

Key Messages for Social Mobilization and Community Engagement in Intense Transmission Areas

Ebola Guidance Package

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Community messaging for areas of intense transmission of Ebola virus disease

Why these messages

The exponential rise of Ebola cases and deaths in West Africa makes clear the urgent need for practical messaging and engagement of individuals, families and key stakeholders in a community. These messages should inform individuals, families and communities, in clear practical terms, of the ways in which they can minimize their risk of catching the disease, and help them to support their family and community members safely and humanely.

The messages are a resource that national and local communication and social mobilization teams can work with and adapt to address different aspects and contexts of the Ebola outbreak, and respond in a way which does not stigmatize or marginalise anyone.

Messaging approach

The messages are driven by the need to be: *empathetic, action oriented (prompting specific preventive behaviours), and focussed on the informational and emotional needs of people and communities*. They are designed to help people understand Ebola virus disease and make them less likely to become ill, enhance trust throughout the community, promote dialogue and community ownership of the response, and minimise psychosocial distress.

The messages are deliberately generic and will require adaptations to local contexts/languages, particularly as they are shared through local community networks and organizations.

Type of messages

There are five different sets of messages:

- Overarching and supportive messaging – key facts about severity, transmission and importance of early prevention;
- Treatment – information for those seeking treatment for a person with symptoms of Ebola; information for those treating sick family members in their home; and information for those who have fully recovered from Ebola;
- Contacts – information for those who have had close contact with a person with Ebola; and,
- Safe burial practices – information for those handling a person with Ebola who has died.
- Messages on what practical steps should be taken to stop Ebola in your community – suggestions on effective community mobilization

The messages are designed to align with the key interventions identified to rapidly stop Ebola transmission in areas of intense transmission.

Users

The messages should be used to inform, educate and engage different audience groups depending on their level of risk, vulnerability, presence in contact areas, care of patients with Ebola, or engagement or attendance of burials. Communication teams, local organizations, and media (broadcast, mobile and social) should select key messages based on their understanding of relevant audiences, adapt them accordingly and monitor audience response for further refinement and effectiveness.

A final word on updating and adapting

As the Ebola outbreak evolves and the epidemiology changes, these messages should be revised to better reflect, reinforce, or change their focus accordingly.

Important reminders!

- **These messages have been developed based on WHO Technical Guidance and with inputs by the WHO Technical Teams working on the Ebola Response.**
 - **These messages are for intense transmission areas only.**
- **These messages must be adapted to the local contexts and realities of the Ebola outbreak response.**
- **These messages will be updated periodically to reflect changes in the Ebola response.**
- **Messages in support of the Ebola Response in at risk areas will be shared soon.**

Overarching Messages

- Ebola is real and kills. But you can protect yourself, your family, and your community.
- Be alert – help stop the spread of Ebola. Speak with your local community leader if you suspect someone with Ebola in your community or call the toll free Ebola Hotline XXXX for advice.
- Do not touch a sick person with suspected Ebola or someone who has died from Ebola.
- Ebola causes sudden high fever, extreme tiredness, headache, body pain and loss of appetite. If you have a sudden high fever after contact with a person with Ebola or after attending a funeral, go to the nearest health facility.
- Early treatment of Ebola at a health facility increases your chance of survival. By going to the health facility the moment you have symptoms, you protect your family and community and help stop the spread of the disease.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water after every social contact.

Supporting Messages

- Ebola enters your body through your mouth, nose and eyes, or a break in the skin. To catch Ebola, you must touch the bodily fluids of a person with Ebola and then with dirty hands touch your eyes nose or mouth. Bodily fluids include sweat, stools, vomit, urine, semen, vaginal fluid and blood.
- A person who has died of Ebola is still highly infectious and should not be touched. Call the toll free Ebola Hotline XXXX to arrange for the body to be picked up or contact your local community leader.
- Ebola is spread to humans from some animals like bats and monkeys. People can catch the disease touching or eating a sick or dead animal. Never eat animals that are found sick or dead. Now that Ebola is in the human population it is being spread from human to human.
- Ebola can also be caught from a used razor at a barber shop, or when receiving an injection with a needle that has already been used (hospital or tattoo parlour), or if you are cut in a ceremony with a knife that has been used on someone who is infected. You cannot get Ebola by talking to people, walking in the street or shopping in the market.
- If you or someone you know falls sick with sudden high fever, extreme tiredness, headache, body pain and loss of appetite, consult your local community leader and immediately call the Ebola Hotline at XXXX for advice.
- If someone you know dies with symptoms of Ebola do not touch the body. Call immediately the toll free Ebola Hotline and consult your local community leader. Pay your respects without touching, kissing, cleaning or wrapping the body. The body can be prayed over to complete religious practices, but at a safe distance of one meter, without touching. The person's soiled clothes and bedding are contagious and must be burnt. The house, latrine and person's room must be disinfected by trained staff. Call the toll free Ebola Hotline.
- Children orphaned or separated from caregivers due to Ebola may be very fearful and will need care and support. If a child is orphaned or separated immediately contact a trusted child protection actor to initiate reunification with relatives or other trusted members of the community known to the child, such as neighbours or relatives.
- The body of a person with Ebola should only be handled by people who are trained in safe burial practices.

