

Behavioural Science for Mpox Prevention Messaging

Guidelines to train frontline workers

Introduction

Understanding behavioural Science for Effective Communication

Behavioural science studies how people make decisions and how they act on them. By applying behavioural insights, we can craft messages that encourage communities to adopt healthier practices. As religious leaders, community leaders, teachers, or health volunteers, you are trusted voices in your communities. Leveraging behavioural science can help you influence your audience more effectively, promoting behaviours that prevent the spread of Mpox.

Key Behaviours to Prevent Mpox Transmission

1. **Avoid Close Physical Contact:** Stay away from people who have a rash, lesions, or blisters, or who show other symptoms of Mpox.
 2. **Do Not Share Personal Items:** Avoid sharing towels, utensils, and other personal items.
 3. **Handwashing:** Practice good hygiene by washing your hands frequently.
 4. **Regular check:** Check on yourself and family members (especially children) to ensure that they are not showing any symptoms.
 5. **Inform and monitor your children:** Make sure that children know not to have physical contact with other children if they are infected. Inform them on the symptoms to look out for and what to do if they notice it.
 6. **Isolate Affected Individuals:** If you or someone in your household has Mpox, report the infection to a health worker, and follow their guidance on isolating in the hospital or at home.
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Engage, listen and understand your audience

It is critical that key influencers, like religious and community leaders, teachers and health workers engage and listen to affected communities to understand what their concerns, perceptions and challenges are in terms of practicing recommended behaviours. These groups should be supported with resources to enable them to answer frequently asked questions

- **Proactively Reach Out:** Reach out, interact and exchange with community members, especially groups more at risk. Identify where the virus might be transmitting the most and try to engage and dialogue with those communities if you are part of their most trusted frontline worker/actor.
 - **Listen to your audience:** Build a rapport and establish a connection by showing empathy and genuine concern. Listen to their issues and understand why they may not be able to adopt the key behaviours. Try to understand how they perceive the virus and what they believe to be the cause or transmission. This knowledge will help guide how you frame your messaging. Listen respectfully without dismissing their feelings.
 - **Prepare Your Messaging:** Tailor your communication to address specific concerns and cultural contexts. Different groups of people are motivated by different things, try to create a set of messages that you can use for different people. Frequently ask for feedback from your audience on the messages you have communicated and adjust accordingly.
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Different framing techniques for your messages

Below are a series of different ways to frame your messages based on research from behavioural science. These are high level suggestions but should be tailored and adjusted for your given context and audience.

Messenger Effect

What It Is: The messenger effect refers to the phenomenon where the credibility and trustworthiness of the communicator influence how the message is received. People are more likely to accept information from sources they trust and respect.

Why It Works: Trusted figures like community leaders or healthcare providers can significantly influence decisions because they are seen as knowledgeable and so their behaviour becomes a reference for a successful life.

How to Apply:

- **Example Messages:** " As a community leader, I've been closely following the advice of health experts, and I want to assure you that simple actions like washing hands regularly and avoiding close contact with those showing symptoms can keep our community safe"
"As a teacher I have been consulting reliable sources such as the site of MoH, WHO posts, to keep me informed on how we can maintain our school safe, ensuring handwashing points have soap and are available in classroom entrance"
- **Tip:** Use your respected status to endorse health recommendations, reinforcing trust and credibility, or refer to someone that the community hold in high regard, e.g. a celebrity.

Incentives

What It Is: Incentives involve highlighting the benefits of taking action or the costs of inaction to motivate behaviour change.

Why It Works: People are motivated by rewards and the avoidance of negative consequences. Emphasizing the personal and communal benefits of preventive actions can encourage compliance.

How to Apply:

- **Example Messages:** "Preventing Mpox is simpler and less costly than treating it. By taking precautions now, you save time and protect your health."
"Getting the vaccine is a free and easy way to you and your family from an expensive visit to the hospital"
- **Tip:** Highlight immediate, tangible benefits and reduce perceived barriers to action.

Social Norms

What It Is: Social norms are the accepted behaviours within a community. People often look to others to determine how to behave, especially in uncertain situations.

