

Researchers outline adapted health communications principles for the COVID-19 pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced unique challenges for public health practitioners and health communicators that warrant an expansion of existing health communication principles to take into consideration.

In an article published Tuesday in *Public Health Research & Practice*, CUNY SPH Distinguished Lecturer Scott C. Ratzan and colleagues outline a checklist for the implementation of COVID-19 communication strategies to move from the acute phase of the pandemic to the "next normal."

One of the major challenges that has emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic is the increasing amount of false content circulating on [social media platforms](#). The spread of misinformation relating to a potential vaccine for the disease, even well before a vaccine is available for public use, is particularly concerning, the authors say. Rumours of safety scares and conspiracies relating to a COVID-19 vaccine have swirled throughout [social media](#), leading to social media outlets taking [active measures](#) to limit misinformation. These measures, although important, have not prevented a

saturated information system nor blocked harmful misinformation from undermining science-backed sources. These features of the media environment and the way people engage with the news call for a revision of the risk communication guidance during a public health crisis.

Ratzan and colleagues identified three general areas of capacity building for health communication during the pandemic: the need for communicators to be proactive and to take preventive actions at times; the importance of planning ahead while also acknowledging the unpredictability of the situation; and the call to focus on people.

The checklist for [health communicators](#) is made up of five objectives: set shared goals, establish coordinated response, devise a communication strategy, implement the communication plan, and be ready to adapt.

"We are trying to advance [public health](#) with simple innovations to promote evidence-based approaches to stem the COVID-19 pandemic," says Ratzan. "While we are pleased to publish and disseminate widely, we implore [political leaders](#) and governmental officials to adapt these checklists for a healthier populace and COVID-19 recovery."

It is critical that health communicators worldwide are more proactive in tackling risk communication challenges related to COVID-19, with likely prevention achieved through vaccination and societal COVID-19 resilience, Ratzan says.

More information: Scott Ratzan et al, Enhancing global health communication during a crisis: lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, *Public Health Research & Practice* (2020). DOI: [10.17061/phrp3022010](https://doi.org/10.17061/phrp3022010)

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