

Public Health Risk Communication: lessons learned

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Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada

Canada 

Content

- Definition
- Canadian examples
- Emergency Risk Communications
Tools for Effective Strategies
- Some applications
- Conclusion



Definition

- *Dissemination of appropriate information about risk that enable the public and decisions makers to make appropriate decision*
- *Risk is a dual process of fact and feelings (pain, suffering, unknown, choice, control, trust, nature of threat, etc.)* IAEA



Definition

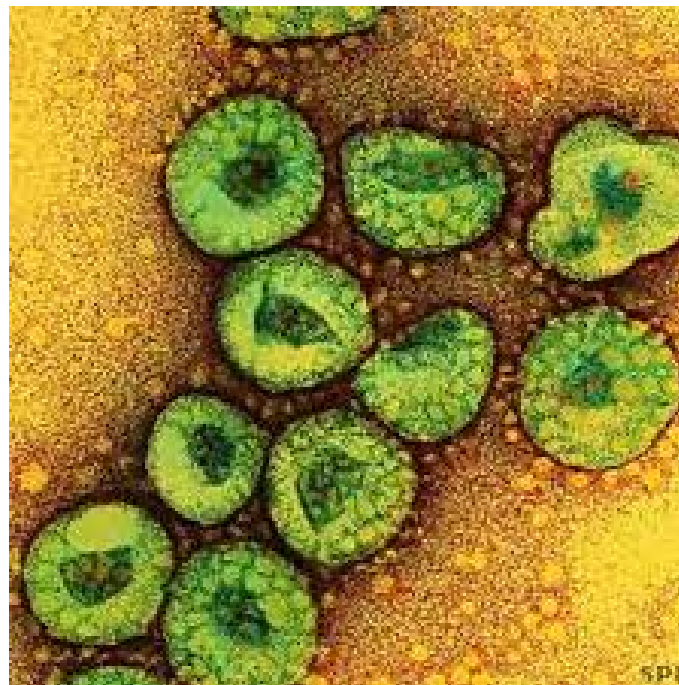
- Risk communication is a matter of what an organization does, not just what it says.
- Risk communication must account for the affective component in people's perceptions of risk.
- Risk communication will be more effective if it is thought of as dialogue, not instruction.(encourage certain behavior)
- Risk communication and crisis



Examples in Canada



SARS 2003



SARS 2003 (Tyshenko & al 2010)



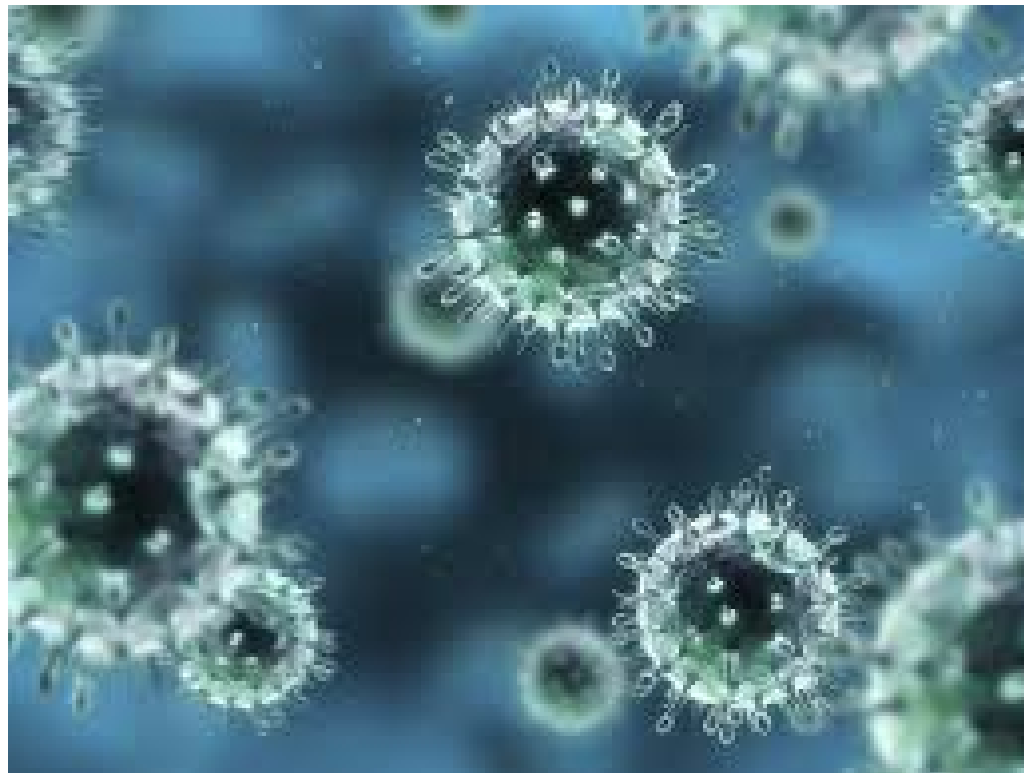
- Clear lack of communication between key groups
- Many authoritative voices with different perspective and sometimes conflicting opinion
- No education plan or information campaign to empower the public
- Post SARS focus on isolation rooms but not so much on ways to improve communication to the public

