

Hidalgo County



Appendix 2: Communication Plan

April 2023

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Table of Contents

Record of Change	iii
Approval and Implementation.....	v
Authority.....	vii
Purpose.....	vii
Explanation of Terms.....	vii
Acronyms.....	vii
Definitions	vii
Situation & Assumptions	vii
Situation	vii
Assumptions	viii
Concept of Operations	viii
General	viii
Information Call System.....	ix
Telephone – Common Carrier.....	ix
HCHHSD News Media Relations.....	x
Activities by Phases of Emergency Management for Health Staff Under ESF-8.....	x
Continuity of Operations	xi
Existing Communications Systems	xii
Staff Notification/Roles and Responsibilities.....	xii
Information Flow	xii
Public Information Procedures	xiii
Emergency Notifications	xv
Organization & Assignment of Responsibilities.....	xvi
Organization.....	xvi
Assignment of Responsibilities	xvi
Direction & Control	xvii
Levels of Readiness.....	xvii
Reporting.....	xviii
Maintenance and Preservation of Records.....	xviii
Facilities and Equipment.....	xix
Communication Protection.....	xix

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Coordination and Control

Trainingxix
Supportxix
Plan Development & Maintenancexix
Attachmentsxx

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Approval and Implementation

Appendix 2: Communication Plan

This appendix is hereby approved for implementation and supersedes all previous editions.

Eduardo Olivarez
Director, Health & Human Services

Date

Ricardo Saldaña
Emergency Management Coordinator

Date

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Authority

The Hidalgo County Commissioner's Court has the authority to approve and implement the Public Health & Medical Services Plan. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan includes 12 appendices. The County Commissioner's Court approved the Public Health & Medical Services Plan on [REDACTED], 2023. This plan aligns with the County's Emergency Basic Plan, ESF-8: Public Health that was approved by the County Commissioner's Court on September 7, 2021.

Purpose

The purpose of the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan is to provide processes that will supplement and integrate with the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department communication system. Emergency preparedness is crucial to minimizing the negative effects to public health in the event of a bioterrorism attack or public health emergency. During these situations, most information and safety instructions are given through traditional media (i.e., television, radio, and print) and through local emergency agencies. For some individuals, however, additional measures are required. These hard-to-reach populations may need alternative alert systems, nontraditional means of communications and additional instruction or assistance.

The primary goals are to immediately address any public health issues that could result in deaths or injury during the emergency; to coordinate and support all community healthcare organizations to assist victims or vulnerable populations; and to ultimately restore normal public health and community medical services as soon as possible.

As the public health authority for Hidalgo County, HCHHSD also takes part in regional emergency planning efforts, such as the Texas Homeland Security Strategic Plan under the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC). This collective effort brings emergency resources together for three counties in south Texas.

Explanation of Terms

Acronyms

See the Public Health and Medical Services Plan, Explanation of Terms.

Definitions

See the Public Health and Medical Services Plan, Explanation of Terms.

Situation & Assumptions

Situation

1. Public information and rumor control are vital to help the public deal with an emergency, avoid panic, and maintain the public's cooperation.

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Coordination and Control

2. Bioterrorism, other infectious disease outbreaks, and other public health threats and emergencies are considered highly sensitive issues.
3. Negative effects may arise within individuals who experience a disaster firsthand as survivors or observers (i.e., anxiety, depression, family disruption and violence, substance abuse, absenteeism, and other related physical and mental health symptoms). This can adversely affect public health and a top priority is educating the public to allay people's anxiety and fear to prevent negative public health outcomes.
4. A reliable communications system is essential to obtain and share information during emergency situations and to direct and control our resources responding to those situations.
5. The Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department, 1304 S. 25th Avenue, Edinburg, Texas 78539 operates a 24-hour on call telephone contact number 956-318-2432, which is to be used for emergency notification of public health threats to the community from local, regional, or state stakeholders.
6. Maintaining the binational public health collaborations between HCHHSD, Jurisdiction IV, and other Mexican public health partners is vital to continue to serve the public health needs along the border and within our community, and to effectively respond to binational cases, public health infectious disease outbreaks, natural/man-made disasters, and exercises/drills.
7. The County is at risk of different hazards that could threaten personal safety and property, public health, and government safety, as well as property.
8. The County of Hidalgo Dispatch/Communications Center is located in Edinburg, Texas. It is staffed on 24-hour basis by Hidalgo County Police Department dispatchers. Equipment is available to provide communications necessary for emergency operations.
9. The HCHHSD PHEP program maintains a CERC Plan that provides processes for receiving and issuing communications concerning threats to public health on a 24/7 basis.

