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BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON MPOX



This tool offers guidance from lessons learned through public health messaging efforts for other infections, to inform current practices and stigma reduction when addressing MPOX.

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Public health messaging is a form of community engagement that aims to provide accurate information regarding prevention, acquisition, and treatment of infections, such as MPOX (formerly monkeypox).

Due to limited public understanding of the transmissibility and cause of MPOX there has been significant stigma for those who acquire the virus. A recent article (2022) discussed similarities and lessons learned from HIV and MPOX stigma to guide stigma-informed preparedness and responses. They argue that stigma and discrimination related to HIV may also occur with MPOX, particularly within the Black community.

Another survey (2022), following the MPOX outbreak in the United States and Western Europe, investigated factors associated with COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and related them to MPOX vaccine hesitancy. The study found 25% of Black Americans surveyed reported vaccine hesitancy. This hesitancy was associated with concerns about vaccine safety, mistrust of the medical system, and perceived lack of vaccine efficacy.

When engaging with the community, public health messages are often directed toward those who have been placed at highest risk for infection, including marginalized genders, men who have sex with men (MSM), racial minority groups, people who inject drugs, and sex workers, there is an imperative to provide greater sensitivity and consideration when generating messaging for these communities. Studies have shown that simple and useful health messaging is most effective in reaching people, particularly those who are at higher risk of becoming infected, have a preexisting condition, or are harder to reach.

This tool offers guidance from lessons learned through public health messaging efforts for other infections, to inform current practices and stigma reduction when addressing MPOX. As much of the existing data targets MSMs and marginalized gender individuals at risk, our tools emphasize practices found effective with those communities:

7 TIPS FOR ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY ON MPOX

- 1 Use clear, concise language:** Public health messages should always be written in a clear and concise manner that is easy for people to understand. Information that is easily grasped and paired with actions to take reduces confusion.
- 2 Use a positive tone:** A positive tone in public health messages can help to reduce fear and anxiety. One's health is personal. Positive messages can encourage people to take proactive steps to protect themselves, rather than reacting out of fear or panic.
- 3 Provide accurate information from a stigma-informed perspective:** Community-directed messages should provide the most accurate and up-to-date information on MPOX, with the understanding that there is significant stigma surrounding this infection. What you share should be based on the latest research and guidelines from public health authorities, and not make any single group feel targeted.
- 4 Use multiple channels of communication:** Using multiple channels of communication can help to reach a wider audience, however some channels may be more effective for specific age groups. Messages can be disseminated through social media, radio, TV, newspapers, community bulletins, and at public gatherings such as nightclubs or Ballroom events. Meet your community where they are.
- 5 Do not underestimate the value of interpersonal communication:** Person-to-person communication, is documented to be the most effective health messaging method. Personal conversations have the greatest effect on health behaviors across all ages. Sharing accurate information publicly within your immediate network, and being willing to talk about MPOX, can decrease misinformation and stigma.
- 6 Address misinformation:** Engage your community in a way that actively addresses misinformation and dispel rumors or myths surrounding MPOX. This can be done by providing accurate and credible information from reputable sources like the CDC.
- 7 Provide compassion:** Offer compassionate understanding to all individuals when discussing MPOX, or any other infection. No person is immune, and no one should be ashamed if they acquire the infection Offer actionable steps that a person can take to receive treatment or protect themselves from MPOX without inducing shame.



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