

The War on COVID: Pandemic Communications in a Government Setting

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TIMELINE

- Jan 20, 2020- First U.S. case
- Jan 29, 2020 – COVID Task Force established
- Jan 20, 2020 –DOD issues first Force Health Protection Guidance
- Feb 28, 2020 – DOD COVID Task Force Established
- Apr 30, 2020 – CDC Advises To Wear Face Coverings
- Dec 09, 2020 - DOD announces DOD COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan and population schema
- Dec 14, 2020 – First vaccines begin in U.S.
- April 19, 2021- All DOD eligible and authorized adults can make a COVID-19 vaccination appointment with their local military treatment facility.

Updated List of Possible COVID-19 Symptoms
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released additional information about possible COVID-19 symptoms.

People with COVID-19 report a wide range of symptoms. Some initial symptoms include fever, cough, and loss of taste or smell.

What You Need to Know:
People with these symptoms, or combinations of symptoms, may have COVID-19:
 Fever
 Cough
 Shortness of breath
 Loss of taste or smell
 Fatigue
 Muscle pain
 Headache
 Sore throat
 Difficulty breathing
 Repeated shaking with chills

This list is NOT all inclusive.
Visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus for more information.

To learn more, visit www.dhs.gov/mhs

The example above represents the early stages of communication about COVID-19 from the MHS. This product focuses on signs and symptoms of the virus.



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COVID-19 – By The Numbers

TRICARE COVID-19 Communications (1 JAN 2020 – 15 MAY 2023)



- 2,579**
Products or Tactics Distributed
- 1,276**
Social Media Posts
- 723**
Updates to TRICARE.mil and MTF Websites (e.g., graphics, videos, content)
- 207**
Internal Products (e.g., videos, leadership messages)
- 144**
Customer Service Blog Posts
- 133**
Emails to Beneficiaries
- 96**
TRICARE Articles

- 19.8M** Email opens (29.4% open rate) and 1.1M link clicks (2.2% click rate) on TRICARE emails
 - ▶ The open rate was at the 80th percentile for federal emails
- 5.6M** Impressions (potential views) and 253K engagements (e.g., comments, likes, shares) on TRICARE social media posts
 - ▶ Impressions on Twitter posts were 24% higher than the average 2020-2022 TRICARE Twitter post
- 2.9M** Pageviews on TRICARE web pages (e.g., COVID-19 landing page, COVID-19 FAQ pages, COVID-19 testing page)
 - ▶ 789K pageviews on the TRICARE.mil vaccine landing page and 123K pageviews on toolkits with turnkey products designed to help partners amplify key messages
- 1.9M** Pageviews on TRICARE articles
 - ▶ The average pageviews were 45% higher than the average TRICARE article in 2020-2022
- 243K** Views on MHS Minute and Got Your 6 videos
 - ▶ The average views were over 120% higher than the average views for similar video series in 2020-2022
- 650+** Customer service community members reached with blog updates
 - ▶ Approximately 15% increase in members reached since JAN 2020

Is It Your Time to Get the COVID-19 Vaccine?

Health Care, Emergency, and Safety Personnel, and Other Essential and Critical Groups

PHASE 1A

- Emergency room, urgent care centers, and first responders (i.e., police, search and rescue, and fire personnel), and Armed Forces Retirement Home residents
- Health care and support personnel at military hospitals and clinics, along with other non-clinical staff authorized to receive vaccine from DoD, who support patient care with a high risk of exposure or potential to interface with COVID-19 positive cases
- Outpatient health care and support personnel, including National Guard and Reserve personnel as well as active duty service members deploying or supporting COVID-19 response operations in Title 10 or Title 32 duty status

PHASE 1B

- National critical capabilities (strategic and nuclear defense forces, homeland defense)
- Personnel preparing to deploy to locations outside of the continental U.S. (OCONUS)
- Personnel preparing to deploy within the next three months, including military civilian and contractors authorized to receive transportation from the DoD
- New! Beneficiaries age 75 or older
- New! Front Line Essential Workers: Education and youth and child services staff sector, eligible defense manufacturing, DoD contractors staff, DoD postal service staff, DoD public transit workers, Commissary and other installation food service or agriculture workers

PHASE 1C

- New! Eligible beneficiaries age 65-74 years
- New! Eligible beneficiaries age 16-64 with increased risk for severe illness as defined by the CDC
- OSD Agencies, field activities, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Space Force, U.S. Coast Guard, and Reserve Component designated as key essential, or mission essential
- DoD Prisoners

Remaining Population

- Healthy uniform personnel, other TRICARE beneficiaries, and those not otherwise mentioned above

Source: DoD Population Schema
www.defense.gov/portals/15/spellright/2020/containers/vaccine-availability/SCHEMA.pdf

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Combatting Vaccine Hesitancy

- Working through Dis/misinformation at all levels
- Continuous Messaging – Repetition of value proposition
- Grassroots – trusted community members must be the conduct of the information
- Vaccine availability/standardization
- Convenience



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Lessons Learned : 6 Ps for Pandemic Communications in Government Setting

- Plan
- Practice
- Promulgate
- Products
- Pace
- Pray



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Plan



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- Do you have one?
- Who has read it?
- Who developed it?
- What is your role in it?
- Who is impacted by it?
- Have additional touch point leads been identified?
- What is your organization's role and responsibility? (beyond the 4 C's of Crisis Communication)
- Have you seriously thought about worse case?

Practice



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- Rehearse with leaders not with only AOs;
- Identify and correct gaps (IT barriers, technology glitches, etc)
- Media Training of SMEs – message must be simple not scientific; mainstream not military

Promulgate

- Information must get down to lowest levels;
- Multiple meetings and agendas must be coordinated and shared (if not a single attendee);
- Synchronization and clarification of confusing and conflicting messages;
- Deal with mis/disinformation



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Products

- Never Enough;
- Social Media;
- SharePoint and Size;
- Synchronization;
- Update



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Pace



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- Resilience;
- Expect long-haul;
- Staffing;
- Time off
- Ensure someone on the team is "outside the daily fight" and thinking strategically;
- De-conflict Battle Rhythm

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Pray

- Never hurts;
- Expect internal losses and the need to address;
- Capture lessons learned and conduct "hot washes" after significant events/response to help for the "next time";
- Communications can't fix operational, administrative or technical issues



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Before the Next Time

- Establish a network of trusted “community” communication agents
- Fill social media gaps
- Develop targeted marketing capabilities
- Accelerate decision making cycle/approval process
- Identify and develop collaborative intragovernmental and international communication tools



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QUESTIONS

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