



Standard Operating Procedures for responding to a poliovirus outbreak in a polio-free country

TERMS OF REFERENCE: OUTBREAK COMMUNICATION OFFICER (C4D and External Communication) (National level)

Introduction:

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) seeks to ensure that future generations of children will be free from the threat of polio virus infection and paralysis. Achieving this goal depends on interrupting poliovirus transmission in the remaining endemic countries and on ensuring rapid and effective responses to poliovirus outbreaks occurring in polio-free countries. The GPEI has recently revised its Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the response to new polio outbreaks in polio-free countries.ⁱ

This document describes the Terms of Reference for the Outbreak Communication Officer in the context of the new SOPs.

Purpose of the position:

The Outbreak Communication Officer will lead the polio communication support provided to the country during the response to a poliovirus outbreak, working under the supervision of the Head of the WHO/UNICEF Country Offices and in collaboration with the communication teams of those organizations.

The communication officer's support to the team at the country office will ensure that the response is:

1. Aligned with the government/Ministry of Health (MOH) plans and strategies, and
2. Aligned with the latest outbreak response SOPs.

The communication officer will be deployed to countries as part of the Rapid Response Team (A) or the Surge Team (B).

Summary of assigned duties:

General:

- Assess communication needs and existing capacity at the country level.
- Report to WHO/UNICEF headquarters on progress, achievements, and where additional assistance is required.
- Contribute to the development of a communication plan to underpin the technical response, in collaboration with the WHO/UNICEF offices.
- Provide technical input to the overall response strategy, including the implementation of the operational work plans and provision of authoritative advice and support to operational units.
- Provide leadership and strengthen the existing communication teams by emphasizing team building and collaboration as daily routine with national/international partners.

Communication for Development (C4D):

- Ensure conduct of the required social investigation of polio cases as part of the early outbreak response.
- Develop/update/review data on immunization knowledge and attitudes and behavior of the target audience, especially for high-risk and mobile populations.
- Facilitate and lead the reinvigoration of a social mobilization and/or communication working group or the expansion of an existing one.
- Initiate the development of the social mobilization component of the 6-month outbreak response

plan document, including details for subnational implementation in high-risk areas and mobile populations, as well as the means for monitoring field activities and budget to cover those activities.

- Finalize C4D community engagement and information dissemination strategies to promote polio and routine immunization.
- Develop and tailor health information products for various target populations/audiences, based on careful assessment of community knowledge, practices, and behaviors.
- Ensure that polio microplans (at least in priority areas) include social data and information on social mobilizers and leaders by the time of the first response.
- Provide support for the training of health workers.
- Help implement the strategic communication response plan, including mass communication plans, as appropriate.
- Undertake in-depth reviews of potential refusals of vaccines or issues of mistrust to be addressed.
- Conduct regular analyses of independent monitoring data and other available resources to identify priority areas and devise social mobilization microplans targeting those areas that incorporate social mobilization indicators within program monitoring indicators.
- Set up social mobilization teams with delegated authorities at the sub-national level, as needed, and oversee the structure until the end of the outbreak with performance monitoring.

External Communication:

- Conduct a media landscape analysis.
- Support the outbreak response team to prepare an external communications strategy, including the engagement with political, religious, and community leaders and other stakeholders.
- Develop polio-related media and external communication packages.
- Identify a media focal person and spokesperson from the government, WHO, and UNICEF.
- Work with partners and government counterparts to conduct a press brief/media release, if appropriate, and update donors and partners on work progress.
- Host weekly calls with WHO polio communications counterparts in country offices, regional offices, and HQ.
- Receive and review all media releases/news feeds related to the outbreak and share with focal points. Target other non-media communication channels that could be more effective in certain settings.
- Update talking points and FAQs, as needed (e.g., with changing epidemiology and ahead of vaccination rounds).

Other:

- Undertake other assignments and responsibilities as requested by heads of country offices, regional directors, and other partners to support the successful response to the outbreak.

ⁱ Global Polio Eradication Initiative, Responding to a poliovirus outbreak, Standard Operating Procedures for a new polio outbreak in a polio-free country, February 2015, Available at <http://www.polioeradication.org/Portals/0/Document/Resources/PolioEradicators/1a.PolioOutbreakGuideline20150220.pdf>