Why It Works: Individuals are influenced by the actions of their peers. If they believe that most people are engaging in a behaviour, they are more likely to do the same.

How to Apply:

- **Example Messages:** "90% of families in our community who have had a member contract the virus is reporting their infection, seeking help and limiting transmission."
- **Tip:** Share positive examples and statistics that show widespread adoption of preventive measures. Do not use an example of a behaviour that most people are not practicing as this will have the opposite effect.

Commitment

What It Is: Getting individuals to make a public or private commitment to a behaviour.

Why It Works: People like to be consistent with their commitments. Once they agree to something, they are more likely to act accordingly.

How to Apply:

- **Example Messages:** "Let's all make a commitment to check in with our families daily at breakfast to check if anyone has any signs of symptoms."
"Let's make our village mpox free, by installing public handwashing points at starting a community surveillance monitoring system."
- **Tip:** Encourage them to make a pledge or sign a commitment.

Implementation intention

What It Is: Encouraging people to make a plan or express their intent to take a specific action. This is similar to commitment, but emphasises stating very clear steps to implement the behaviour.

Why It Works: Verbalising or planning an action increases the likelihood of follow-through due to a sense of commitment and consistency.

How to Apply:

- **Example Messages:** "If I feel any symptoms like a rash or fever, then I will immediately isolate myself in [state the room or space] and contact the local health clinic [state where] for advice."
In a school context: "Every morning, at the beginning of classes, I will promote a 5 minute briefing and dialogue on mpox with students."
- **Tip:** Help them set specific goals and offer assistance in planning.

Emotional Appeals

What It Is: Leveraging emotions to motivate behaviour change.

Why It Works: Emotions can be a stronger driver of behaviour than rational arguments. Connecting on an emotional level can inspire action.

How to Apply:

- **Example Messages:** "Imagine the relief of knowing you've done everything you can to protect your loved ones. By following simple health measures, we can all feel that sense of security."
"Our families are our greatest treasure. By taking action now, we are showing our love and care for those closest to us, keeping them out of harm's way."
- **Tip:** Share heartfelt stories or testimonials that resonate emotionally.

Ego

What It Is: Appealing to one's self-image or identity.

Why It Works: People are motivated to act in ways that enhance their self-esteem or align with their desired identity.

How to Apply:

- **Example Messages:** "By taking these precautions, you are being a responsible and caring member of our community."
"By convincing your classmates to join the school mpox activity, you are being a role model for your school community."
- **Tip:** Reinforce their positive self-image when they engage in desired behaviours.

Reciprocity

What It Is: Encouraging action by highlighting the mutual benefits and responsibilities we share within the community.

Why It Works: People are more likely to engage in positive behaviours when they feel they are reciprocating a good deed or supporting those who have helped them.

How to Apply:

- **Example Message:** "Healthcare workers are putting their lives at risk to protect us. By following health guidelines, we're helping them and doing our part to keep everyone safe."
"Volunteers have been working day and night to protect our community. By following the prevention measures, we are contributing to their effort while protecting our community."
- **Tip:** Remind people of the sacrifices others have made and how their actions can give back to the community.

Do's and Don'ts in Pro-Mpox Prevention Communication

Do's

1. **Listen Actively:** Understand concerns without interrupting. Encourage open discussions and invite questions.
2. **Use Positive Reinforcement:** Praise efforts to adopt preventive behaviours. Be empathetic, respectful, and encouraging.
3. **Align with Cultural Values:** Frame messages in a way that resonates culturally and religiously.
4. **Stay Informed:** Keep up to date with health guidelines to ensure accurate information.

Don'ts

1. **Don't Dismiss Concerns:** Avoid dismissing, making fun or ignoring fears.
2. **Don't Use Fear Tactics Excessively:** Overemphasis on risks can cause panic or resistance.
3. **Don't Overwhelm with Data:** Too many statistics can confuse or bore your audience.
4. **Don't Repeat Myths:** Repeating false information, even to debunk it, can reinforce it.
5. **Don't Generalize:** Address the specific situation and needs of your community.

"This material is developed by UNICEF for the use for public health and community engagements professionals. We recommend it to be tailored for each context."