Assumptions

1. Adequate communications are available for effective and efficient warning, response, and recovery operations.
2. Any number of natural or manmade hazards may neutralize communications currently in place for emergency operations.
3. Any number of natural or manmade hazards may partially or completely disrupt communication systems currently in place for emergency operations.
4. Additional communications equipment required for emergency operations will be made available for citizens, business, volunteer organizations, and/or other governmental agencies.

Concept of Operations

General

The Hidalgo County Sheriff's Department has a network consisting of telephone, teletype, and radio facilities that will serve to perform the initial and basic communication efforts for emergency operations, internal and external.

During a disaster, emergency condition, or an act of terrorism event, the HCHHSD via Hidalgo County Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) will coordinate and deliver risk communication and public health information to the public through every available channel, including the media (through the JIC), Hidalgo County website, HCHHSD phone bank, community meetings, distributed flyers and through partners and stakeholders.

Information Call System

The Hidalgo County EMC has a system that will handle incoming public calls during an emergency from the County EOC. If the system is overloaded, calls are sequenced to the four county precinct offices. All inquiries are filtered to the County EOC and are handled depending on the urgency of the call.

All caller information (i.e., name, phone number, date, and time of call) is documented using a data collection system tied into the EOC (WebEOC) so that EOC staff can monitor inquiries and progress and conduct rumor control. The data collection system can generate call log reports for EMC.

Call center and EOC staff have access to call history information and call notes that allows each operator to have information necessary to respond to questions and document actions.

Telephone – Common Carrier

1. Overloaded Circuits

To avoid overloaded circuits during emergencies, citizens will be advised to listen to EAS for information and to use telephones only if they have a genuine emergency. If overloaded circuits do become a problem, coordination with the current HCHHSD phone carrier company will begin immediately to restore priority circuits.

2. Emergency Service

During major emergencies, a direct line to the Communications Center is activated in the EOC for emergency service calls.

- a. The County of Hidalgo operates the Emergency Notification System utilizing First-Call Network, Inc. technology. This system is used to relay information to the community for those who have subscribed to receive communications.
- b. In addition, the HCHHSD will activate a hotline to handle public calls during an emergency. The hotline would consist of at least four (4) lines operated by HCHHSD staff and first responders to answer questions from the public and/or to provide guidance to medical providers during extended hours of operation.
- c. If the volume of calls overwhelms the HCHHSD hotline, the public would be advised to call 211 or 311 for information. If this were to occur, Hidalgo County staff would be in constant contact with 211 administrators in order to provide accurate information and guidance.
 - If a hotline could not be established in a timely fashion, 211 would serve as the official phone bank during the emergency.

HCHHSD News Media Relations

During a bioterrorism event, infectious disease outbreak, and other public health threats and emergencies, HCHHSD's open-door media procedure is suspended, and the following procedures apply:

All news media inquiries on bioterrorism, other infectious diseases, and public health threats and emergencies, including requests for participation on radio and television talk shows and other programs, must be directed to the HCHHSD Director. The HCHHSD Chief Administrative Officer will:

- a. Provide the information requested, or
- b. Arrange an interview with the appropriate HCHHSD staff, or
- c. Refer the reporter to another source, or
- d. Decline the request.

Once a reporter is referred to the HCHHSD Director, the referring staff member must not communicate with the reporter until hearing directly from the HCHHSD Director, regardless of how many times the reporter calls back. The Director will establish general policies for HCHHSD communications equipment and perimeters for when information should be shared with and who is authorized to receive and/or share information to stakeholders and partners.

During emergency operations, all HCHHSD departments will maintain their existing equipment and procedures for communicating with their field operations units. They will keep the health EOC informed of their operations and status at all times.

A common operating picture within our jurisdiction provides the framework of our communications capabilities. This framework is made possible by interoperable systems. Extensive communications networks and facilities are in existence throughout Hidalgo County to provide coordinated capabilities for the most effective and efficient response and recovery activities.

Activities by Phases of Emergency Management for Health Staff Under ESF-8

1. Prevention
 - a. Maintain a current technology based reliable, interoperable, and sustainable communications system.
 - b. Ensure warning communications systems meet jurisdictional needs.
 - c. Ensure intelligence and other vital information networks are operational.
 - d. Ensure integrated communications procedures are in place to meet the needs and requirements of Hidalgo County.
2. Preparedness
 - a. Review and update the Public Health and Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan.

