

CRISIS+EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION

Zika Risk Communication: Leaders Do and Don't

Do express empathy. Empathy, the ability to take another's perspective, allows the leader to take an active role in supporting, consoling, and persuading others to the benefit of everyone involved in the emergency. While many leaders may believe that societal norms forbid them from expressing empathy, in fact, leadership research suggests that relating to others is a key to moving others toward prosocial behaviors even if the actions involve sacrifice. *"Like you, we are concerned about Zika mosquitoes arriving here."*

Do raise self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy increases positive risk decisions and leaders can influence individual and group efficacy. Expressing faith in the competence of people can raise their self-efficacy as can directing them to take actions that the leader is certain most people can accomplish. *"While some aspects of Zika are outside our control, there are things every one of us can do to help prevent Zika illness in our community. Tip and toss standing water. Even small amounts can be a breeding ground for mosquitoes."*

Do value honesty and openness. Without credibility a leader cannot lead. People will look for fairness and restraint in the use of power. Today, information technology makes withholding information dangerous and futile, and leaders will risk the trust others have in them. *"We have to fight Zika together, which means we will share what we know when we know it."*

Do collaborate. Organizations will face crises, but they do not have to face them alone. With effective planning and networking, a leader will have the necessary responses outlined and the relationship networks needed to carry them out. *"We know preparing to fight Zika is not 'one size fits all.' Your input matters."*

Do understand media's role. People seek information from multiple sources and the media influence people directly. The value of information sources depends on their reliability in providing information useful to the person. Recognize that the media's perspective "what does this mean to me?" is useful in crafting relevant messages during an emergency.

Do not be invisible. In an emergency, the leader should be accessible and should appear to share the risk. Do not wait for information to be final to begin to speak; instead, remind the public that the situation is fluid. A leader's presence can be reassuring to followers. *"Based on what we know now . . ."*

Do not be paternalistic. Empower people and express confidence in them. Be careful not to imply that "father knows best" and that the facts are too difficult for them to understand. When a decision is made, explain the basis for that decision. Give people choices if possible.