

## Messages for the Preparedness Phase Countries Neighboring Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea

With the wide-spread outbreak of Ebola in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia, neighboring countries have a unique window of opportunity to prepare their citizens for potential cases of Ebola. Many timely “lessons learned” from affected countries can be applied to communication and social mobilization efforts to prepare citizens while their awareness and concern is high.

Neighboring countries can begin/continue to disseminate messages now that help build trust in authorities, motivate the public to participate in efforts to protect themselves and their community, and decrease the number of people who might “go underground” if they experience Ebola-symptoms in the future.

### Messages should:

*Sow hope, not fatalism (which has, in other affected countries, discouraged people from seeking timely care at health care facilities)*

- Messages can stress what can be/is being done—rather than focus primarily on lethal nature of disease.
- Highlight stories of survivors (may have to draw from other countries) who sought care early, that can also motivate citizens to seek medical care if they, or family members, are experiencing illness.
- *Set expectations*
  - Given the wide-spread outbreak in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone; messages should foreshadow possibility that there may be cases in neighboring countries.
- *Redefine success*
  - Instead of defining success as “no cases” in the future, identify goal as rapidly identifying and isolating cases and contact tracing when/if a case occurs.
- *Build reassurance/confidence in health authorities*
  - Describe concrete authorities are taking to protect people, why these action are necessary, and how they work.
- *Empower citizens*
  - Let them know they have a role to play in keeping themselves and their communities safe.
  - Concretely describe what people can do to “protect yourself, your family, your community.”
    - Make sure that citizens can perform those actions.
    - Identify barriers to performing those actions, and help people to overcome them.
  - In addition to describing how disease is spread, describe how people can protect themselves and their families.
  - Let them know where to go for more information or other resources to protect themselves.

- *Lower fear/stigma of the disease and patients*
  - Highlight experience of citizens who were the subjects of contact tracing, how they were monitored (and when confirmed) how they were free of disease
  - Help people understand how disease is NOT spread.
  - Describe how patients are treated and cared for
  - Highlight stories of survivors
  - Help people understand the process of contact tracing or health monitoring (the more they understand, the less uncertainty and fear).
- *Messages should be developed now for immediate release when/if there is another case.*
  - Create a document incorporating key messages, filling in specifics/that can be released rapidly as press release and situation report to post on Web and other channels.
  - If detected early, identification of the case can be described in public release as evidence that the system of detection, isolation, contact tracing is working.
  - Describe what is happening the patient(s) and how s/he is receiving care (demystify the process--the more understanding of the process, the less fear)
  - If possible, provide information about how the patient is able to be in contact with family/community (cell phone or visits with Protective gear for family). This will lower fear of isolation
  - Explain steps being taken by authorities to protect others from exposure
  - Explain what public can do to protect themselves from further spread of disease.