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Coordination and Control

- b. Develop communications procedures that are documented and implemented through communications operating instructions (include connectivity with Sheriff's Office, Office of Emergency Management, local cities, and nongovernmental organizations).
 - c. Thoroughly and continually review the system for improvement, including the implementation and institutionalized use of information management technologies.
 - d. Ensure communication requirements for the Emergency Operations Center and potential Joint Information Center (JIC) are regularly reviewed.
 - e. Review After-Action Reports of actual occurrences and exercises and other sources of information for lessons learned.
 - f. Ensure the integration of mitigation plans and actions into all phases of emergency management, as applicable.
 - g. Acquire, test, and maintain communications equipment.
 - h. Ensure replacement parts for communications systems are available and make arrangement for rapid resupply in the event of an emergency.
 - i. Train personnel on appropriate equipment and communication procedures, as necessary.
 - j. Conduct periodic communications drills and make communications a major element during all exercises.
 - k. Review assignment of all personnel.
3. Response
- a. Select communications personnel required for emergency operations according to the incident.
 - b. Ensure incident communications follow ICS standards and are managed by the IC using a common communications plan and an incident-based communications center.
 - c. Ensure documentation of emergency public information and warning communications is completed according to the NIMS Incident Command System structure.
 - d. Ensure HCHHSD maintains a record of emergency notifications through WebEOC, as internal record-keeping forms.
 - e. Ensure all incident management entities make use of common language during emergency communications. This will reduce confusion when multiple agencies or entities are involved in an incident.
 - f. Ensure emergency equipment repair on a 24-hour basis.
 - g. Initiate warning procedures, if required.
4. Recovery
- All activities in the emergency phase will continue until such time as emergency communications are no longer required or instructed by Hidalgo County Office of Emergency Management

Continuity of Operations

Each department is responsible to establish a line of succession for communication with staff/personnel.

Existing Communications Systems

1. Local Networks
 - a. Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office
 - b. EOC

Staff Notification/Roles and Responsibilities

Once notification of a public health incident or emergency is received by the HCHHSD Director, the EMC will be contacted and notified of the health event. HCHHSD is prepared to activate the Health EOC upon notice of activation and notify response staff immediately. HCHHSD staff operate under the direction of the Director in coordination with the EMC and Medical Health Authority, if applicable, to determine the response level required.

The Director, or designee, would then initiate a call-down as per the 24/7 Call-Down Organizational Chart for functional staff to report to duty. The Director's Call-Down message (phone or text) would contain a brief incident description and the designated reporting site (primary Health EOC or incident site, as requested by Incident Commander). Based on the incident and the directives from the Incident Commander at the site, the team would report as indicated in the Call-Down message. If the Primary Health EOC is not safe or suitable to perform Emergency Operations, the Secondary Health EOC would be used. The Secondary Health EOC would be identified by the EMC, in accordance to the incident and considering the safety and security of responding staff.

Staff in the Call-Down would include PHEP Staff, Epidemiologist and Surveillance staff, Clinical staff, the Information Technology Department, and other HCHHSD support staff. Staff not required to report are placed on 'Standby.' Staff must acknowledge the receipt of the Call-Down notice immediately and have one (1) hour to report to the designated site for the situational awareness Operations Briefing for responders. Should a member of the Command staff not be available to respond, the next available staff in the tiers (primary, secondary, tertiary) will be utilized.

Each Section Chief will provide Just-In-Time training to their branch directors and unit leaders, as needed, using Job Action Sheets.

HCHHSD maintains a list of all department staff on file and all staff are required to maintain an updated list for their reference and usage. HCHHSD uses mobile phones, voice calls and text messages, as the primary method of contacting staff during an incident; E-mail notifications act as the redundant communication method.

Information Flow

During emergency situations, communications will be maintained between local Hidalgo County EOC, HCHHSD, other local health departments, local medical community, healthcare providers, DSHS-HSR 11, DSHS Austin-State, with the support of the DDC, and other stakeholders, as appropriate for a specific emergency. This will include the

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Coordination and Control

dissemination of public information for the County vulnerable populations during a public health emergency. Special considerations for barriers such as language, cultural diversity, and disability or literacy will be taken to ensure that the largest possible number of residents receive information.

The Communications Coordinator will establish redundant methodologies within 12 hours using the equipment or systems below:

- i. Primary: WebEOC (Fusion Centers)
- ii. Primary: Public Health Information Network (PHIN)
- iii. Primary: Social Media Platforms (Twitter, Facebook)
- iv. Secondary: 800 Mhz Radios, HAM Radios, Hand-Held Radios
- v. Tertiary: Communication Trailer/Mobile Phones
- vi. Quaternary: Physical message delivery to sites

HCHHSD conducts communications exercises and test its communications platforms to ensure operability. HCHHSD works with stakeholders and other partners during exercises or public health events to ensure that common communication methods can operate in conjunction with each other and barriers to communication are identified and addressed (i.e., out of date equipment, equipment requiring repair).

