

10 STEPS TO COMMUNITY READINESS



What countries should do to prepare communities for a COVID-19 vaccine, treatment or new test

22 February 2021

READY, SET, GO...

Informed, engaged and empowered communities are the bedrock for the arrival of new vaccines, treatments and tests that will be introduced to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and save lives

With communities fully engaged and actively participating through the full cycle of planning, delivery and assessment for new biomedical tools, demand for these tools can be increased, leading to widespread and effective uptake and use.

The empowerment of people and communities is not an abstract idea and there are concrete and measurable steps that can be taken to ensure citizens are engaged and ready to support new biomedical tools. Though communication needs may be slightly different for each tool, the principles that promote their safe and successful introduction remain the same.

The following 10 steps are well established risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) principles that have proven their power. Together, they put communities at the heart of the roll-out of new vaccines, treatments and tests, and promote trust – the critical ingredient for all community action.

STEP 1

MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THE PEOPLE, WITH THE PEOPLE

People are more likely to take action if they are involved in decision-making. Engage communities early and work to involve, collaborate and empower them. Leave no community behind.

- Initiate discussions with communities to understand sociocultural contexts and power dynamics. Map networks and influencers in the community.
- Identify what type of engagement interventions are safe, feasible and acceptable.



STEP 2

MAINTAIN & STRENGTHEN TRUST THROUGH FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONNECTIONS

Coordinate action through the widest set of stakeholders possible. A whole-of-society approach works best. Trust brings communities together for action and is paramount for the delivery of health care and services.

- Activate or strengthen RCCE coordination mechanisms and use existing health and response structures to support health system readiness at all levels. Ensure representation of civil society and vulnerable groups. Work closely with other committees and advisory groups such as the National Immunization Advisory Group.
- Launch or strengthen an independent national “alliance” of influencers and stakeholders who can listen, advocate, educate, address rumours and misinformation, and build vaccine and health literacy.



STEP 3

LISTEN MORE, TALK LESS

Regularly seek out and respond to feedback from communities. This improves the relationship and trust between communities and public health authorities.

- Establish community feedback mechanisms to promote accountability and ensure that community beliefs, questions, concerns and suggestions are heard.
- Guide the continuous adaptation of the COVID-19 response in an effective, agile, safe and confidential manner.



STEP 4

USE DATA FOR DECISION-MAKING & COURSE CORRECTION

Social data give an important perspective on community knowledge gaps, perceptions and behaviours. Understanding the drivers of behaviour is also critical to understand why people may or may not be practising public health and social measures. For something as complex as human behaviour, a mix of data sources is best.

- Include community feedback, social listening, polling and survey data to best understand community knowledge gaps, perceptions and behaviours.
- Use this knowledge to inform decision making at all levels.



STEP
5

PLAN, PLAN, PLAN WITH THE PEOPLE

Community participation in planning can improve services, ensure services are equitable and help to remove barriers. This is especially important when introducing new tools and services such as vaccines, treatments or new types of tests.

- Ensure communities are involved in co-designing solutions.
- Use social data analysis to develop and regularly review and update RCCE action plans.
- Crisis communication preparedness plans should be developed as part of this process.



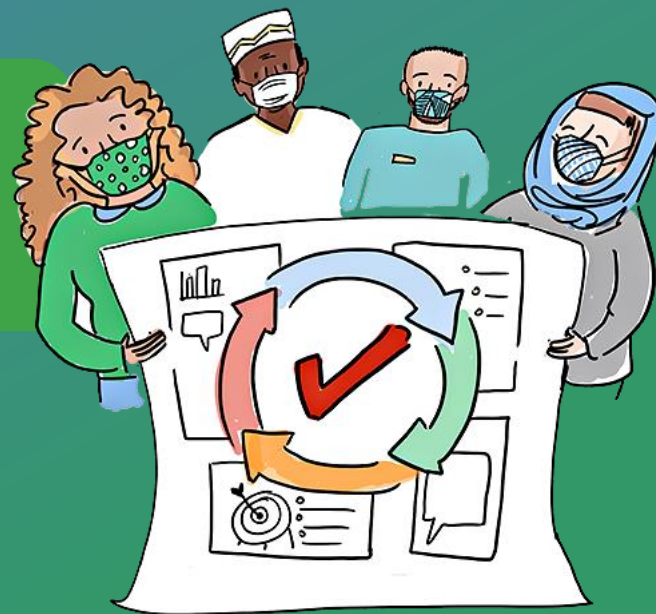
STEP
6

LET THE PEOPLE MEASURE SUCCESS

We have learned over time that widespread community participation in monitoring and evaluation supports programme sustainability and promotes joint accountability and best use of resources.

