Communicating science during health emergencies

7 to 25 June 2021

See inside this programme for individual time slots

Geneva, Switzerland
(Virtual)
Ensuring people have the right information at the right time in the right format lowers barriers for individuals to take steps to protect themselves, their families and communities against COVID-19.
Scope & purpose

Background
Since the beginning of the pandemic, the evidence on COVID-19 and related protective measures is continuously evolving. According to one estimate, scientists have published over 200,000 articles about COVID-19 in 2020. The outpour of research studies has been associated with both benefits and risks. On the positive side, the year 2020 has been ground-breaking for science. Extraordinary progress has been achieved at record time in all conceivable areas of the response. On the flip side, researchers, journalists, public health professionals and policy-makers are struggling to keep pace with the sheer number of studies, lacking time to digest and verify new evidence, its added value and limitations. Changing recommendations and pandemic response measures expose the public to high levels of uncertainty and are hence complicated to convey. Increasing pandemic fatigue and an overabundance of (scientific) information highlight the need for effective, innovative and reliable science communication. In addition to the traditional science communicators working in research, policy and the media, the all-disruptive nature of the pandemic demands also other stakeholders like teachers, health professionals or social media influencers to translate science into practice in their daily activities.

Aim
Many good practice examples of science communication have already emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. These innovative solutions represent a valuable resource for the current and future health emergencies. The World Health Organization Information Network for Epidemics (WHO EPI-WIN) organizes a global conference on communicating science during health emergencies to facilitate the solution-oriented discussion of challenges and good practices in health science communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. The insights of the conference will eventually contribute to a repository of good practices and feed into the development of standards for effective science communication during health emergencies. The conference will further present innovative science communication concepts in the areas of (i) science communication for researchers, (ii) science and the media, and (iii) translating science into action.

Objectives

- Convene representatives of the multidisciplinary science communication community to map and address the challenges encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Facilitate the exchange of experiences and lessons learned;
- Identify and collate good practice examples of innovative science communication during the COVID-19 pandemic to inform the development of a set of principles for effective science communication during public health emergencies;
- Create a multidisciplinary network of ‘science communicators’ to be called upon for future science communication activities.

Participants

Participants include science communicators from a broad range of disciplines and areas of work including health, education, journalism and broadcasting, social media and culture, and represent research, policy, civil society and international organizations.

Format

The conference will have public opening and closing panels open for anyone who previously registered online. The remaining conference will be presented through a series of ‘scopes’ open to a limited number of invited participants:

- Scope 1: Engaging in science communication during health emergencies as a researcher
- Scope 2: Connecting science and the media during health emergencies
- Scopes 3 & 4: Translating science into action
  - Scope 3: Science communication during health emergencies for and by decision-makers
  - Scope 4: Perspectives of professionals working in health, culture and education on science communication during health emergencies
OPENING PANEL

Communicating science during health emergencies

7 June 2021

Objectives

- **Highlight the importance of science communication** during public health emergencies
- **Provide an overview of the main challenges of communicating science** during the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Spark a global discussion** about how science communication can become more innovative and effective

Format

- **Open to the public with 5 inspiring keynote presentations** on science communication as integral part of the pandemic response
- **Live transmission** via Zoom and YouTube
- **Session will be recorded** and made available online
- **Anyone can join and listen upon registering** for the event and submit questions
THEMATIC SESSIONS
Communicating science during health emergencies

8 – 24 June 2021

Objectives

- Map challenges in communicating science during the pandemic and discuss solutions to address these
- Facilitate the exchange of experiences and lessons learned
- Identify and collate good practices of innovative science communication during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Identify research gaps and support required for effective science communication
- Create a community of research and practice in science communication

Format

- Conference scopes are by invitation only. Participants will be identified through targeted outreach
- Each scope will bring together stakeholders from similar areas of work and focus on topics, challenges and solutions most relevant to this target group.
- Sessions will be a mix of expert presentations and interactive discussions
Scope themes

Scope 1: Engaging in science communication during health emergencies as a researcher
Publishing and communicating science as researchers (e.g. exploring alternative peer review models to speed up the publication process; engaging in knowledge translation activities through summarizing findings in science briefs, plain language summaries or other formats; how to best communicate with specific audiences; how to deal with uncertainty and continuously evolving evidence)

Scope 2: Connecting science and the media during health emergencies
Distilling science and information sharing as part of the media (e.g. how to respond to the overload of research publications; differentiating between reliable and unreliable information and identifying trusted sources; how to increase science literacy; how to communicate uncertainty; how to respond to rapidly changing information and views; strategies to translate complex information into understandable language)

