

Communications plan

This plan will provide you with a framework for developing a communication outreach initiative towards raising awareness and preventing rabies from a local to national level. It will also provide resources and considerations for appropriately adapting these strategies to your local situation (including cultural and communication resource considerations).

This section contains information on the following:

- [4.1. Why is it important to develop an effective communications plan as part of a canine rabies control program?](#)
- [4.2. What is health communication?](#)
- [4.3. How does someone start developing a communication plan?](#)
- [4.4. How do I develop a communications plan suitable for my area, region, or country?](#)

4.1. Why is it important to develop an effective communications plan as part of a canine rabies control program?

Raising awareness on rabies prevention and control is essential in preventing exposures, increasing the general public's behaviours towards proper wound care and seeking medical attention. Enhanced awareness can also improve rabies control efforts in animals by increasing reporting of potential rabid animals, improving understanding among the population about the need to vaccinate dogs and behaviours of responsible dog ownership. All of these efforts will lead to improved overall rabies prevention at the local level.

4.2. What is health communication?

Health communication is the study and use of methods to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health. It is a hybrid of several other disciplines, drawing from communications, behavioural science, health education and health promotion, journalism, business, clinical professions, political science and information technology.

4.3. How does someone start developing a communication plan?

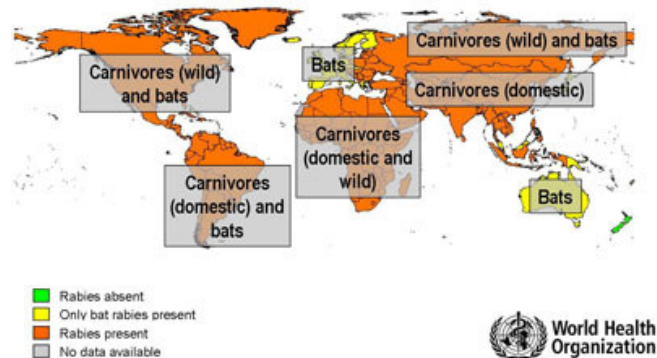
Table of Contents

- [STEP 1: Assessing the science](#), p1
- [STEP 2: Defining the purpose for the communication](#), p1
- [STEP 3: Identifying and understanding the audiences\(s\)](#), p2
- [STEP 4: Developing and testing messages](#), p2
- [STEP 5: Choosing media and channels for the message](#), p3
- [STEP 6: Determining the best timing for delivering the message](#), p3
- [STEP 7: Implementing the communication plan](#), p4
- [STEP 8: Evaluating the effort and its impact](#), p4

Communication planning consists of eight interrelated steps. These steps are essential to ensuring a well thought-out strategy that can be implemented in any setting and circumstance. The framework consists of:

STEP 1: Assessing the science

Most often the basis for health communication is scientific knowledge and epidemiological analysis, described [here](#). For a rabies prevention and control effort, you should review what animal reservoirs are causing the most human disease and define your prevention and control point. For example, if human rabies cases in your country are primarily caused by exposure to rabid dogs, you should target your efforts towards preventing dog exposures. If your locale has more wildlife exposures, you should focus your messaging towards these efforts. Click [here](#) to find out how you can assess the science.



STEP 2: Defining the purpose for the communication

Interventions and programs are initiated once sufficient evidence exists on the value of a behaviour change. Informing means providing factual information with no intent of influencing a decision but rather to assist in making decisions. Persuading involves changing behaviours of individuals or communities to support healthy living. Click [here](#) to find out how you can define the purpose of the communication.

STEP 3: Identifying and understanding the audiences(s)

The purpose of communication is always audience-specific, and it must target what the recipient is supposed to do in response to the message. Identifying and understanding the intended audience is vital. Rarely do all people relate to or understand the same messages and it is very important to consider audience segmentation. Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) studies can be useful to assess the level of knowledge and people perceptions on rabies. These could then serve as the basis for tailoring the messages. Click here for examples of [KAP studies on rabies](#) and [other diseases](#). Click [here](#) to find out how you can identify your target audience/s.