Public Information Procedures

Depending on the situation, a Joint Information Center (JIC) may be formed to make sure the information reaches a majority of county residents; multiple JIC locations will be used when circumstances of the incident require it. The Hidalgo County JIC includes the County PIO and the HCHHSD PIO. The final release authority in a multiple JIC system is the County PIO. In the event a JIC may not be established in a physical location (EOC), PIOs will use the WebEOC platform (as set up by Hidalgo County Emergency Management) to maintain communication with JIC representatives. The JIC includes representatives of each jurisdiction, agency, private-sector entity, and nongovernmental organization involved in incident management activities. The JIC enhances information coordination, reduces misinformation, and maximizes resources by co-locating PIO's as much as possible. With the JIC in place, special emphasis will be placed on reaching the county's vulnerable populations in urban and rural settings.

The process of getting information to the public during an incident involves gathering information from the incident site, incident command, call centers, and monitoring media to identify trends and issues. The JIC verifies the information collected by consulting other PIOs in the JIC, EOC sources, and PIOs in the field. Information is then coordinated between PIOs in the JIC to establish key messages to ensure consistency and to obtain approval from those in authority to ensure that the information is accurate, complete, and current. The dissemination of information to the public involves interviews, public service announcements, coordinated radio and television messages, and community meetings conducted by field PIOs provided with talking points and flyers. The JIC will monitor media

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Coordination and Control

response and coverage to ensure that messages disseminated were understood and reported accurately to the public.

The JIC will be staffed and configured to meet the needs of the incident. Regardless of the number of PIOs and the scope of the operation, the JIC will be organized so that it can effectively get information to the public and may include the following sections:

- a. JIC Management: includes the positions of the lead Public Information Officer (PIO), deputy lead PIO, and JIC Coordinator. Should the event require extended operational periods or require a large number of staff to effectively disseminate information, support staff will be assigned to the PIO to conduct necessary research, on-going media operations, and any administrative duties as applicable; the PIO will submit an ICS Form 213 – Resource Request form to request additional staff, as needed.
- b. Lead Public Information Officer: advises Incident Command on matters related to public information and directs the overall public information effort. The lead PIO also manages the Joint Information Center (JIC).
- c. Deputy Lead PIO: assists the lead PIO to ensure that all JIC functions are operating efficiently. As directed, the deputy lead represents the lead PIO as needed and assumes responsibilities of the lead PIO, as assigned.
- d. JIC Coordinator: supervises daily operations of the JIC, executes plans and policies as directed by the lead/deputy lead PIOs. The JIC Coordinator provides direction and support to the JIC staff to ensure that all functions are operating efficiently and establishes internal communications procedures.

If necessary, a Public Inquiry Center (PIC) will be activated, under the direction of the lead PIO, to respond directly to questions from the public using trained operators. The PIC serves a dual purpose: It disseminates information by responding to requests from the public, and it gathers information by identifying trends, inaccurate information, misunderstandings, or misperceptions reported by the public or reflected by their inquiries.

The Information Gathering and Analysis Section may include the following functions:

1. News Analysis and Media Monitoring
2. PIO Liaison Operations

The Information Coordination and Production Section may include the following functions:

1. Research and Writing
2. Photo Documentation
3. Graphics and Production

The Information Dissemination Section may include the following functions:

1. Media Relations

2. Field PIO Operations
3. Demographics and Media List Development

The Administration and Logistics Section includes the JIC administrative support function and is largely responsible for the documentation of JIC activities and products. Documentation includes:

- Draft, revised, and final news releases and Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
- Approval records (signoffs) of all products
- Media contact logs
- Newsclips
- Videos of televised interviews and other coverage
- Photographs
- Copies of all products (i.e., talking points, backgrounders, briefing booklets, news conference agendas, flyers)
- Staffing information (i.e., contact information, assignments)
- Copies of legal notices

The Medical Health Authority, working in conjunction with the EMC, the County PIO, and the HCHHSD Director, will direct and control the public release of information regarding incident-specific health alerts/threats, continuity of operations and recovery, orders for isolation or quarantine, and instructions for vulnerable populations. The EMC, along with the PIO, will designate times set by the operations battle rhythm, and methods for release of information to the public. For trainings for the PIO, see *Appendix 12: Workforce Development Plan*.