SARS 2003

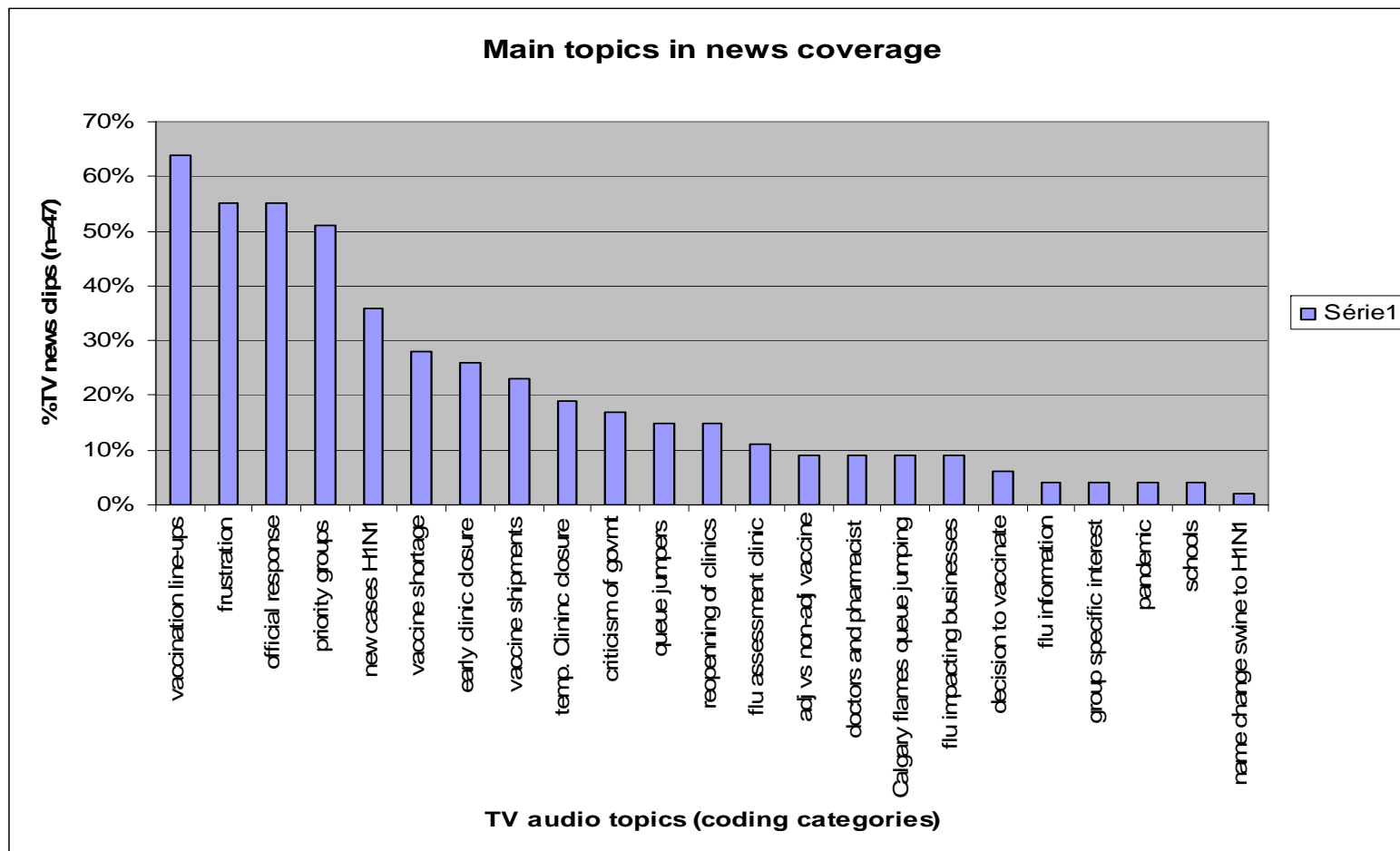
- Creation of the Public Health Agency of Canada
 - Authoritative voice
 - Link between experts and population
 - Website and IT social media to educate the public
 - Strategic risk communication policy