Photo courtesy of the Serengeti Carnivore Disease Project

STEP 4: Developing and testing messages

Developing tailored communications materials can increase the likelihood that the prevention recommendation will be followed. Once messages and materials are created, they should be tested

on the target audience. This is critical to ensuring that the messages are followed. Click [here](#) to find out how you can develop and test messages. Click [here](#) for a list of items to cover when pretesting messages and materials and for an example intercept interview used to pretest rabies prevention materials.

STEP 5: Choosing media and channels for the message

Assess the current resources in your locale based on the most utilized media channel of your target audience. These are the formats or outlets most utilized and trusted by your target population. These could be posters, fact sheets, mass media, face-to-face lectures, publications, email, videos etc. Search for the most efficient outlet that meets your needs. For example, paper-based materials may not be the most efficient in some localities. In these cases, focus on other media such as radio. Click [here](#) to find out how you can choose media and channels for the message.



Photo courtesy of Peter Maina, Kibera, Kenya

STEP 6: Determining the best timing for delivering the message

The timing of delivering your messages needs to be determined on a case-by-case basis. You may want to choose times of the year to conduct more proactive rabies outreach (in the form of a campaign), while there will be other times of the year in which you may need to rely on rapid risk communication efforts during outbreaks (e.g. mass exposures) or greater exposure risk (e.g. more rabies exposures in certain months if there is seasonal transmission). Rabies prevention and control messaging lends itself well to being tagged onto the larger [World Rabies Day initiatives](#) in September. However, rabies exposures in some places may be more prevalent in the summer months, warranting rapid communication during times when you have larger or mass exposures. Identifying what time period seems more feasible for your locale is important, understanding that more than one time a year can be selected. Click [here](#) to find out how you can determine the best timing for delivering the message.



Photo courtesy of Asabe Dzikwi, Ahmandu Bello University

STEP 7: Implementing the communication plan

When implementing the program, several items should be taken into consideration including timing of the launch, hosting an event, media outreach, timing of the release and maintaining the communication campaign long-term. Click [here](#) to find out how you can implement the communication plan.

STEP 8: Evaluating the effort and its impact

Evaluation of your program is critical to demonstrate success, look for areas of improvement, and justify funding for future years. Evaluation is usually the first step cut in health communication programs due to funding restrictions. Resources in this document and through the World Rabies Day initiative can assist you in ensuring that appropriate evaluation can be accomplished. Click [here](#) to find out how you can evaluate the effort and its impact.

4.4. How do I develop a communications plan suitable for my area, region, or country?

Table of Contents

- [STEP 1: Assess the science](#), p1
- [STEP 2: Define the purpose of the communication](#), p1
- [STEP 3: Identify your target audience\(s\)](#), p2
- [STEP 4: Develop and test the messages](#), p2
- [STEP 5: Choose media and channels for distribution of the message](#), p3
- [STEP 6: Determine the best timing for delivering the message](#), p3
- [STEP 7: Implementing the communication plan](#), p4
- [STEP 8: Evaluate the effort and its impact](#), p4

Following the steps above can greatly enhance and improve the effectiveness of your communications campaign. To aid you in this process, this section will walk you step-by-step through this planning process. When complete, you can use [this interactive document](#) as a guide for developing a full rabies-specific communication plan for your locality.

STEP 1: Assess the science

The first step is to identify the important points from the epidemiologic assessment as well as a comprehensive list of potential issues, challenges, and barriers to change that may affect your communication outreach. Some of these issues may be more culturally based, while others may be resource-based.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the rabies situation in my country?
- Who is most affected by rabies in my area?
- Why are people being exposed to rabies? What behaviours are putting people at risk?

