

Internal and external communication processes have been established to ensure that response to an HPAI outbreak is efficient, effective, and supported by communication. This document provides a brief overview of communications in an HPAI response. Please see the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) *HPAI Response Plan* <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/fadprep> and Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) HPAI [website](#) for more information on HPAI response.

## Communications Objectives

- In an HPAI outbreak, all communications must:
- ◆ furnish accurate, timely, and consistent information;
  - ◆ maintain credibility and instill public confidence in the government’s ability to respond to an outbreak;
  - ◆ minimize public panic and fear; and
  - ◆ address rumors, inaccuracies, and misperceptions as quickly as possible.

## Key Public Messages

Four key messages are conveyed to the public:

- ◆ This detection does not signal the start of a human flu pandemic.
- ◆ We are responding quickly and decisively to eradicate the virus.
- ◆ Properly prepared eggs and poultry are safe to eat.
- ◆ We are safeguarding the food supply.

An additional key message is conveyed to producers:

- ◆ Protect your flocks with good biosecurity practices and be vigilant in reporting signs of illness.

Effective communication during an HPAI outbreak can be carried out and maintained by

- ◆ establishing a network of stakeholders and systems for communication prior to an incident or outbreak;
- ◆ briefing the media, public, industry, Congress, trading partners, and others on the HPAI outbreak status and the actions being taken to control and eradicate the disease;
- ◆ coordinating with Federal, State, and local agencies, Tribal entities, producer groups, and Land Grant University-based Cooperative Extension Services to ensure consistent messaging regarding animal health, public health, and food safety; and
- ◆ assuring consumers that USDA is working on animal health issues, in an informed and timely manner, along with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which is working on any human health issues.

In addition, all communications should highlight the importance of sound biosecurity measures and steps that producers and owners can take to protect against HPAI infection in their own flocks.



## Joint Information Center

Under the Incident Command System (ICS), a Joint Information Center (JIC) is established. During an HPAI outbreak, APHIS LPA and the USDA Office of Communications (OC) staff the JIC.

**The JIC organizes, integrates, and coordinates information to ensure consistent messaging across multiple jurisdictions and disciplines. It includes the plans, protocols, procedures, and structures used to provide public information.**

In the JIC, communications personnel will perform emergency information functions, crisis communications, and public affairs functions. JICs may be established at various levels of government, at incident sites, or can be components of Multiagency Coordination Groups.

## The Role of LPA

During an emergency, LPA will lead and coordinate rapid response efforts. LPA and Veterinary Services manage the development of Q&As, factsheets, and website content about the emergency. LPA ensures that timely and accurate information is communicated to stakeholders, States, international partners, Congressional staff, the media, and the public. LPA will do the following:

- ◆ Develop or implement a plan that outlines key audiences, approved messages, outreach goals, materials needed, and a timeline for notifying audiences.
- ◆ Provide on-site support to train incident staff on approved messages for media response or stakeholder and public outreach.
- ◆ Coordinate with State and industry counterparts to ensure effective communication channels are in place.



**The PIO Role**

The LPA Public Information Officer (PIO) deployed to an incident is typically an APHIS Public Affairs Specialist (PAS). He or she is responsible for helping LPA coordinate effectively with personnel and media on site. The PIO will:

- ◆ Establish and oversee processes for coordinating and clearing public communications.
- ◆ Ensure that an overall unified message is developed and communicated publicly.
- ◆ Coordinate this unified message with the Response Coordinator, LPA and APHIS Management, State Departments of Agriculture, other Federal agencies, and USDA’s OC.

**USDA Office of Communications**

USDA OC will review and coordinate all information programs; maintain the flow of information; provide liaison between USDA agencies, mission areas, other Federal agencies, the mass communication media, State and local governments, and the public; and conduct operations from a JIC in an emergency. When the JIC is activated, the OC or designee may:

- ◆ Send a field PIO who will link back to the JIC in order to support the Incident Command (IC). Upon direction from the JIC, the field PIO represents and advises the IC on all public information matters.
- ◆ The field PIO also handles on-scene media and public inquiries, emergency public information and warnings, rumor monitoring and response, media monitoring, and other functions to coordinate, clear, and disseminate accurate and timely information related to the incident.
- ◆ Actively communicate program project activities to other Federal agencies; the media; State, Tribal, city, and county governments; industry and stakeholders; trade partners; and the general public. USDA will distribute specific messages to the public and to industry stakeholders via broadcast and print media channels.

