> **INFORMATION POINT: Examples of technical terms used in public health that may not be understood by the public**
>
> - Age-adjusted mortality rate
> - Attributable risk
> - Carcinogen
> - Confidence interval
> - Control group
> - Dose-response
> - Epidemiology
> - Incidence rate
> - Morbidity
> - Mortality
> - Mutagen
> - Odds ratio
> - Prevalence
> - Prophylactic
> - Reference dose
> - Relative risk
> - Standard deviation
> - Statistical significance
> - Surveillance
> - Toxicology
> - Variance
> - Vector

II. Preparing and distributing a news release

If at all possible, information to be included in a news release should be prepared in advance. During an actual emergency situation, the time pressure is likely to immense. As a result, what has been prepared beforehand will be crucial. If news release templates for the major categories of public health emergencies most likely to occur have already been prepared this will help to get the process off to a good start.

1. What is a news release?

A news release[1] tells reporters the basic who, what, when, where, why and how of an event. Most importantly, a news release should quickly convey the vital information. Reporters use news releases to help determine whether they will cover a story, and to gather the information needed to write it. Because reporters often receive many news releases, it is normally important to grab their attention and convince them of the story's value. During an emergency this will be less relevant as reporters will already be on board. In all cases, the news release must meet their deadlines.

2. How are news releases prepared?

News releases generally follow a standard format designed to quickly give the reporter all the information they need. The "inverted pyramid" style of writing should be followed in which the most important and essential information appears first followed by supporting information. Sometimes this is referred to as "bottom line up front" (BLUF) because reporters are often extremely busy and may not have time to read the entire release.

In addition to answering or addressing the basic questions, the release should also express concern, provide guidance (if appropriate), and give details about how further information will be disseminated. If possible, the release should also give telephone numbers or contacts for more information or assistance. If possible and appropriate, the release should include direct quotes from the agency leader.

The more that news releases are written like news articles, the greater the chance the media will use them (or selected paragraphs) in their entirety. This will increase the probability that the agency's messages will be accurately reported and repeated. If a release cannot be issued, consideration should be given to providing the media with a fact sheet or list of frequently asked questions (FAQs). In this way, factual information can at least be put in the hands of the media, greatly reducing the risk of misunderstandings. As with all communication materials, news releases need to be approved using the agency's clearance and approval protocol (for example, by a subject-matter expert, the agency director, or the public information officer).

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1 The term "news release" and "press release" are often used synonymously. The term "press release" harks back to an earlier time when newspapers dominated.

3. Essential elements of a news release

FIGURE SIX shows a sample template for a news release. Although it can be used as shown, the sample is meant only to provide guidance as a single template structure will not work for every situation and should be modified for local application. The first paragraph is designed to capture the interest of the reporter and should contain the most important information of the release remembering to:

- keep it very short;
- limit paragraph to 1–3 sentences at most;
- use plain language; and
- avoid using acronyms and jargon.

The length of the entire news release must in fact be kept short (1–2 pages double-spaced). Quotations should be used whenever possible to add a "human side" to the story, and should:

- support statements made in the first lead paragraph;
- be from a significant person;
- add information; and
- be included within the first three or four paragraphs.

INFORMATION POINT: Contents of a news release

- Insert headline.
- Insert the key messages to the public.
- Insert 2–3 sentences describing the current situation.
- Insert quote from the lead spokesperson or agency head demonstrating leadership and concern.
- List actions currently being taken.
- List actions that will be taken next.
- List information on possible reactions of the public and on ways the public can help.
- List contact information, ways to get more information from the agency, links to other organizations and other resources.

4. Coordinating news releases with internal and external partners

- identify (and if appropriate) consult with partner organizations interested in, or affected by, the news release;
- ensure all partners receive a copy of the release before it is provided to the media;
- identify procedures for sharing the news release with internal staff;
- determine how information will be released and who will do the releasing;
- prepare and distribute joint news releases; and
- assist partners in developing their own news release.

FIGURE SIX: SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE TEMPLATE

[ORGANIZATION'S NAME ON LETTERHEAD]

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

[DATE]

[Name of internal media representative/contact person]

[Name of organization]

[Telephone number]

[Fax number]

[Email address]

[After-hours telephone number]

[Web site for more information]

[Headline goes here, initial cap, bold]

[CITY, State] – [Date] – [Text goes here, double-spaced, indented paragraphs]

[First paragraph: short (less than 30–35 words); contains the most important information]

[Second paragraph: contains the who, what, why, where, when of the story. Try to include a quote from the lead spokesperson or agency leadership within the first few paragraphs]

If the news release is more than one page long, use:

– more –

Centre the word at the bottom of the page, then continue onto the next page with a brief description of the headline, and page number as follows:

[Shortened headline] – Page 2

[The last paragraph should be an organization boilerplate, which is a brief description of the organization, and any information considered useful for people to know, such as type of organization, its location and web site address]

At the end of the release put:

End or ###

centred at the bottom. This lets the reporter/reader know they have come to the end.

End