

Communicating Disease Information

Humans were affected by disease long before any written records were kept. Some prehistoric cultures developed a rich store of knowledge about illnesses that affected their people and primitive treatments to alleviate symptoms. This knowledge was often passed from one generation to the next orally.

Today, there is an incredible array of diagnostic tools, treatments, and knowledge available to healthcare providers and patients. Communication flows almost instantaneously across the globe, connecting researchers and physicians in a worldwide network that promotes awareness, prevention, and treatment of disease in a way that never existed before. Why, then, does disease continue to be part of human life? As world population increases, more people are confined to smaller areas. This overcrowding, particularly in large cities, can lead to poor sanitation and more rapid spread of disease. Increases in the human population can cause changes in insect populations and can increase our exposure to insects that carry certain diseases. Food-borne illnesses are still causing problems in most of the world. And as worldwide travel increases, the spread of disease from continent to continent becomes unavoidable. Finally, some diseases cannot be treated or cured because the pathogens continually mutate and are resistant to conventional medicines.

In this activity, you will work with a team to research a newly identified or reemerging disease. You will create a television advertisement, radio announcement, or billboard as part of a public-education campaign designed to teach people about the disease.

OBJECTIVES

Gather information about a particular emerging or reemerging disease.

Summarize key facts about a disease, including causes, symptoms, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment.

Create a television advertisement, radio announcement, or billboard to educate the public about a disease.

MATERIALS

- markers
- poster board (to produce billboard)
- recording device (tape recorder to produce radio announcement, video recorder to produce television advertisement)
- research materials (access to Internet, library resources)

Procedure

1. Your group will research a disease that affects humans. The disease you are assigned might be a new, or emerging disease, or a reemerging disease that is once again a public health problem.

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2. Use a variety of research materials to learn about the disease. Consider dividing research among group members. Record your findings in Table 1.

TABLE 1: DISEASE INFORMATION

Name and description of the disease	
Epidemiology of the disease	
Cause(s) of the disease	
Recent outbreaks (severity, location)	
How is the disease transmitted?	
Signs and symptoms of the disease	
How is the disease diagnosed?	
How is the disease treated?	
How can the disease be prevented?	
Other important information	

3. Reconvene the group, and share information gathered. As you discuss what you have learned, consider possible ways to share the information with others.

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- 4.** The goal of a public advertising campaign is to educate citizens about a particular topic. People are reached through methods that include television advertisements, radio announcements, and billboards. It is important to provide information without creating fear or panic. With your team, choose a forum to educate others about the disease you have researched. To be effective, your advertisement should be interesting and informative, stressing disease prevention. You do not have to include all of the information you have gathered.

Analysis

- 1. Describing Events** How difficult was it to find information about the disease? Identify the sources of information that were most helpful to you.

- 2. Examining Data** In what parts of the world is this disease most prevalent? Based on your research, how great a threat does this disease pose to citizens of the United States?

Conclusions

- 3. Drawing Conclusions** From what you have learned, who should be your target audience, and how important do you think it is to educate them about this disease? Why?

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4. Applying Conclusions Based on your research, make a prediction about the status of this disease in the next five years. What are the chances that it might spread beyond the areas in which it is now located? Can preventive measures, if used effectively, keep the disease under control or even eradicate it? Are new treatment options on the horizon?

5. Evaluate Methods Evaluate the effectiveness of the method your group used to educate the public. Could the information have been presented more effectively in a different way? Why do you think advertisers use a variety of ways to present information in a public education campaign?