Treatment – Information for those seeking treatment for a person with symptoms of Ebola

- Free treatment for Ebola is available at health facilities.
- It is always best to seek treatment at your nearest health facility. Early treatment increases your chance of survival compared to staying at home.
- At the health facility the medical team provides treatment of the disease by: lowering the fever, providing rehydration and good nutrition, reducing pain and controlling infection.
- Going to the health clinic the moment you have signs and symptoms protects your family and your community and prevents the spread of the disease.
- Do not care for a sick person at home. Entire families get sick and die from treating one person at home.
- If you or someone in your family or community is sick, immediately contact your local community leader and call the toll free Ebola Hotline for advice at XXXX.
- Ebola treatment centres have been established in major hospitals and field centres to provide the safest possible care to persons with symptoms of Ebola.
- In areas where treatment services are fully occupied or not yet established, Ebola care or referral centres are being established to help stop the spread of the disease. Ebola care or referral centres can also help communities track and monitor contacts of patients who may have also caught the disease.
- It is important that you follow guidance from your local community leader, health facility or the toll free Ebola Hotline on what is the best care available to you.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water after every social contact.
- If it is impossible for you to travel or contact your local health facility and you or a family member falls sick with suspected Ebola, immediately provide them with their own space. Provide them with their own plate, cup, spoon and towel. Wash these items with water and detergent or with disinfectant separately from the rest of the household.
- Assign one person to take care of the individual affected. Family or community members who have fully recovered from Ebola cannot catch it again during this outbreak and can safely provide care to others who are sick.
- If you provide care, you need protective equipment. Use dish gloves, or plastic bags as gloves. Use a raincoat worn backwards as an apron. Don't touch the person with Ebola or their bodily fluids without protective equipment.
- Provide the sick person with plenty of drinks, such as water, soup, tea and locally available beverages. Alcohol should not be given to persons sick or suspected of Ebola infection.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water after every contact.

Information for those who have recovered from Ebola

- If you have recovered from Ebola you cannot catch it again during this outbreak.
- You can help the community by taking care of other sick people with Ebola. Follow hygiene rules so you do not carry the fluids of a sick person to other family or community members.
- You can no longer infect others. However, men who recover from Ebola should wear a condom during sexual contact for at least 3 months after recovery – Ebola is present in the semen up to this time.

Contacts - Information for those who have had close contact with a person with Ebola

- If you have touched or been in close contact with someone with Ebola or attended a funeral of someone who has died of Ebola you may have been exposed to the disease.
- Contacts of people with suspected Ebola are those who have:
 - Slept in the same household with a person suspected of having Ebola
 - Touched a person with suspected Ebola (alive or dead)
 - Had sexual contact with a person with suspected Ebola
 - Touched the blood or bodily fluids of a person with suspected Ebola (alive or dead)
 - Touched the personal belongings of a person with suspected Ebola, including their clothes, towels and bed linen
 - Breastfed by a woman with Ebola
 - Breastfed or wet-nursed a baby with Ebola
- If you think you have come in close contact with someone with suspected Ebola you should closely monitor yourself and your family's health and stay close to your home.
- Health workers may ask you to report the status of your health or visit you every day for 21 days until they are sure you do not show signs and symptoms of Ebola.
- If you think you may have been exposed to Ebola minimize close contact with other family members. Signs and symptoms for Ebola can appear 2 - 21 days after being exposed to the disease. If you have a sudden high fever report to the health facility or call the toll free Ebola Hotline on XXXX.
- You cannot spread Ebola disease until symptoms like sudden high fever and headache appear. A person who does not have physical symptoms cannot infect others.
- If you or a family member falls sick with sudden high fever, immediately contact your local community leader and call the Ebola Hotline at XXXX for advice. Go to your nearest health facility for treatment.
- Please note - Ebola can be transmitted between a baby and their mother (or wet-nursed) if one of them is infected. However, babies should continue to be exclusively breastfeed until 6 months and with complimentary feeding up to two years or beyond.
- Breastfeeding should only be stopped if a trained health worker determines there is a risk to continue nursing or if either mother or child shows symptoms of Ebola.

Safe Burial Practices - Information for those handling a person with Ebola who has died

- If somebody in your family dies with suspected Ebola, immediately call the toll free Ebola Hotline at XXXX for disinfection of the house and removal of the body.
- Pay your respects without touching, kissing, cleaning or wrapping the body before burial or cremation. The body can be prayed over to complete religious practices, but at a safe distance or one meter, without touching. Ebola is very infectious even after death.
- The body of a person with Ebola should only be handled by trained personnel using appropriate protection. Bodies should be buried or cremated by teams trained in safe burial procedures.
- Under no circumstances should a body be touched or moved after burial.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water after every social contact.

What can you do to Stop Ebola in your community?

- Begin by educating and protecting yourself, your family and your community.
- Contact your local political or community leader to devise ways to inform and engage your community. Also contact NGOs & INGOs and volunteer with them.
- Speak with influential leaders like Chiefs & Traditional Leaders, Imams, Priests & Pastors, women's and youth groups, traditional healers & societal heads about their role in educating the community about how to prevent Ebola.
- Volunteer with Community Health Workers going door-to-door educating the population.
- Speak with teachers about the importance of creating theatre groups and other playful activities that provide children with educational opportunities about Ebola.
- Speak with your neighbours about how you can organize yourselves and support prevention of Ebola.