Emergency Notifications

Emergency notifications and alerts are pre-written templates and are on file at the HCHHSD. The emergency notification templates must be reviewed and approved by the Director in coordination with the EMC and the Medical Health Authority prior to use to ensure that templates are consistent, clear, and specific.

In an actual incident or emergency, the HCHHSD follows the NIMS ICS for the approval and dissemination of messages to the public by the PIO. HCHHSD staff in coordination with the County PIO update the media contact list on a bi-annual basis, or as needed, to ensure that it is accurate. An electronic copy of the media contact list may be found on the HCHHSD shared drive.

HCHHSD will coordinate with local 2-1-1, radio and television stations, Public Health Information Network (PHIN), and other media outlets (i.e., Twitter, Facebook) to ensure that notifications are sent and received timely according to reporting standards and protocols.

Notifications will be sent to the public, including provisions for the vulnerable and at-risk populations within the jurisdiction (i.e., hearing and vision-impaired, and other populations, as defined in the *Public Health and Medical Services Plan*).

Organization & Assignment of Responsibilities

Organization

The emergency communications system is operated by HCHHSD and includes a variety of equipment. HCHHSD will ensure that warning information received at warning point will be disseminated to county officials, Sheriff's Office, Public Relations Office, Office of Emergency Management, and where appropriate, to the public. The responsibility of ensuring the communications system is operational and incorporates all available resources rests with HCHHSD, who may appoint a Communications Coordinator to carry out this task. HCHHSD will plan and carry out public health and medical operations during all-hazards emergency situations.

HCHHSD functions as the local Medical Authority. HCHHSD has primary responsibility for health and medical services and shall designate its Director to plan and coordinate these services during emergency situations. The Director or designee shall serve as a member of the EOC and will coordinate the public health response through the IC. Large-scale health and medical efforts shall also be coordinated from the EOC.

Upon receipt of official notification of an actual or potential emergency condition, it is the responsibility of the Director in conjunction with the Medical Authority and the EMC to receive and evaluate requests for health and medical assistance and to notify all other public health, medical, and mortuary services, as needed.

During emergency situations, communications will be maintained between the Health EOC and the County EOC and will include, if needed, DSHS Region 11 and DDC. When involving multiple agencies and/or jurisdictions, normal speech will be used to insure comprehension. In addition, local time will be used during transmissions.

Assignment of Responsibilities

1. HCHHSD Director will:
 - a. Ensure that warning information received is disseminated to appropriate city, counties, regional and state officials and to the public when appropriate.
 - b. Supervise the Communications Coordinator.
 - c. Request assistance from Office of Public Relations for PIO support, if needed.
 - d. Approve the following communication procedures:
 - ii. Warning to general population, including the functional needs population.
 - iii. Communication developed.
 - iv. Development of procedures for the dissemination of public health messages.
 - v. Communication with the County, City/Cities PIO, and EMC.
 - vi. Procedures for the continuous communication during the emergency.

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Coordination and Control

- vii. Development and maintenance of a communication resource inventory.
 - viii. Communication capacity between HCHHSD, RMOC, EOC, and DSHS HSR 11.
 - ix. All activities enumerated in this appendix, *Activities by Phases of Emergency Management for Health Staff Under ESF-8*.
2. Communications Coordinator will:
- a. Establish communications network to link public health, emergency management, healthcare providers, hospitals, and law enforcement within 12 hours.
 - b. Coordinate common communication plan for devices (i.e., hand-held radios, 800 MHz radios, mobile phones).
 - c. Develop and maintain a communications resource inventory.
 - d. Ensure communication restoration procedures are developed.
 - e. Ensure that the mobile Communication Trailer is operational, and equipment is tested monthly.
 - f. Ensure procedures are in place for dissemination of message traffic (i.e., coordinating radio frequencies).
 - g. Include HCHHSD amateur radio operators (HAM) in the communications network.
 - h. Maintains SOPs to include message-handling procedures and recall rosters for essential personnel. HCHHSD employees are provided a copy of the Notification Organization Chart containing names, titles, phone numbers, and details the flow of communications during notification/activation and is updated on a quarterly basis before and after drills.
3. Medical Health Authority will:
- a. Direct and coordinate the efforts of local health and medical services, agencies, and organizations during major emergencies and disasters requiring coordinated communication response.
4. Radio Operators (HAM) will:
- a. Ensure proper use and maintenance of the equipment.
 - b. Ensure correct message handling procedures are taken, including routing of all incoming messages, and logging all incoming and out-going messages.
5. PIO will:
- a. Monitor commercial radio and telephone broadcasts for accuracy of public information.
6. HCHHSD personnel will:
- a. Follow all procedures outlined in this Appendix.

