



Advice for Media during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Emergency Broadcasting Guidelines in a Pandemic

This internal guidance was produced by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to help ABC content makers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ABC International Development is sharing this guidance in case it is useful for adaptation by other media organisations in our region.

Please remember that this guidance is not official medical or legal advice and should not be treated as such. Any advice must be adapted to local country contexts, taking account of your government's laws, rules and guidelines. In the event of a conflict between this guidance and local laws, the local laws will prevail. This guidance should not replace official advice from your usual sources of health or legal information.

The Scenario

An outbreak of an infectious disease is spreading across multiple countries. Authorities have implemented pandemic management plans. Targeted actions are likely to include encouraging social distancing, movement and travel restrictions, bans on mass gatherings, school closures, self-isolation within the home and quarantine. The outbreak may last for many months.

A severe pandemic is likely to cause widespread disruption to social and economic life with impacts on food and medical supplies, transport, fuel, utilities, accommodation, entertainment, the finance and business sectors, animals and livestock, as well as the management of mass casualties.

Minimum Standards

When authorities begin to take targeted action, the local media station should begin regular daily health information updates, signposted with a Health Info Alert sting to gain audience attention.

Updates on all platforms should maintain a calm tone and concentrate on crucial information. Frequent use of casualty numbers and new cases could increase panic.

These updates should increase in frequency as the threat and disruption to life becomes more severe and localised:

Level 1

- Updates scheduled in peak time programs (e.g. morning and evening)
- Play one Community Service Announcement (CSA) per program

Level 2

- Updates scheduled three-hourly
- Play one CSA per update and per program

Level 3

- Updates scheduled hourly into programs (including at peak audience times)
- Play CSAs hourly
- Local editorial leaders consider rolling coverage when:
 - information is changing rapidly
 - multiple regions/cities are severely disrupted
 - news is breaking
 - there is a high volume of advice/warnings

For ALL levels

- Refer to senior editorial staff to adjust updates times and frequency on editorial judgement, including stopping coverage when audience is well informed
- Local and networked programs should also broadcast press conferences featuring Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Medical Officers (or equivalent)

Social

Pin posts to top of local pages where significant outbreaks are occurring and/or there's a need for crucial information. All other content posted on editorial value.