Scopes 3 & 4: Translating science into action
Scope 3: Science communication during health emergencies for and by decision-makers
Supporting the connection of science and society and basing decisions on evidence (e.g. how to respond to the overload of information; strategies to communicate with and inform the public during health emergencies; communicating uncertainty to the public; managing rumors and misinformation; dissemination of relevant materials adapted to the target audience; developing platforms for communication)

Scope 4: Perspectives of professionals working in health, culture and education on science communication during health emergencies
Managing science communication in everyday life situations (e.g. what can we learn from stakeholders outside the traditional science communication professions; science communication through social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter and Facebook; how to communicate science and uncertainty to children and older people; how to increase science literacy)
CLOSING PANEL
Communicating science during health emergencies

25 June 2021

Objectives

- Present innovative science communication concepts submitted through a public call for good practice examples
- Inform participants and the public about the main lessons learned from communicating science during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Discuss conclusions and next steps

Format

- Open to the public with 5 innovative practice presentations
- Closing panel discussion with representatives from all scopes
- Live transmission recording will be made available online
- Anyone can join upon registering for the event and submit questions
Monday, 7 June 2021, 13:00–16:00 CET

13:00 – 13:05  Opening  
  Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization

13:05 – 13:10  Introduction  
  Sylvie Briand, Director, Global Infectious Hazard Preparedness Department, World Health Organization

13:10 – 13:30  Science journalism needed now, more than ever  
  Shamila Nair-Bedouelle, Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences, UNESCO

13:30 – 13:50  Discussion with the audience  
  Sylvie Briand & Shamila Nair-Bedouelle

13:50 – 14:00  Break

14:00 – 14:20  Drinking from a firehose: The communication of science and risk during a pan- and infodemic  
  Kasisomayajula Viswanath, Lee Kum Kee Professor of Health Communication, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, USA, and Director, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health India Research Center, India

14:20 – 14:40  Demystifying the science behind the COVID-19 pandemic  
  Siouxsie Wiles, Associate Professor, Faculty of Medical & Health Sciences, The University of Auckland - Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau, New Zealand

14:40 – 14:55  Discussion with the audience  
  Siouxsie Wiles & Kasisomayajula Viswanath

14:55 – 15:00  Break

15:00 – 15:20  Trustworthy and useful evidence communication to decision-makers  
  Alexandra Freeman, Executive Director of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

15:20 – 15:40  Communicating science in a pandemic: when social media shapes the public discourse  
  Atila Iamarino, Social Media Science Communicator & Biologist, Brazil

15:40 – 15:55  Discussion with the audience  
  Alexandra Freeman & Atila Iamarino

15:55 – 16:00  Closing & outlook on closing panel  
  Tim Nguyen, Unit Head, High Impact Events Preparedness Unit, World Health Organization
## Scope 1: Engaging in science communication during health emergencies as a researcher

### Tuesday, 8 June

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13:00 – 13:30</td>
<td>Welcome to thematic track &amp; introduction of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:30 – 14:30</td>
<td>Discussion of science communication challenges &amp; solutions encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tuesday, 15 June

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 13:00 – 13:30 | Ensuring scientific quality during health emergencies – going beyond peer-review & open access publications  
**Naomi Lee**, Senior Executive Editor, The Lancet  
**Kamran Abbasi**, Executive Editor, BMJ |
| 13:30 – 14:30 | Guided group discussion                                                  |

### Tuesday, 22 June

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 13:00 – 13:30 | When science communication related to COVID-19 becomes a luxury: Reflections from the Eastern Mediterranean Region/Lebanon  
**Tamar Kabakian, Jihad Makhoul, & Marco Bardus**, Department of Health Promotion and Community Health, American University of Beirut |
| 13:30 – 14:30 | Guided group discussion                                                  |
### Scope 2: Connecting science & the media during health emergencies

#### Wednesday, 9 June

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13:00 – 13:30</td>
<td>Welcome to thematic track &amp; introduction of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:30 – 14:30</td>
<td>Discussion of science communication challenges &amp; solutions encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Wednesday, 16 June

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13:00 – 13:30</td>
<td>Knowledge-based science communication: quality reporting to help understand uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vitalba Crivello, Policy Analyst, European Science-Media Hub (ESMH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vera Novais, Journalist at Observador and Free-lance Science Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kai Kupferschmidt, Science Journalist and Correspondent for Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adeline Marcos, Editor and Science Journalist at Agencia SINC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:30 – 14:30</td>
<td>Guided group discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Wednesday, 23 June

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13:00 – 13:30</td>
<td>Getting the science right – Tackling COVID-19 misinformation for media professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ann Ngengere, Fergus Bell &amp; Tom Trewinnard, Viral Facts (Fathm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:30 – 14:30</td>
<td>Guided group discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scope 3: Translating science into action – Science communication during health emergencies for and by decision-makers