Direction & Control

Levels of Readiness

Response activities will occur depending on level of readiness. The response time for the readiness levels identified will depend upon the specific emergency or outbreak and upon the direction of the Texas DSHS and the CDC, in coordination with HCHHSD. The HCHHSD follows the *DSHS Notifiable Conditions List* for specific disease response

times. Additionally, HCHHSD follows the *DSHS Emergency and Acute Infectious Disease Guidelines, January 2022*, which provides instructions on managing special situations, reporting guidelines and timeframes, an action checklists. Refer to *Appendix 9: Epidemiology and Laboratory, Attachment 1: Disease Reporting* for further information.

Readiness Level IV – Normal Conditions

Refer to the prevention and preparedness activities listed under Activities by Phases of Emergency Management for Health Staff Under ESF-8 within this document.

Readiness Level III – Increased Readiness

- a. Alert key personnel.
- b. Check readiness of all equipment and facilities and correct any deficiencies.
- c. Test equipment (i.e., radios, internet).

Readiness Level II – High Readiness

- a. Alert personnel for possible emergency duty.
- b. Monitor situation of possible issuance of warning or alerts.
- c. Develop Communication Plan (ICS Form 205).
- d. Review pre-develop messages from CERC Plan.

Readiness Level I – Maximum Readiness

- a. Institute 24-hour operations.
- b. Conduct periodic communication checks.

Reporting

In addition to reports that may be required by their parent organizations, health and medical elements participating in emergency operations should provide appropriate situation reports to the Incident Commander, or if incidents command operation has not been established, to the Medical Health Authority in the EOC. The IC will forward periodic reports to the EOC.

Pertinent information from all sources will be incorporated into the Initial Emergency Report and the periodic Situation Report that is prepared and disseminated to key officials, other affected jurisdictions, and state agencies during major emergency operations.

Maintenance and Preservation of Records

1. Maintenance of Records

Health and medical operational records generated during an emergency will be collected and filed in an orderly manner. This is so a record of events is preserved for use in determining the possible recovery of emergency operations

expenses, response costs, settling claims, assessing the effectiveness of operations, and updating emergency plans and procedures.

2. Documentation of Costs

Expenses incurred in carrying out health and medical services for certain hazards, such as radiological accidents or hazardous materials incidents, may be recoverable from the responsible party. Hence, all departments and agencies will maintain records of personnel and equipment used and supplies consumed during large-scale health and medical operations.

Facilities and Equipment

A complete list of equipment is included in Attachment 1: Emergency Warning and Notification Plan.

Communication Protection

1. Computer Equipment and Facilities

The physical protection of computer equipment and facilities will be maintained under normal and emergency operations to help ensure continuity of communications.

2. Radio – Lightning, Wind, and Blast

a. Standard lightning protection is used, including arrestors and the use of emergency power during severe weather.

b. Mobile repeaters, kept in the Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office, can be quickly positioned at predetermined locations to resume radio communications in the event of damage to radio towers.

Training

HCHHSD will assign personnel who are familiarized with the agency's operating procedures to the Health EOC. HCHHSD will also provide additional training, in coordination with OEM, on emergency communications equipment and procedures, as necessary.

Support

If requirements exceed the capability of HCHHSD communications resources, the Director will request support from OEM.

Plan Development & Maintenance

1. The Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department Director is responsible for maintaining and reviewing the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan annually. Recommended changes to this plan should be forwarded as needs become apparent and may reflect any changes within our jurisdictional risks and/or community capabilities.
2. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan and its attachments are living documents and require revision to account for changes in roles/responsibilities and resources within Hidalgo County such as the

acquisition of new equipment, training of staff, and increased partnerships from the private sector.

3. Once the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan has been updated, the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department Director will present to Commissioner's Court for final adoption and ratification. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 1: Coordination and Control is updated and presented to Commissioner's Court every five years with input from Emergency Management and various stakeholders. Departments and agencies assigned responsibilities in the Public Health & Medical Services Plan are responsible for developing and maintaining SOPs. Copies of the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan are kept at HCHHSD's main offices at **1304 S. 25th Avenue, Edinburg, TX 78542** in the following locations:

Office of Administration

Public Health Emergency Preparedness Division (PHEP)

Clinical Health Services

Information Technology Services

Safety Officer

Hidalgo County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Hidalgo County Emergency Management Coordinator

Each HCHHSD division manager is responsible for informing and instructing public health personnel about the location of the plan copies, as well as each employee's emergency response role and responsibilities. The supervisors/managers are also responsible for ensuring that employees attend appropriate training, according to their assigned response tier.