Think about what role communication can play in addressing this problem. You will need to assess the challenges and barriers that may affect your communication outreach. These barriers may be behavioral, cultural, demographic, or physical. For rabies prevention and control, there may be specific issues that will affect the success of your outreach. Look at the following message on rabies prevention (taken from [here](#)):

Rabies Kills! Prevent Rabies! Take animals to get vaccinated. Avoid dog bites. Wash bite wounds with soap and water. Get medical care immediately after a bite.



Rabies prevention poster used in Africa

Now, let's take into consideration the behavioural, cultural, demographic, or physical factors that may affect how different populations may react to this message:

- ▶ **Behavioral** – perceptions on the use of medicine (e.g. vaccinations) and health-seeking behavior may be different across populations. This could effect messaging. For example, telling a population to “Take animals to get vaccinated” will not be effective if they do not believe that this is necessary. Communication will need to start with a rational for why vaccination will assist them in preventing rabies.
- ▶ **Cultural** – feelings or perceptions of the role of dogs vary across localities. In some localities, dogs will be viewed as pets, whereas others will not appreciate this concept. When this message was tested in Asia, the direction to “Take animals to get vaccinated” brought up many questions from the target audience on who should vaccinate the dogs (as many are not “owned” as pets).
- ▶ **Demographic** – economic implications need to be taken into account when writing messaging. Some populations will not be able to afford to pay for vaccination for dogs or post-exposure vaccinations. For this reason, the direction of “Get medical care immediately after a bite” may not be feasible for some populations.
- ▶ **Physical** – in addition to access to healthcare facilities, some populations may not have access to clean water. In the message above, telling a population to “Wash bite wounds with soap and water” raised questions when tested in localities with limited clean water and soap (note - regardless of the water cleanliness, washing a bite wound from a potentially rabid animal is advisable).

Taking these factors into account when writing your messages will assist you in increasing the likelihood that your program will be successful. In advance, you may need to take into account how local or national governments will assist in addressing some of these barriers (e.g. vaccinating dogs, assisting in healthcare access etc.). Examining these factors will also help you understand your audience (Step 3). Additionally, when conducting message testing (Step 4) you will be able to better tailor your messages to overcome some of these challenges.

STEP 2: Define the purpose of the communication

To define the purpose of your communication, identify the targeted goals and measurable objectives of your outreach. The goals and objectives of a national communication plan should be adapted towards your national needs.

Sample goals and objectives that may be appropriate:

Goal: To raise awareness towards rabies prevention behaviours.

Objectives: 1. To raise national awareness about the risk of rabies and prevention behaviours. 2. To mobilize resources to support local rabies prevention programs. 3. To inform and educate those most at risk.

STEP 3: Identify your target audience(s)

When identifying your target audience(s), you will want to segment your audiences based on factors such as age, sex, occupation, or behaviour. This will help you in ensuring that messages will better resonate with individual audiences, and helps you better target an individual audience with prevention messages. Additionally, you should segment audiences into primary, secondary, or tertiary audiences for the purposes of communication outreach. This will help you focus your efforts towards each audience in order of priority.

► **Primary** = those who need to make a decision or a change. The primary audience should be those who are most at risk of exposure or death from rabies in your area.

Example: This is going to be the group that is most affected by rabies in your country. In most localities, this would be children under 15 years of age who are mostly in contact with dogs. Rabies prevention programmes should therefore target this group. Young boys would also bring dogs to vaccination points.



Photo courtesy of Serengeti Carnivore Disease Project

When advertising vaccination campaigns, messages should therefore be targeted to this audience and the timing of vaccination should be scheduled when they are available to bring their dogs (e.g. during week-ends or school holidays).

► **Secondary** = those in a position to directly influence the decisions or actions of the primary audience (family members, peers, physicians, stakeholders, teachers, news media).

Example: If children are your primary audience, parents, teachers and healthcare providers or veterinarians would be your secondary audience.

► **Tertiary** = those with more indirect yet important decision making roles such as religious organizations and community leaders.

Example: In most locations, your tertiary audience may be policymakers or other community leaders who would make decisions on rabies prevention and control efforts.

