

# Placing communities at the centre of the Hantavirus response

Operationalizing RCCE for effective  
prevention and control



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## Context



- Complex and fast moving emergency – unprecedented outbreak on a ship
- Affecting many countries and regions
- Significant amount of uncertainty
- Huge media and public interest
- Strong reaction from the public – triggered, post covid trauma



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## The nature of risk: Why communities matter

- This event is not only biomedical in nature.
- Important to remember that beyond the virus, people, families and communities are the ones who carry the burden of infection and response measures.
- Understanding community perceptions, risk communication challenges, the practical realities of those experiencing the disease, including possible stigma or discrimination is essential.
- Because community responses can either amplify harm or strengthen protection — depending on communication, trust, and engagement.

Biomedical / Technical Lens	Social and Community Lens
Exposure pathways	Knowledge and Risk perception
Morbidity and mortality	Fear & uncertainty
Clinical management	Trust in authorities
Isolation and quarantine	Lived experience
Surveillance and detection	Rumours and disinformation
Containment measures	Acceptability and uptake of protective behaviours in context of daily life

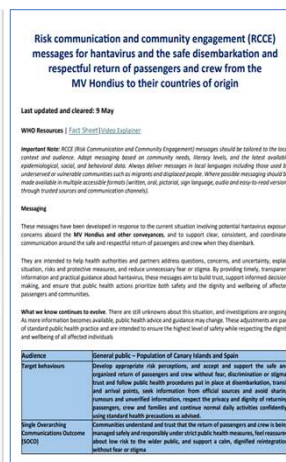


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## RCCE in action – What does this mean in practice

- Sharing lifesaving information
- Shaping the public narrative and appropriate risk perceptions
- Preparing the public for changes in information
- Demonstrating solidarity, and empathy
- Encouraging dialogue and feedback
- Addressing questions and concerns with science and facts
- Managing stigma and discrimination
- Recognizing psychosocial needs of passengers/crew



"As I have said many times: viruses do not care about politics, and they do not respect borders. The best immunity any of us has is solidarity."



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## So what are people saying?

Huge amount of public interest given established public health risk.

Conspiracy narratives significantly outperforming official and mainstream reporting by engagement, particularly narratives involving pharma and political actors.



WHO social listening summary of online conversations 4 – 10 May, 2026



## Top public concerns and online trends – summary May 13

- **Fear of a “New COVID” pandemic:** Despite expert reassurances that hantavirus is fundamentally different, many users are speculating that this outbreak could lead to new lockdowns and widespread illness.
- **The outbreak itself is staged:** Viral posts about the outbreak being predicted have triggered conspiracy theories and false claims the event was staged or “pre-planned”.
- **Long incubation period:** The virus can take 1-8 weeks to show symptoms, creating anxiety over whether returning passengers –and potentially others - are silently infected and spreading the virus.
- **Transmission concerns:** Significant discussion on rare but documented human-to-human transmission and high fatality rate of those infected with the Andes strain leading to significant anxiety about the disease.
- **Lack of Vaccines and Treatments:** Concerns are rising about the absence of an approved vaccine or specific antiviral therapy, leaving limited options for treatment beyond supportive care.

WHO infodemic management insights reports – HQ, EURO, WPRO – May 4 -13

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## Immediate priorities for data and evidence

1. To track public discourse in real time from public communications, social listening data and community narratives, in order to identify signals of concern particularly those that could drive misinformation and stigma. Quality evidence to support responses at all levels.
2. To inform with experience of those directly affected to tailor a people-centred response. It is crucial to understand people affected (including passengers and crew, as well as – at a second layer – family, and close contacts of those affected). These data can help address physical and emotional health needs related both to the outbreak and to the response (e.g. isolation)
3. To learn from national response through a comparative review of how different countries managed direct support to their nationals - from repatriation to quarantine - to document variation, identify good practice, and strengthen coordinated multi-country response frameworks for future events.



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