

Attachment E Radiological Event Messages for Public Health Workers

Focus Group Discussion Guide for Study of Radiological Messages Among Public Health Workers

1. Introductions

The focus group facilitator greets the participants as they gather for lunch. She asks that they put their first name on the back and front of the place cards so that she and the recorder can be sure who is speaking.

As the group is eating, she says she appreciates the participants taking time to give their opinions. She explains that there are no right or wrong answers in a focus group and they are being asked for their personal and professional opinions on the questions they are about to discuss. She explains that there are pads and pencils by their places because sometimes she will ask them to write down their responses and have everyone report out. At other times, there will be a general discussion.

The facilitator introduces herself and the recorder. She asks each participant to introduce themselves by telling the group their name, how long they have been in public health and their current job. The recorder takes down this information and further answers with an indication of which participant made each comment.

2. Feelings of Safety and Security

The focus group facilitator asks the group what makes them feel safe in a work environment? She will record their responses on a chart pad.

If information or knowledge is mentioned, the facilitator will probe the participants to ask HOW knowledge helps people feel safe or she will introduce the idea if it has not already been introduced by a group member. She will probe the group to determine WHY information can help them feel more secure in their ability to do their jobs.

3. Messages about Radiological Incidents

The facilitator asks participants if they are familiar with the term dirty bombs. She asks what they know about them. She records their answers on a chart pad. If no one comes up with a correct definition, she explains that a dirty bomb is a radiological dispersion device, also known as an RDD, that combines conventional explosives like dynamite with radioactive materials in the form of powder or pellets. It could possibly cause buildings and people to be exposed to radioactive material, but the primary danger is the blast itself.

She will explain the group is about to evaluate some messages created by subject matter experts to help public health workers deal with a dirty bomb explosion in their area. They are messages that should equip public health workers with the information they need to deal with a dirty bomb explosion. The facilitator says she will pass them out one at a time, read them aloud to the group and then ask for reactions.

The facilitator reads each of the five message maps and asks for reactions. She probes participants for positive and negatives regarding the messages. She asks:

- How believable is this message? Why?
- What would make it more believable?
- Is there anything else on this topic you need to know?
- How confident are you these actions will keep you safe?
- How confident are you that you can carry out these recommendations?
- What would make these messages better or more informative?
- What would make these messages easier to understand?

4. Mall Scenario

The facilitator will say that the participants are going to hear a scenario that could take place at any time. "At 4 p.m. Friday local radio stations report that there has been an explosion in a crowded shopping mall about 10 miles from your workplace, killing and wounding up to 100 people. The bomb has blown out windows in the roof and walls, started several small fires, and created widespread panic.

You turn to the local television station and the news report indicates it might be a "dirty bomb." People are being asked to stay away from the site, and first responders are using Geiger counters to assess whether radiation might be present.

Ten minutes later a local anchor is on another television station providing information that a dirty bomb or radiological dispersion device (RDD) has been confirmed as the cause of the explosion. Many people at or near the sites will be transported to clinics and hospitals. Others have gone home. The anchor introduces a local health unit representative to give information on what actions the public should take.”

The facilitator asks each person to write the answer to this question on the pad provided. Do the messages you have in front of you that we just discussed give you the information and preparation necessary to handle this incident on your job? Why or why not?

The participants report out. General discussion follows about what is good and useful, then what could be better about the messages that have been considered.

5. Close

The facilitator thanks the participants for their help. She explains that they are one of six focus groups being conducted in pilot states to help evaluate message maps for the Centers for Disease Control in a research study conducted by the National Public Health Information Coalition. She thanks them for their time and participation.

Message 1

How can I protect myself and my family?

Listen to local authorities for specific instructions.

- Shelter in place until you receive information about the incident and safety measures.
- Local officials will provide information about evacuation procedures if it is necessary.
- Do not forget pets in your emergency plans.

If you suspect you have been contaminated, there are simple decontamination steps you can take.

- Remove clothes before entering the home (or shelter) to limit contamination.
- Taking off outer clothing will remove most of external contamination.
- Wash exposed skin with soap and lukewarm water to remove remaining contamination from skin and hair.
- Try to minimize contact with other people or things to help control the spread of contamination.

If you are pregnant or a nursing mother, special precautions may be needed.

- Protective actions that will protect pregnant women will also protect their unborn babies.
- Nursing mothers should listen to guidance from public health officials on breastfeeding.
- If possible, it may be necessary to change to baby formula.

Message 2

What are the short-term health effects of radiation?

The effect of radiation on the body depends on the amount of radiation.

- Adverse effects can range from mild effects, such as skin reddening, to serious effects such as cancer and death.
- The adverse effects depend on the amount of radiation absorbed by the body (the dose), the type of radiation, the route of exposure, and the length of time a person was exposed.
- Exposure to very large doses of radiation may cause death within a few days or months.
- There are treatments available for people suffering from radiation sickness.

Message 3

What are the long- term health effects of radiation?

The adverse health effects of exposure may not be apparent for many years.

- Exposure to lower doses of radiation may lead to an increased risk of developing cancer or other adverse health effects later in life.
- Long term monitoring programs will be put in place.

Message 4

What is the difference between radiation and contamination?

Contamination occurs when radioactive material is where it should not be.

- Both people and objects can be contaminated.
- If radioactive material is on or outside the body, it is external contamination.
- If radioactive material is on the inside of the body, it is internal contamination.
- People who are externally contaminated can become internally contaminated if radioactive material gets into their bodies by inhalation or ingestion.

Both external and internal contamination can be assessed and mitigated.

- Simple decontamination techniques can remove most if not all external contamination.
- In nearly all cases, external and internal contamination is not immediately life threatening.
- For a number of radionuclides, there are medical countermeasures available to treat internal contamination.
- If you suspect you are contaminated, try to minimize contact with other people or things to help control the spread of contamination.

Being irradiated is similar to getting an x-ray.

- Getting irradiated does not contaminate a person.
- If the amount of radiation is significant it could be immediately life threatening.
- There are testing methods available to evaluate the amount of radiation the person has received.

Message 5

What is my professional (public health) role in a radiological or nuclear emergency?

The public health community will play an important role in responding to a radiological terrorism event.

- Public health officials will perform most of the same functions they would handle during any disaster response.
- In addition, public health officials will be responsible for population monitoring to identify, screen, measure, and monitor populations (people and possibly even their pets) for exposure to or contamination from radioactive materials.
- Psychosocial issues among people in the community, particularly in a radiological event, could create additional strain on public health and medical resources.

Traditional public health practitioners will need to work closely with radiation experts in their state and local agencies as well as federal partners to address response and recovery issues.

- Public health officials at the federal, state, and local levels will work together to protect the public's health.
- CDC is developing guidance and training for the public health workforce on radiological emergency preparedness.
- It is important to foster collaboration with state and local radiation experts in the planning process before a radiological event takes place.