To identify your target audiences, ask yourself the following questions:

- From Step 1, who did you identify as being most at risk for rabies in your area? This will be your primary audience.
- Who can influence your primary audience?
- What other groups play a role in rabies prevention and control?

STEP 4: Develop and test the messages

When developing and testing messages, start by reviewing existing materials to see what is already available. A resource library on the [World Rabies Day website](#) is available to assist you as a starting point. This site has a comprehensive list of messages and materials used globally.

Secondly, develop and test message concepts on your target audience. Decide on what materials you want to develop. When testing messages, you should probe your target audience to determine what materials they would prefer to receive. For example, in some localities, paper-based products are preferred. In others, radio or other forms of media are preferred.



Photo courtesy of Lusaka Animal Welfare Society and University of Lusaka Veterinary Department

There are numerous reasons to test messages in advance of their release. Message testing allows you to:

- ▶ Assess attention of the messages.
- ▶ Assess comprehensibility of the messages.
- ▶ Assess motivation to comply with the recommended behaviour changes.
- ▶ Assess recall of the prevention recommendations.
- ▶ Determine personal relevance of the prevention recommendations.
- ▶ Gauge cultural appropriateness of the messages and the graphics.
- ▶ Identify strong and weak points of the messages and materials.
- ▶ Identify sensitive or controversial elements.
- ▶ Identify barriers to following prevention recommendations.

There are several ways in which to test messages. The following are some examples of the methodologies:

- ▶ Rapid Assessments – this is primarily used during outbreaks and consists of doing a quick assessment of the affected population.
- ▶ Media monitoring - which includes collecting media clips during a campaign or an outbreak to assess your messages as portrayed in the media.
- ▶ Focus groups – groups of about 9-12 individuals from the target population who can provide feedback on the messages and graphics in a roundtable discussion.
- ▶ In-depth interviews – one-on-one interviews with individuals from the target population who can provide insight into barriers to following prevention behaviours.
- ▶ Self/Interview-administered surveys – written surveys that discuss the issue and obtain feedback.
- ▶ Theatre testing – using a movie-theatre setting, the interviewer obtains feedback from a larger group of individuals (this is primarily done for videos and public service announcements).
- ▶ Observational studies - for example, a member of the target audience is observed while navigating through a website.
- ▶ Readability assessments – these are quantitative assessments that identify the grade-based reading level of the messages and material.
- ▶ Expert/gatekeeper review – these are similar to in-depth interviews and discuss the topic with individuals who are local experts or “gatekeepers” who can assist in reaching the target audience.



Photo courtesy of Asabe Dzikwi, Ahmandu Bello University

STEP 5: Choose media and channels for distribution of the message

There are numerous ways to disseminate your rabies educational messages. There are benefits and limitations to each of the channels. [This table](#) may assist you in determining which channel would best meet your local needs.

When determining an appropriate channel to disseminate your information, you will want to ask yourself the following questions:

- ▶ Which communication channels are most utilized by my target audience?
- ▶ Which communication channels are most trusted by my target audience? For example, most children trust their teachers, making school-based educational initiatives helpful in reaching children.



Photo courtesy of Lusaka Animal Welfare Society and University of Lusaka Veterinary Department

- ▶ Which communication channels can we afford within our budget?
- ▶ Can we combine and send messages through several communication channels?

Improving media outreach

Media outreach is only one channel, but is essential for any campaign. The media like stories that are appealing, particularly stories that are relevant to their readers or viewers. They look for stories which stimulate debate, controversy, or conflict. Many times, they are also looking for a personal angle to their story. Reporters are regularly looking for new angles or twists that will attract public interest. In other words, it is not enough that it is World Rabies Day; you will want to put a new spin on the rabies prevention efforts in your area every time you reach out to the media.