Thursday, 10 June

13:00 – 13:30 Welcome to thematic track & introduction of participants

13:30 – 14:30 Discussion of science communication challenges & solutions encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic

Thursday, 17 June

13:00 – 13:30 Connecting science & society. How to create fora for dialogues with the public
Alice Hazelton, Programme Lead, Science and Society, World Economic Forum
Mirjam Jenny, Head Science Communication Unit, Robert Koch Institute, Germany

13:30 – 14:30 Guided group discussion

Thursday, 24 June

13:00 – 13:45 The role of knowledge platforms in communicating science around decision-making
African Health Observatory - Platform on Health Systems & Policies (AHOP)
Charles Ebikeme, London School of Economics and Political Science
Aminata Seydi, World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa, Integrated African Health Observatory (iAHO)
Prince Agwu, AHOP Nigeria National Centre, Health Policy Research Group, University of Nigeria
Alex Njeru, & Fatuma Guleid, AHOP Kenya National Centre, Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI)
Africa Infodemic Response Alliance
Aurélie Skrobik

13:45 – 14:30 Guided group discussion
Scope 4: Translating science into action – Perspectives of professionals working in health, culture & education on science communication during health emergencies

Friday, 11 June

13:00 – 13:30  Welcome to thematic track & introduction of participants

13:30 – 14:30  Discussion of science communication challenges & solutions encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic

Friday, 18 June

13:00 – 13:30  When communicating science puts you at risk – managing trolls & threats
Atila Iamarino, Social Media Science Communicator and Biologist, Brazil

13:30 – 14:30  Guided group discussion

Thursday, 24 June

13:00 – 13:15  CoronaQuest, a serious game to inform & fight against COVID-19 in classrooms & families
Julien Schekter, Department of Education, Youth & Culture, Canton Vaud, Switzerland

13:15 – 13:30  Strengthening effective communication & basic psychosocial skills among COVID-19 responders
Carmen Valle, IFRC Psychosocial Center Copenhagen, co-Chair IASC MHPSS Reference Group & Fahmy Hanna, Technical Officer, Department of Mental Health and Substance Use, World Health Organization, and co-Chair IASC MHPSS Reference Group

13:30 – 14:30  Guided group discussion
CLOSING PANEL

Moderated by Melinda Frost, Technical Officer, Global Infectious Hazard Preparedness Department, World Health Organization

Friday, 25 June 2021, 13:00–16:00 CET

13:00 – 13:15  Opening
Sylvie Briand, Director, Global Infectious Hazard Preparedness Department, World Health Organization

13:15 – 13:30  Rethinking communication: storytelling in the age of misinformation & disinformation
Elizabeth (Lizz) Ntonjira, Global Communication Director, Amref Health Africa, Kenya

13:30 – 13:50  Alert, not anxious
Mikhail (Doctor Mike) Varshavski, Board Certified Family Medicine Physician and Content Creator, USA

13:50 – 14:05  Discussion with the audience
Elizabeth (Lizz) Ntonjira & Mikhail (Doctor Mike) Varshavski

14:05 – 14:15  Break

14:15 – 14:35  Covid dreams—visual science communications reimagined
Radhika Patnala, Founder and Director, Sci-Illustrate, Germany

14:35 – 14:50  Dear Pandemic: authentic dialogue between scientists and the public as a strategy to address the COVID-19 infodemic
Malia Jones, Researcher, University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Applied Population Laboratory, and Founding Member, Dear Pandemic, USA
Lindsey Leininger, Public Health Scientist, Dartmouth College Tuck School of Business, and Founding Member, Dear Pandemic, USA

14:50 – 15:05  The story about the children’s storybook on COVID-19
Fahmy Hanna, Technical Officer, Department of Mental Health and Substance Use, World Health Organization
Zeinab Hijazi, Senior Mental Health Technical Advisor, Programme Division Director’s Office, UNICEF

15:05 – 15:15  Discussion with the audience
Radhika Patnala, Fahmy Hanna, Zeinab Hijazi, Malia Jones & Lindsey Leininger
CLOSING PANEL

Friday, 25 June 2021, 13:00–16:00 CET

15:15 – 15:35
Using science communication to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic: insights from the thematic discussions of the conference
Charles Ebikeme, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom
Mohamed Elsonbaty, Freelance Science Journalist and Science Communication Consultant, Egypt
Francesca Hartley, Intensive Care Nurse, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, United Kingdom
Mirjam Jenny, Head of Science Communication Unit, Robert Koch Institute, Germany

15:35 – 15:55
Discussion with the audience
Charles Ebikeme, Mohamed Elsonbaty, Francesca Hartley & Mirjam Jenny

15:55 – 16:00
Closing & next steps
Tim Nguyen, Unit Head, High Impact Events Preparedness Unit, World Health Organization

Translate science into action

Illustration by: Sam Bradd