk of this food and you should listen because I've done the science and I know best.

- The Role of Transparency:
  - The public is considerably more competent than what the experts give them credit for.
  - Simplifying risk messages can cause the public to think authorities are lying.
  - Communicating uncertainty will actually increase public trust and help it make informed choices.
  - Honesty can help alleviate the stigmatization of certain commodities after food scares, especially if additional controls will be instituted.
  - Honesty is just as important in non-crisis conversation as it builds the trust you may need to rely on later on.
  - Media amplification makes all these issues increasingly important.

- Attitude & Demeanor makes or breaks good food risk communication:
  - Consumers feel they are entitled to know what is in their food vs.
  - Consumers are entitled to know what is in their food
  - Non-verbal cues are as important as words used in gaining consumer trust...watch tone, cadence, facial expression
Social Media Do’s & Don’ts

- Messaging should be specific to each social media channel & platform
- DO NOT use social media & Twitter as an extended RSS feed
- DO talk with people, not at them
- DO NOT tweet and disappear….better to spend a little time everyday than just Friday afternoon
- DO pause before pushing SEND….1,000 tweets to build a reputation and 1 to trash it
- DO NOT respond to trolls, pick a fight, or adopt an even slightly sarcastic tone
- DO respond to anyone who had a bad experience with your company…..say sorry, ask them more about it, apologize again for not catching it sooner
- DO NOT pay anyone for reviews or endorsement online without disclosing it
- DO keep politics and religion away from your website and online presence
- DO NOT have employees (or their relatives) pose as your consumers online
- **DO, DO, DO** enhance your website for consumer experience….simplify your home page, give away some information in newsletters/blogs/white papers, be ready with staff to respond

EVERY POINT OF CONTACT IS A POINT FOR ENGAGEMENT THAT EITHER HEIGHTENS THE RELATIONSHIP OR LOWERS IT!
Messaging as a Crisis Unfolds

• **Pre-Crisis**
  - Use social media to develop insight and social capital
  - Monitor issues & make team-building practice drills a priority

• **Crisis Identified**
  - What you say FIRST really matters!
  - Use ALL resources and methods for getting the word out

• **Crisis in Progress, then Winding Down**
  - Update information often – in government notices & your website
  - If you stay silent your audience will write a story in their own minds

• **Crisis Follow-Up**
  - Declare it’s OVER loud and clear!
  - Circle back internally – document, reflect, change, update, practice
A Tale of Two Recalls

Letter 1

May

Dear Customer,

Enclosed please find a refund check to reimburse you for the [redacted] you purchased.

We apologize for the inconvenience we have caused you. We strive to produce the best quality products. Yet despite our quality control efforts, the simple truth is that we occasionally make a mistake. We rely on many suppliers around the world and, in this instance, one supplier provided us with a product that may have been contaminated.

In an effort to be proactive and ensure your safety, we decided to voluntarily recall the product in question. Rest assured that we will not work with the supplier in question again and that we have taken appropriate steps to prevent a similar problem from occurring again.

Once again, our sincerest apologies. We hope you will try our [redacted] and other products again in the future and that they will meet with your satisfaction.

Sincerely,

[signature]

Letter 2

Recent Recall (Letter on Website)

By admin / March XX, 20XX

The following is an open letter from the owners and founders of XXXXXXX.

First, we would like to apologize for the situation at hand, we are voluntarily recalling one lot of our frozen [redacted] with the expiration date of XXXXX for potential risk of salmonella and listeria. Regarding the lot in question, no illnesses have been reported in either people or their pets. If you have any of the affected product please discontinue feeding it and dispose of it properly. You can contact us directly for a full refund or return to the store where the product was purchased for a full refund. As the raw food market has grown and matured, so has the scrutiny and testing for pathogens. Starting immediately, we will ramp up testing on our raw materials, finished products, and processing environment in an effort to produce an even better and safer XXXXXXX pet food product. We will continue to adopt interventions and technologies to prevent the possibility of pathogens being found in our products. We will continue to source only the highest quality ingredients available to us like we have always done. The lesson here is no matter how great our sources and no matter how much we test the presence of microbes in raw meat products is inevitable. We will do everything in our power to keep delivering a well sourced and well made food for your pets. At XXXXXXX, the health and well being of you and your pets and our customers are our greatest concern. We will always work to provide safe, quality products and speak openly and honestly about them. If you have concerns or questions, please reach out to us at info[@]xxxxxxx.com.