Photo courtesy of Yuri Pedrosa, Balsas-Maranhao, Brazil

To enhance your media outreach, ask yourself the following questions:

- ▶ What are we doing new or different?
- ▶ Is there any new scientific data this year?
- ▶ Have we made any noteworthy improvements?
- ▶ Are there any new and interesting partners?
- ▶ Do we have a personal story that we could tell? Is there someone in our community that has been affected by rabies who could tell their story to tie in why prevention is essential?

To enhance your media outreach, the following steps are recommended:

- ▶ Make a list of key media contacts, develop relationships with them, and communicate with them regularly. This outreach will help you in obtaining media down the road.
- ▶ Develop a plan for periodic media coverage of your program and make your program newsworthy.
- ▶ Identify and train media spokespersons.
- ▶ Track media coverage. Tracking your media coverage will help you identify any errors or gaps in your messaging. Tracking general media on rabies will also allow you to pick up on myths or misconceptions and correct them.
- ▶ Capitalize on breaking news. If you are following step #4 and tracking your media coverage, you will be able to pick up on other rabies media and provide comments. For example, a story on a mass exposure to a rabid animal would be a good time for your organization/agency to reiterate the importance of your rabies prevention and control efforts.



From the Chicago Tribune

A useful tool for reporters is a pre-packaged media kit. Consider including the following items in a media kit:

- ▶ A media advisor (to announce a press conference or kick-off event).
- ▶ A press release.
- ▶ Local, state, and national statistics about your issue.
- ▶ Background information.
- ▶ Biographies of your speakers.
- ▶ Reproducible copies of charts or graphs used in your speakers' presentations.
- ▶ Copies of other program materials or reports that can be used as reference.
- ▶ Name and telephone number of someone who can be called to answer questions or verify information.

Utilizing partners

When deciding on what partners to include in your outreach efforts, look for partners that will bring resources, expertise, or credibility to your program. Think about what roles individual partners can play to enhance your communication outreach. Engage a variety of partners that will help you in expanding your reach to your target audiences. For example, you may reach children by engaging school groups or teacher organizations. You could reach dog owners by targeting veterinarians. Look for organizations that will help balance the program, and give each partner a specific outreach task. Allow partners to adapt the program to fit their communication outreach capabilities.

Examples of partners you may want to include in rabies prevention and control efforts include:

- ▶ Animal welfare societies
- ▶ Department/Ministry of Education
- ▶ Immunization programs
- ▶ Medical professionals
- ▶ Medical schools
- ▶ Ministries of Health and Agriculture
- ▶ Non-profit organizations
- ▶ Pet organizations or companies
- ▶ Public health organizations
- ▶ Public health schools
- ▶ Teaching organizations
- ▶ Veterinary clinics
- ▶ Veterinary schools

STEP 6: Determine the best timing for delivering the message

To determine the best timing for delivering rabies prevention and control messages in your area, ask yourself the following questions:

- ▶ What time of year are most rabies cases occurring?
- ▶ Are there other events during that time period that would conflict with rabies messages?
- ▶ Are there other events during that time period that would complement rabies prevention and control messages?
- ▶ Could rabies messages be promoted during the same time period as other public health messages?
- ▶ What other activities are happening in your area around World Rabies Day?
- ▶ Could your messages be promoted during World Rabies Day?
- ▶ Can we make a news "hook" that would attract attention during this time period?
- ▶ Can we sustain our messages after the initial launch?
- ▶ How can we promote our messages year round?



Peruvian World Rabies Day (WRD) stamp, issued in June 2009 to commemorate the inaugural WRD campaign in September 2007.

STEP 7: Implementing the communication plan

Before implementing the communication campaign, there are several questions to ask and answer for your locality:

- ▶ How should we launch or announce the campaign?
- ▶ Should we have an event associated with the launch?
- ▶ How should we obtain media coverage?
- ▶ What partners need to be included in the launch?
- ▶ How can we find out whether we are reaching our target audience?
- ▶ How can we maintain media and partner interest in the campaign long-term?

For rabies prevention and control efforts, tagging a kick-off event in association with World Rabies Day could enhance media attention and participation by partners.



