

## CHAPTER 9

# COMMUNICATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

An efficient and effective communications strategy has an important role to play in the successful management of an FMD outbreak. It is essential, therefore, that the strategy and operational elements needed to meet the demands of diverse audiences be unified by clear overall objectives. This chapter details the role of the Animal Health and Welfare Division (AHWD) in the communications process during an outbreak. It complements and should be read in conjunction with Chapter 8, **Public awareness**, which focuses on the role of the Press Office.

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## 1. INFORMATION NEEDS

### 1.1 The communications process will involve:

- capture of information
- analysis and assimilation
- condensing and processing to meet the particular needs of different audiences
- transmission of information.

### 1.2 The primary internal and external audiences are:

- people directly involved in management of the crisis
- elected Government members and other political representatives
- other State and public agencies
- the farming community
- local, national and international media
- key sectors, special interest and professional organisations
- relevant international bodies (EU and OIE) and foreign Governments and administrations
- the general public.

### 1.3 Coherent and efficient communications can have a positive impact on how well the outbreak is managed and on the levels of understanding, co-operation and support received from a wide range of audiences.

The communications strategy must capture key information and deliver it to where it is required quickly, accurately and in ways appropriate to the needs of different audiences. **Whatever the audience being addressed, communications must be consistent in content and tone.**

### 1.4 Information requirements are likely to be most acute in the early phases of the outbreak. The most critical information will be:

- the nature, scale, and location of the disease outbreak(s)
- the evolving situation
- the responses and precautionary measures needed and being taken.

### 1.5 For all external communications (e.g. replies to PQs, press releases etc.) generated by DAF to be authoritative, accurate and timely, the parties preparing the drafts will need consistent access to source information.

### 1.6 To foster support for the various measures being introduced to manage the outbreak they will also need to identify, quantify and communicate clearly the benefits which will accrue to various stakeholders from its successful containment.

## 2. AUDIENCES

AHWD will facilitate communications with and between the following audiences:

### 2.1 *People directly involved in management of the crisis*

This involves the ongoing capture of information from veterinary and other personnel in the field, security intelligence and information from the general public. Following assessment and decisions by Ministers and senior officials, instructions and advice will be transmitted to DAF personnel and others.

### 2.2 *Elected Government members and other political representatives*

It will be necessary to service the information needs of the Government and both Houses of the Oireachtas, as well those of individual national and local public representatives. Meeting these demands will require preparation of briefing notes and other documents for:

- the Taoiseach (including daily notes for the Order of Business)
- the Minister and Ministers of State (and other Ministers from time to time)
- the provision of verbal briefings
- Oireachtas Committees
- Dail and Seanad debates
- replies to Parliamentary Questions
- replies to written representations
- speeches for the Taoiseach/Ministers.

### 2.3 *Other State and public agencies*

It will be important to ensure good two way flows of information between DAF and other Government departments and public agencies to ensure that everyone understands and has the information needed to play their roles in the management of the FMD crisis.

### 2.4 *Farming community*

The farming community is the stakeholder most directly affected by an FMD outbreak and the one whose full co-operation is required to bring it to a successful conclusion as quickly as possible. A range of targeted communications will be required. These will be delivered through meetings, as appropriate, with farmers at local level and ongoing liason between DAF and farmer representative bodies, media releases (in particular to trade press and farming programmes) and public notices.

## 2.5 *Local, national and international media*

Media coverage will have a significant influence on the public's views on how well the outbreak is being managed. This will in turn, have an influence on the level of public support for the steps being taken to bring it to a speedy conclusion. Information will be supplied to the media in the following ways:

- press releases (initially on a daily basis)
- press conferences
- responses to individual enquiries
- interviews
- supplied articles at request of media.

## 2.6 *Key sectors, special interest and professional perspectives*

An FMD crisis will affect different sectors and interest groups in different ways. In particular, the agri-food, travel and tourism sectors, various event managers and sporting bodies will need advice as quickly as possible on the precise implications of an outbreak for them. DAF must be able to provide advice at an early stage on appropriate procedures at locations or premises, on any restrictions on transport of goods or people and on the holding of events.

It is imperative that decisions to prohibit or discourage the staging of an event (e.g. a sports fixture) be taken and communicated immediately to the relevant parties. Such decisions/advice should be accompanied by a clear and reasoned explanation which event organisers and others can use to offset negative reaction from intending participants/spectators.

## 2.7 *Relevant international bodies, other Governments and administrations*

The NDCC Policy Co-ordinator is responsible for all external communications related to an FMD outbreak, including drafting reports to OIE and letters, as necessary, to the Commission, Member States and third countries (See Section 4.2 (b), Chapter 4, **National Disease Control Centre**). All such communications are directed through the office of the Chief Veterinary Officer.

## 2.8 *General public*

The general public must be treated as a partner in the management of the crisis. The public must be told the nature and scale of any threat immediately it emerges and be kept fully informed as the situation evolves. The primary means of achieving this will be through press advertisements, press releases, interviews and briefings. It will also be necessary to establish channels to monitor public opinion and to obtain relevant information from the public on such issues as illegal imports or animal movements. Lo-call telephone help-lines and the Department's Web site will have an important role to play in this.

### 3. STRUCTURAL ARRANGEMENTS

- 3.1 To ensure day-to-day consistency in content and tone of communications to the many audiences it will be necessary to discuss the current position and priorities to be adopted at the daily NDCC review/management meetings. Discussion on these subjects will also be necessary with senior management and the Minister's Office.
- 3.2 AHWD, working closely with the Press Office, will have primary responsibility for generating communications materials. If significant communications originate elsewhere within DAF, AHWD should be made fully aware as soon as practicable. **All communications materials will require appropriate clearance by senior management prior to release.**
- 3.3 AHWD, to fulfil its role in facilitating communications with the parties referred to in section 2 above, will require inputs from the LDCC, NDCC and other DAF divisions, as necessary.
- 3.4 The key points of two-way interaction will be:
- a) *Senior management and Minister's Office* – covering all political and parliamentary communications. AHWD will prepare drafts of speeches, Dail replies, etc.
  - b) *NDCC* – AHWD will liaise with the NDCC Policy Co-ordinator to receive key information and updates, and a representative of the AHWD will attend the daily NDCC review/management meeting. Additional updates will be given to AHWD as appropriate.
  - c) *LDCC* – If the NDCC is unable to satisfy an urgent information request by AHWD, the latter will contact the DVO SVI managing the LDCC directly (or alternative staff member designated by the SVI for this purpose).
  - d) *Press Office* – The AHWD will liaise closely with the HQ Press Office, which will be responsible for managing the overall FMD information programme.
  - e) *Government Task Force* – AHWD will provide relevant information to the DAF representative on the Government Task Force.
  - f) *Expert Advisory Group* – AHWD will prepare draft protocols and other information for the EAG as required.
- 3.5 To ensure efficient and timely internal communications when an FMD outbreak occurs, new confidential mobile phone numbers should be assigned immediately to the Principal Officer, AHWD and other key DAF staff involved in communications activities.
- 3.6 The Press Office and AHWD will produce daily updates on any outbreak for distribution via the DAF intranet to inform all Department staff and to ensure that those involved in managing the crisis have the information they need.