As long time raw food makers, promoters and feeders for 13 years now we can tell you that this is not anything new. We have been asked what measures we take to protect against recalls. To begin, we use only the highest quality, Human Grade, USDA inspected and passed raw materials. We never use the commonly used mechanically separated meats where bacteria risks are inherently greater. Second, we operate under the strict guidance of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOPs), and a Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points program (HACCP). These are the top of the industry standards where it comes to pet food manufacturing. We also test both raw materials and finished products. Despite these standards, recalls happen....

......3 More Paragraphs......

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely, Signed By All Owners

Ends with a copy of the Lab test showing no salmonella or listeria after recall.
Dear Customer,

Enclosed please find a refund check to reimburse you for the [blank] you purchased.

We apologize for the inconvenience we have caused you. We strive to produce the best quality products. Yet despite our quality control efforts, the simple truth is that we occasionally make a mistake. We rely on many suppliers around the world and, in this instance, one supplier provided us with product that may have been contaminated.

In an effort to be proactive and ensure your safety, we decided to voluntarily recall the product in question. Rest assured that we will not work with the supplier in question again and that we have taken appropriate steps to prevent a similar problem from occurring again.

Once again, our sincerest apologies. We hope you will try our [blank] and other products again in the future and that they will meet with your satisfaction.

Sincerely,

From the “Company” – not a person or CEO
First, we would like to apologize for the situation at hand, we are voluntarily recalling one lot of our frozen xxxxxxxxxx with the expiration date of XXXXXXX for potential risk of salmonella and listeria. Regarding the lot in question, no illnesses have been reported in either people or their pets. If you have any of the affected product please discontinue feeding it and dispose of it properly. You can contact us directly for a full refund or return to the store where the product was purchased for a full refund. As the raw food market has grown and matured, so has the scrutiny and testing for pathogens. Starting immediately, we will ramp up testing on our raw materials, finished products, and processing environment in an effort to produce an even better and safer XXXXXXX pet food product. We will continue to adopt interventions and technologies to prevent the possibility of pathogens being found in our products. We will continue to source only the highest quality ingredients available to us like we have always done. The lesson here is no matter how great our sources and no matter how much we test the presence of microbes in raw meat products is inevitable. We will do everything in our power to keep delivering a well sourced and well made food for your pets. At XXXXXXX, the health and well being of you and your pets and our customers are our greatest concern. We will always work to provide safe, quality products and speak openly and honestly about them. If you have concerns or questions, please reach out to us at info@xxxxxxxxx.com.

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.....3 More Paragraphs......

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Confusing Consumers During a Recall

- Calling it a “Voluntary” Recall
- Using “Abundance of Caution” language
- Posting Advisories vs. Recalls
- Rolling Recalls
- Tardiness in identifying all product
- Not updating illness information
- No/poor information on company website
- Not pushing the recall information out to me …..do you really care about my health?
- Multiple recalls for the same food/commodity in a short timeframe
Problem Solve to Build Trust

- When consumers complain or return a product, they are looking for information not compensation. A brief, honest explanation of what occurred is welcome with an invitation to discuss it further.

- In the middle of a crisis, stop online push marketing, don’t send coupons, especially directly via email. This irritates consumers and sends mixed messages.
Hoping that this stomach flu in our house goes away so I can get my root canal tomorrow in case you're wondering how bad it is. :(  

- Likes 2

3:44
My husband has been so sick for the last 24 hours. But I just saw that he tweeted. That's how I know he's gonna live. @Jamie1947

Ken Jennings Verified account @KenJennings

DINNERTIME FOOD IDEAS FROM MY SON "Can we put Nutella on our salmon and call it salmonella?" This has been DINNERTIME FOOD IDEAS FROM MY SON

- Retweets 343
- Likes 1,182
Resources

Thank You!

Donna Emanuel Rosenbaum, M.S.
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C: 847-757-5377
donna.foodsafety@gmail.com