Photo courtesy of Serengeti Carnivore Disease Project

Click [here](#) for an implementation checklist.

STEP 8: Evaluate the effort and its impact

Evaluation is an important part of any communication initiative. Funding limitations may prevent you from doing a thorough evaluation as you would wish, but there are several ways in which you can evaluate your program to ensure continued improvement and success in the future.

There are two types of evaluation that may be useful to your program: process evaluation and outcome evaluation.

Process evaluation is usually initiated during the implementation phase and helps monitor the function and success of the project. You would use process evaluation to track the function of your

program, partner involvement, effectiveness of your outreach efforts, media response, reach towards intended audience, and ability to stay within budget.

To assess awareness (objective #1), ask yourself the following:

- ▶ How many areas/localities participated in rabies prevention activities?
- ▶ How many events were conducted?
- ▶ How many people participated in these events?
- ▶ How many partners participated in events or promoted rabies prevention messages?
- ▶ How many government agencies participated in events or promoted rabies prevention messages?
- ▶ How many international agencies collaborated with your locality (e.g. OIE, WHO, FAO)?
- ▶ How many people visited your website?
- ▶ How long did people stay on the website?
- ▶ How many people downloaded materials from your website?
- ▶ How many people asked questions through phone lines or email inquiries?
- ▶ How many educational materials were distributed?
- ▶ How many people were reached by your listservs or distribution?
- ▶ How many people were reached by your partners listservs or distribution?
- ▶ How many media articles or news reports covered your topic?
- ▶ How many people were reached by the media?
- ▶ How many partners are willing to work with you again next year?

To assess the amount of resources mobilized (objective #2), ask yourself the following:

- ▶ How many dogs were vaccinated?
- ▶ How many other animals were vaccinated?
- ▶ How do the number of vaccinations this year compare to last year?
- ▶ How many animals were spayed/neutered?
- ▶ How many funds were you able to raise for your outreach?
- ▶ What was the total value of corporate and foundation support received?
- ▶ What was the total value of in-kind support you received from all of the partners?
- ▶ How many funds were you able to raise for future efforts?

To assess the educational outreach (objective #3), ask yourself the following:

- ▶ How many people were educated by your outreach?
- ▶ How many educational materials were distributed by your organization?



Photo courtesy of Serengeti Carnivore Disease Project

- ▶ How many educational materials were distributed by your partners?



Photo courtesy of Serengeti Carnivore Disease Project

- ▶ How many schools were able to take part in rabies education?
- ▶ How many students were reached through the educational outreach?
- ▶ How many areas/localities were able to hold educational efforts?

Outcome evaluation shows you how well the program has met its overall communication goals and objectives. Outcome evaluation can assist you in determining what you might change or improve in the future to make your project more effective. Evaluating the outcome of the project can be done by conducting a large survey (such as a quantitative assessment) or by holding a small discussion or focus group with members of the target audience (such as a qualitative assessment).

For an outcome evaluation, you may want to ask your target audience questions to assess the knowledge, attitude and behaviour on rabies prevention and control.

To assess the knowledge of your target audience, you might ask:

- ▶ Have you heard of rabies?
- ▶ How do people get rabies?
- ▶ Have you heard of rabies prevention messages?
- ▶ Have you heard of [name of your campaign]?
- ▶ Or, questions regarding rabies risk in your area.

To assess the attitude of your target audience, you might ask:

- ▶ Do you believe that rabies poses a risk to you or your family?
- ▶ What do you tell your children about rabies?
- ▶ Are the dogs in your area vaccinated? Do you think the dogs should be vaccinated?
- ▶ Who is responsible for vaccinating the dogs?

To assess the behaviour of your target audience, you might ask:

- ▶ How do you protect yourself or your family from rabies exposure?
- ▶ Do you own a dog? Do you feed a dog? Do you have dogs around your home?
- ▶ What would you do if you were bitten by a dog?
- ▶ Where would you seek medical attention?

Click [here](#) for additional resources that can assist you in your planning efforts.