- Promote community participation in developing the monitoring and evaluation process. Include civil society and community groups in monitoring, reporting and joint accountability efforts to increase the likelihood of broad community uptake and responsibility for new interventions.

JOINT ACCOUNTABILITY
WORKS BEST



STEP
7

HIRE & EMPOWER MORE RCCE EXPERTISE

Risk Communication and Community Engagement support provides the critical links between communities and health services. This expertise supports national authorities in making informed decisions to prepare and protect the health of individuals and the community.

- Carefully map where RCCE expertise is needed and recruit immediately.
- Establish RCCE leadership at all levels with the necessary authority to coordinate partners.
- If not already established, introduce and enforce Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for RCCE as a central coordination and quality assurance tool.



STEP 8

BUILD CAPACITY & DEVELOP SKILLS TO GO BEYOND COVID-19

Training of the community health workforce allows local issues to be solved locally. Include frontline workers, volunteers, community leaders and community/social mobilizers from civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, local women and youth groups in capacity-building events for long-term sustainability.

→ For best results, initiate a continuous peer-to-peer support system for community mobilizers and networks.

TRAIN FOR LONG-
LASTING SKILLS

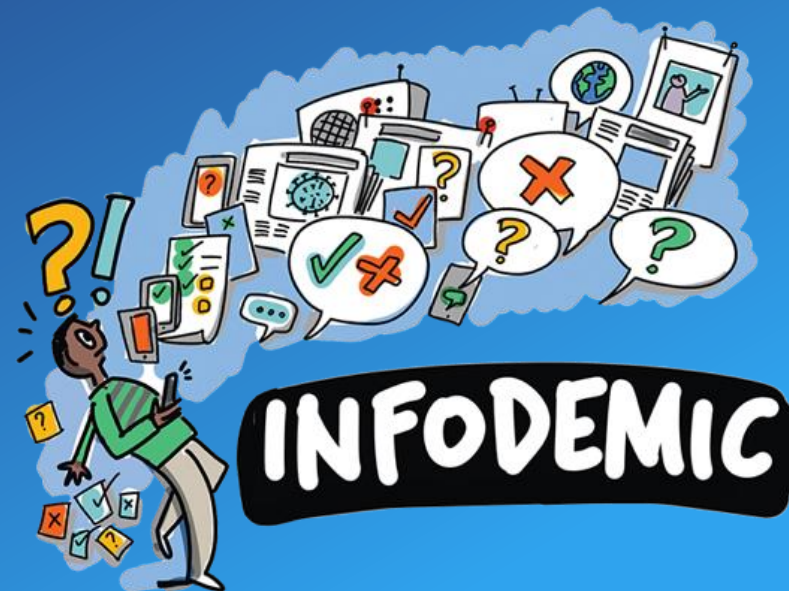


STEP 9

MANAGE THE INFODEMIC

An infodemic is an overabundance of information – good or bad – that makes it difficult for people to make decisions for their health. The COVID-19 infodemic can harm health.

- Ensure access to trusted information and effectively manage misinformation and rumours.
- Activate or strengthen national fact-checking and rumour-monitoring capacity recognizing, that rumours and misinformation can be as dangerous as COVID-19.



STEP 10

START THE DRUMBEAT TOGETHER

Consistent two-way engagement supported by information from locally trusted channels reinforces positive perceptions and drives action.

- Establish and agree on priority communication channels with communities as soon as possible.
- Where possible, adapt science and health messaging to new contexts with communities.



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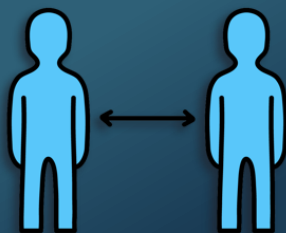
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COVID-19 PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Protect yourself & others



Keep your distance



Wash your hands
frequently



Wear a mask



Cough & sneeze
into your elbow



Ventilate or open
windows