



THIRTY-ONE NEW CHARDON STREET

O'NEILL AND  
ASSOCIATES

Tips for Communicating During a  
Public Health Crisis

## Why this topic and why now?

- The global coronavirus (covid-19) has infected more than 100,000 people worldwide in 105 countries.
- International public health authorities have concluded the virus will continue to spread as efforts are implemented to control its movement.
- The impact is being felt economically. Travel restrictions, safety precautions and behavior adjustments have slowed commerce, impacted financial markets, forced public event and conference cancellations, disrupted schools and other institutions.
- **Employer decisions** that impact employees, their workplaces, customers and clients must be made based on new information that is emerging daily. Sometimes hourly.
- **Communicating effectively and transparently to employees** about a public health threat is critical to maintaining a productive, safe and comfortable workplace.

## Internal communications: Company Policy vs. Company Communications

- **Company policy** regarding a public health threat and decisions that impact policy are **separate from internal company-wide communications**.
- The creation of policy should happen among informed company decision-makers, based on the most current and credible information available.
- **Research** and become educated and updated to better inform your policy.
- **Decide** what factors are important to protect your workplace/workforce.
- **Create** policy to guide company activities/behavior/adjustments to manage the public health threat.
- **Communicate** the policy in clear terms to your workforce and **implement** the policy immediately following.

# Best Practices for Communicating to Employees about a Public Health Crisis

- **Transparency is critical.** You **MUST** have **credibility** with your workforce if your guidance is to be followed and policy decisions embraced.
- **Be proactive wherever possible.** Reactive as necessary. Don't force employees to inquire about critical information you should have already shared. But don't speculate or guess if you don't have reliable information.
- **Establish an information hub or internal resource center specific to the public health crisis.** Create a set timeframe or interval (twice a week, three times a week, once a day, etc.) for sharing related info through a recognizable channel. Include person-to-person conversations as part of the overall communication plan.

# Digital Communications

- It is more important than ever to make sure that you are only spreading information from trusted sources.
- In public health emergencies there is always an abundance of false information being circulated so your organization needs to restrict sharing and retweeting now more than ever.
- Make sure that all website pages that feature public events and event-based updates for your organization take into account that they will serve as de-facto landing pages where visitors will need information about how your organization is dealing with the ongoing crisis. Update your content account.
- Make sure that your social media and communications managers have all of the latest messaging so that they can respond to questions coming in through social media.
- OA Digital offers full community management and reputation and monitoring services to ensure that your audience is properly informed and updated during a crisis.

# Government Relations During a Public Health Crisis

- During a public health crisis, governments at the federal, state and local levels work to ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to limit the spread of an outbreak. They coordinate the overall public health response, integrating non-health entities as appropriate, including law enforcement, utilities, transportation, municipal services and political leadership.
- It is important to understand government's role and how your organization can be a partner in the response. OA's team of government relations professionals maintains extensive relationships with public officials at the federal state and local levels keeping us at the forefront of information.

If you need any help for communications  
or government relations services reach  
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