Attachments

Attachment I – Emergency Warning & Notification Standard Operating Guide

Attachment II – Crisis Emergency Risk Communications Plan

Hidalgo County



Appendix 2:

Communication Plan

**Attachment 1: Emergency Warning &
Notification Standard Operating Guide**

April 2023

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Purpose

The Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department (HCHHSD), in collaboration with the Office of Emergency Management, will maintain processes for receiving and issuing warnings and alerts concerning threats to public health, on a 24/7 basis. The purpose of this guide is to assist the organization, operational concepts, responsibilities, and procedures to accomplish warning requirements for HCHHSD.

Scope

HCHHSD has developed this standard operating guide (SOG) for receiving and responding to warning activities. This SOG may be used in preparation and/or response to all emergencies including, but not limited to, mass prophylaxis dispensing, disease outbreaks and acts of terrorism.

Activation

Elements of this SOG will be activated as needed based upon identified response needs.

Notification

In the event of an emergency, the HCHHSD Director will make necessary notifications, coordinate with staff, make contacts, and gather resources necessary to perform their duties.

In the event of an emergency, the Director, or his or her designee, will notify local and county government officials, and state officials. Contact information will be tested at least quarterly, and documentation of these tests is kept on file at the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department Health Department. The following hierarchy will be used to provide initial notification of the incident of local and county government officials.

1. Work phone (during business hours)
2. Work mobile device
3. Personal mobile device
4. Home phone

Attempts to notify these officials will continue until successful. The staff conducting call down will note the dates, times, and success of each contact attempt per individual.

Methods of Communication - Secretaria de Salud-Tamaulipas, Jurisdiccion Sanitaria No. IV-Reynosa

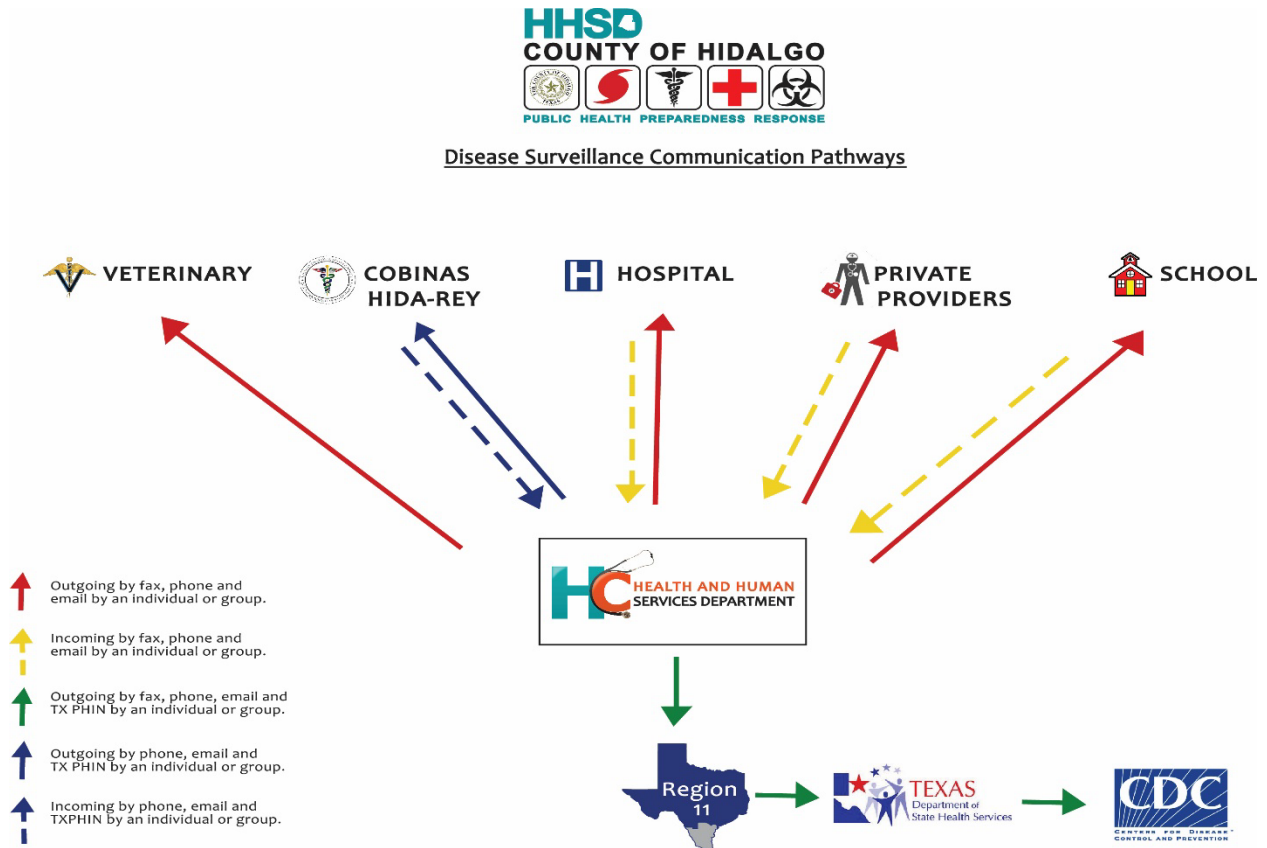
1. Land-Line Communication
 - a. Use international phone line to place calls to Mexico. This phone line will be used for conference calls with Jurisdiction IV when deemed necessary.
2. Web-Based Communication
 - a. Web-Conferencing Program