**USDA OC Outreach and Tactics**

Stakeholder	Tactics
Intergovernmental/ stakeholder outreach	Internal USDA conference call with USDA agency public affairs and mission areas
	Federal Interagency conference call (White House, HHS, Department of the Interior, Department of Homeland Security, White House Homeland Security Council, and Department of State)
	Intergovernmental conference call with local and State governments (including animal health, homeland security, and natural resources)
	Stakeholder conference call with livestock industry groups
	Congressional conference call or personal visits
Media outreach	Conduct press conference with HHS, State representative, and other relevant officials to discuss animal implications, actions being taken, and guidance for the public
	Issue news release
	Issue media advisory listing available resources (b-roll Beta tapes, still photos, Q&As, fact sheets, updated sound bytes via web)
	Establish media briefing schedule to ensure predictable, established lines of communication with reporters to provide updates on management of the outbreak
	Distribute Q&A and fact sheet and post on website
	Provide b-roll tapes upon request (Ames laboratory testing)
	Provide still photos on website (laboratory testing/other)
	Offer updated sound bytes via website
	Monitor media 24/7 to promptly correct misinformation
General public outreach	Distribute public service announcements (PSAs) and sound bytes to radio stations
	Post downloadable PSAs and sound bytes on USDA website

## Training

Having appropriately trained staff is an important part of responding to an HPAI outbreak. LPA is committed to ensuring that a PAS attends and passes ICS courses 100 through 400, 420, and 704 so that they are fully equipped to provide PIO support in the field and Headquarters. LPA staff is trained in risk communications and provide the same training to program experts to help prepare them for becoming agency spokespeople.

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) offers NIMS Communications and Information Management IS-704, which is an interactive computer-based course that introduces students to the Communications and Information Management component of the NIMS. NIMS provides a consistent nationwide template to enable all government, private-sector, and nongovernmental organizations to work together during domestic incidents. Effective emergency management and incident response activities rely on flexible communications and information systems that provide a common operating picture to emergency management/response personnel and their affiliated organizations. Establishing and maintaining a common operating picture and ensuring accessibility and interoperability are the principal goals of the Communications and Information Management component of NIMS. Properly planned, established, and applied communications enable the dissemination of information among command and support elements and, as appropriate, cooperating agencies and organizations.

## External Communications Planning

A PIO will direct external communications. Communication activities for emergency response begin with a press release, press conference, and local media coverage and build as program activities escalate. A PIO will develop an external communications strategy, which the IC must approve before implementation. The plan should include:

- ◆ Designated line and staff responsibilities for the information teams.
- ◆ Internal information verification and approval procedures.
- ◆ Agreements on information release authorities, including who releases what, when, and how.
- ◆ Regional and local media contact list.
- ◆ Procedures to coordinate with field response teams.
- ◆ Designated spokespersons for animal health issues in an emergency.
- ◆ Response team after-hours contact numbers.
- ◆ Contact numbers for emergency response information partners.
- ◆ Procedures to secure needed resources to run the public information and media operation 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- ◆ Agreements and procedures to join the JIC, if activated.
- ◆ Vehicles of information dissemination.
- ◆ Key messages to stakeholder groups.



## External Communications Protocols

### Media

The media desk in the JIC serves as the contact point for all media inquiries regarding HPAI and response activities. If necessary, IC public information staff will liaise with media at a response site. The PIO will use these guidelines for media communication:

- ◆ Give all media equal access to information.
- ◆ Conduct press briefings and interviews when appropriate. Give local and national media equal time.
- ◆ Try to observe media deadlines.
- ◆ Escort media representatives to ensure safety.
- ◆ Record information released and ensure IC has copies.
- ◆ Provide press releases when possible.

### Stakeholder

The appropriate personnel will communicate with animal owners and industry members to keep them informed and promote the health of animals. They should keep lists of important contacts and may become actively involved in supporting response efforts by issuing press releases and distributing information to local law makers, citizen groups, and the media.

### Public

To ensure public good will and reduce suspicion, fear, and anxiety, the general public must be kept informed. The news media will perform that role, but a serious emergency may warrant providing additional information via an 800 number hotline.

### Public Official

State, county, city, and other Federal agencies; area legislators; and affected congressional delegations must be informed of program activities so that they can be responsive to constituent's questions. The PIO will provide updates for local community leaders and other parties.