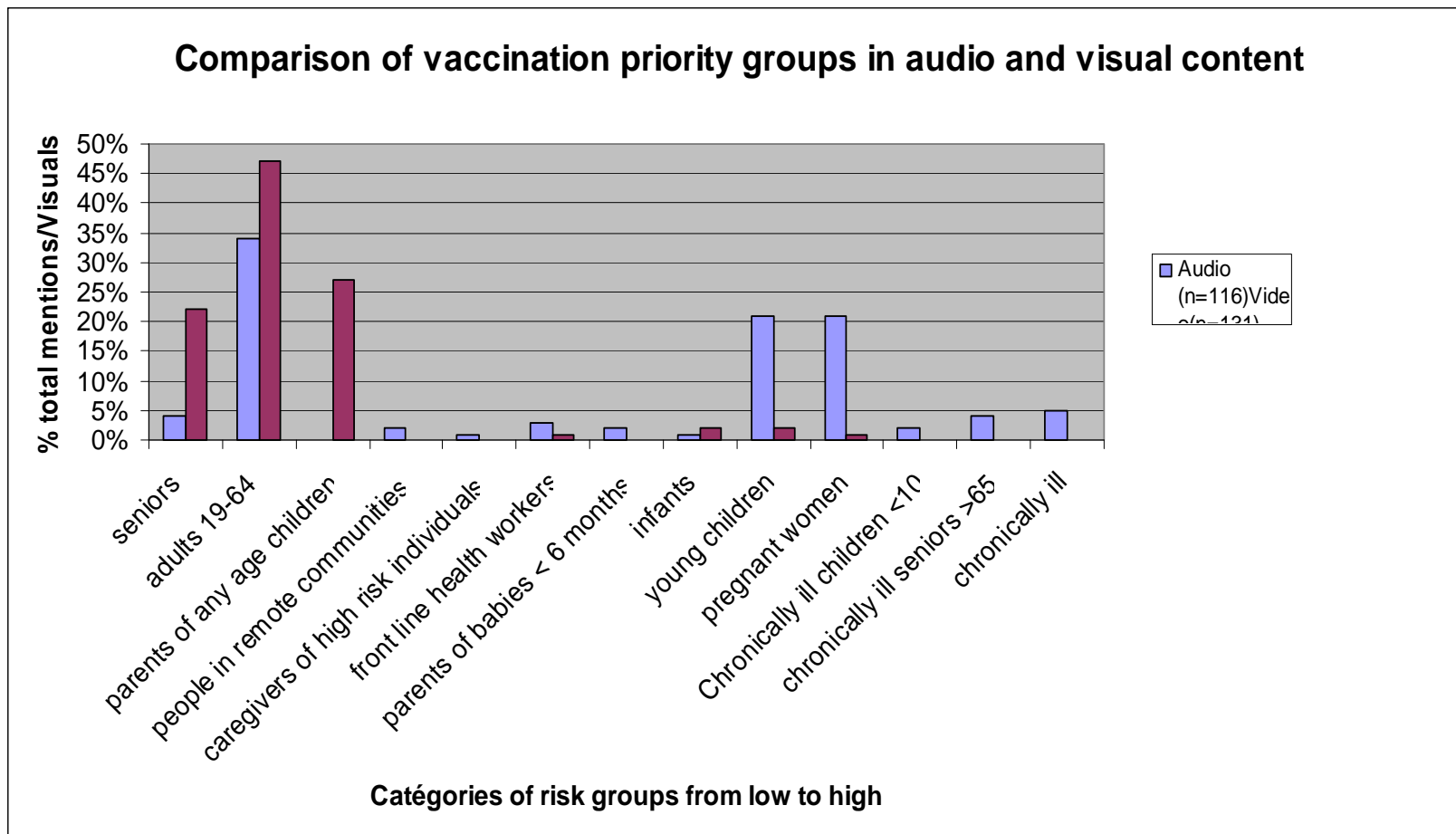
H1N1 2009



H1N1 2009 (Luth & al. 2013)

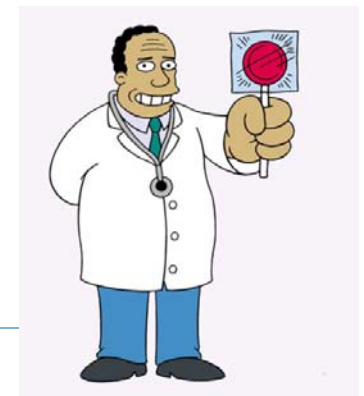


H1N1 2009 (Luth & al. 2013)



H1N1 2009: discussion (Luth & al. 2013)

- Spokepeople should be clearly identified, well trained, confident and accessible
- White coat effect!
- Awareness of the effect of colours
- Account for the dual format of television news and provide ready-to-use visual content to complement key messages

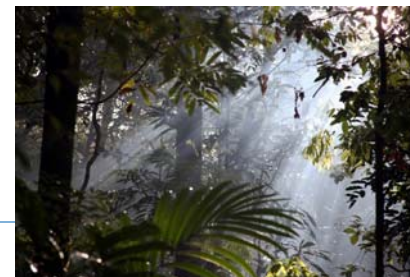


Cryptococcus gatii 2001



Cryptococcus gatii 2001 (Nicol & al. 2008)

- Fungus typically found in tropical or subtropical region (ex. Australia)
- Transmission: inhalation (organism in soil or trees, no human to human)
- Aug 2001 to June 2006: 157 seriously ill and 5 deaths
- Media starts talking about it in June 2002



Cryptococcus gatii 2001 (Nicol & al. 2008)



Cryptococcus gatii 2001 (Nicol & al. 2008)

- Reasons for low coverage
 - Scientific uncertainty
 - Complexities in naming and describing the organism
 - Lack of risk mitigation options, policies or controversy
 - Local stories competing in a Global media arena (WNV, Iraq War, SARS)



Cryptococcus gatii 2001 (Nicol & al. 2008)



- Implications of low coverage:
 - Media up to date source for learning about new emerging pathogen and not only by the general public (ex: SARS and GPHIN)
 - Media report can improve surveillance and disease detection during an outbreak



Cryptococcus gatii 2001 (Nicol & al. 2008)

Conclusions:

Release risk information as early as possible even if uncertain:

- Help to alert people to a potential problem
- Trust in the health officials
- Improved channels of communication between the public and health officials





Emergency Risk Communications

Tools for Effective Strategies



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Health Canada

Health Emergencies Decision-Making Tool

Is the info needed to protect health?