b. Texas Public Health Information Network (TXPHIN)

Disease Surveillance Communication Pathway

Please see Figure 1: Disease Surveillance Communication Pathway for a description of information flow between HCHHSD, CDC, Texas DSHS and providers (i.e., hospitals, private providers, school nurses)

Figure 1: Disease Surveillance Communication Pathway



Communications Trailer - Transport

1. Pick up the correct vehicle keys (Vehicle number 38 or 46 only) and ensure the keys to open the trailer doors are attached to the key ring.
2. Ask for another staff member to assist with attaching the trailer.
3. Inspect the vehicle hitch to ensure it has a two-inch ball attached, as it is required for pulling this unit.
4. Back up the vehicle to the Communications Trailer and have another staff member assist guide you to ensure safety is maintained while reversing the vehicle.
5. After the vehicle is in place, lower the trailer hitch jack to place the trailer on to the vehicle hitch. Secure the trailer hitch to the closed position, and attach the two safety chains and connect the taillight switch.
6. Ensure that all lights are working properly before exiting the parking lot area. Have another staff member assist with checking all the vehicle lights.

7. Do a pre-trip inspection before departure: inspect the tires, doors, wires and safety chains, and ensure that all dolly jacks are positioned up before trailer is moved.
8. Inspect fuel gauges on the vehicles that will pull the trailers. Additionally, Vehicle 38 requires diesel fuel, and Vehicle 46 requires unleaded fuel.
9. Do not exit the parking lot area if any of the prior items are not in place or are not working properly.
10. After all of these areas have been covered, you may depart to your destination.
11. Once you have reached your assigned destination, ask for the I.C. for the event.
12. Once you have checked in with I.C., wait to be assigned an area. Park the trailer in a position or area where you have enough room to be able to unhook the vehicle from the trailer in the event that you may need to leave.
13. After this has been done, set down the stabilizers that are on the trailer so that it may be secured to the ground.
14. After this has been done, unlock the doors to the trailer and meet with I.T. personnel for further instructions.

Equipment

1. Phones & Fax

The Hidalgo County Emergency Operation Center (HCEOC) has four direct phone lines and six internal extensions.

There are currently two phones in the HCEOC room. If the HCEOC were to be activated, at least two additional phone lines and a fax machine would be needed.

The first two Logistics Officers to report to the HCEOC will be assigned to move the needed phones and fax machine into the HCEOC. The fax machine will be connected to a phone number and the two phones will be connected to the remaining phone lines.

2. Satellite Phone

In the HCEOC, there's a docking station with a satellite phone.

a. Using the Satellite Phone

To turn the phone on, press the power button. Next, you'll see a message asking for the pin number. The pin number is the last four digits of the PHR11 inventory number. After entering the pin number, press the "ok" key.

b. Placing a Call

From Satellite to Satellite:

00 + Satellite (12-digit number), and press "ok"

From Satellite to another phone or cell phone:



00 + 1 + Area Code + phone number, and press "ok"

3. Dialing Programmed Phone Numbers

The Satellite Phone has been pre-programmed with other Satellite phone numbers. These are the procedure to access these stored numbers:

- a. Press the “MR” button and enter the location, or leave it blank, for a complete list of numbers.
- b. Highlight the phone number you wish to dial and press “ok”.
- c. A menu will be shown, to which you would choose “View Options?”.
- d. Press “ok” and select the first option “Call?”.
- e. Press “ok” to dial the phone number.

Additionally, here are alternative procedures to access these stored numbers:

- a. Use the “Quick Access key”  for assistance.
- b. Highlight the “Phone Book”  and press “ok”.
- c. