

# Public health leaders call for coordinated communication response to COVID-19

March 5 2020

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History tells us that an informed, activated population is vital to protecting the public's health.

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Credit: CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy

On Thursday in the National Academy of Medicine's Perspectives, public health leaders including CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy Distinguished Lecturer Scott Ratzan, MD called for informed and active public policy leadership to employ strategically coordinated health communication and outreach on COVID-19 and other emerging global health threats.

As the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States rapidly expands, the authors say, the public needs reliable and actionable information to help them understand their risk of exposure as they go about their lives. They need clarity and transparency about travel bans, quarantines, personal protection efforts, and social distancing (e.g., closing [mass transit](#), closing schools, or cancelling sporting events). Moreover, the public needs the assurance that as more is learned about this emerging infection, the information they get from trusted sources reflects both accurately and clearly what the health care establishment does and does not know.

"Currently, the public health community does not have all of the evidence needed to reliably predict the trajectory of this infection," Ratzan says. "Unfortunately, this uncertainty creates a ripe environment for both fear and misinformation."

The authors of the article urge a leading governmental medical spokesperson, such as the U.S. Surgeon General, to create and lead a credible, public-private, interdisciplinary new bureau to inform the United States and serve as an international resource in times of emerging global health threats. Such a bureau could forge long-term relationships with media sources to deliver sustained, up-to-date, evidence based, health-literate communication and serve as a central resource for compelling, scientifically-sound information, medical strategies, personal protection measures, electronic resources, and more.

"The public needs and wants to be able to believe and follow evidence-based guidance from trusted sources," the authors write. "Sound [health communication](#) will serve the public well as public health professionals manage the national response to COVID-19 and strengthen the health information infrastructure for when the next novel infection strikes."

**More information:** Scott C. Ratzan et al, COVID-19: An Urgent Call

for Coordinated, Trusted Sources to Tell Everyone What They Need to Know and Do, *NAM Perspectives* (2020). [DOI: 10.31478/202003a](https://doi.org/10.31478/202003a)

Provided by CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy

Citation: Public health leaders call for coordinated communication response to COVID-19 (2020, March 5) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-health-leaders-response-covid-.html>

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