Release

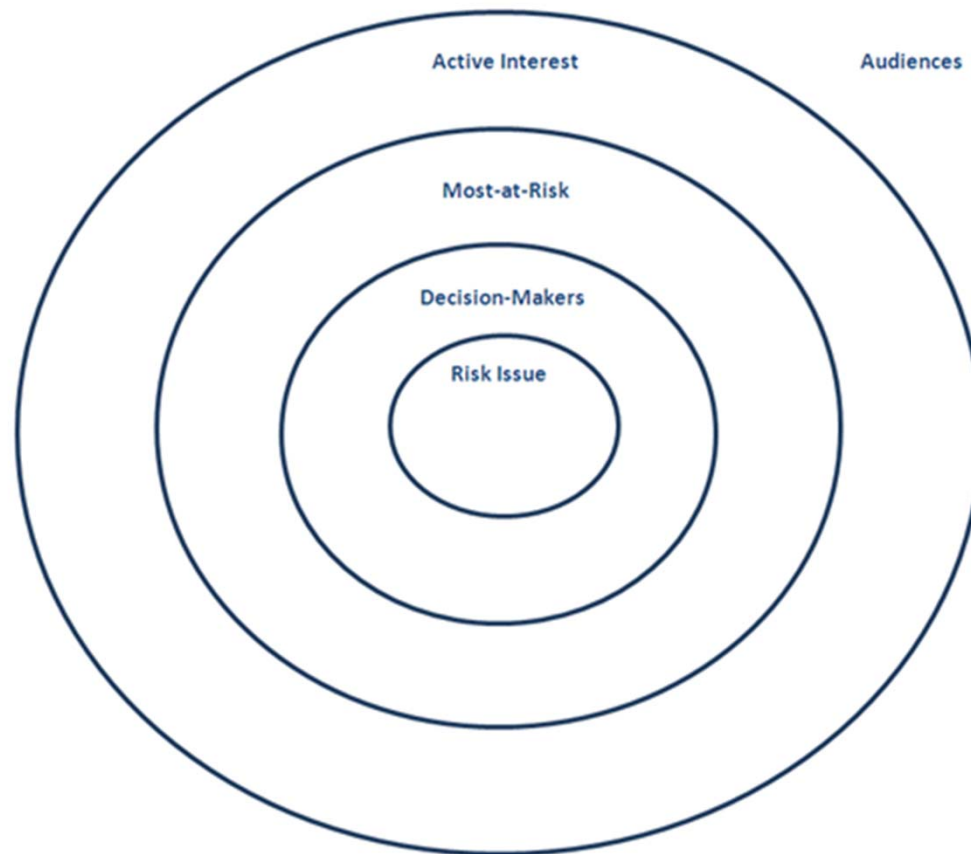
Is the info needed to build trust?

Release with caution

Is there a compelling reason to withhold info?

Withhold

Stakeholder Map



Decision-makers: departments/ branches/other jurisdictions that have a primary or shared role in regulating the risk

Most-at-Risk: the stakeholders who are most affected by the risk issue and its management and have some sort of decision or behaviour-change to make in order to minimize their risk

Active interests: individuals or groups who have a stake in the issue, but are not directly involved

Audiences: general media, other government departments, and interested agencies and associations who are not actively engaged in the issue or its management

Stakeholder Prioritization

- Which of the stakeholders are most affected – positively or negatively- by the issue and our risk management decision-making?
- Is it in our jurisdiction to work with these people?
- Who has been involved in this type of issue in the past?
- Who will share in the ultimate decision-making about the issue?
- Who could help you achieve your goal if you reached out to them?
- Who has the potential to hurt our response?
- Who has the greatest influence?
- Who do you absolutely not want to surprise?

Considerations for Risk Messaging

- Literacy
 - » Aim 6th grade level
- Common knowledge
 - » Can't assume public's knowledge base
 - » Monitor & adapt
- Omnipresent warnings can undermine any single warning's impact
- Medium can depend on the message



Risk Perception Assessment Tool

Potential Triggers for Increased attention

- Profile in the US or Europe
- Link between issue and holiday or seasonal activities

Evidence of Increased Public Awareness

- Increase in media coverage/calls
- Social media traffic
- NGO/Stakeholder activity

Predictors of Increased Risk Perception

- Affects infants or children
- Source of risk perceived as low-trust
- Risk specific to a group already vulnerable?

Applications

- YULEX 2013
 - Evaluate the message to passengers
- Travel health kiosks pilot project at departure/arrival gates



Conclusion

- Communicate is not just for the sake of informing or educating stakeholders or citizens, but to **ENSURE** that people take the appropriate action to reduce the risk
- Transparency is the key!



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Questions!

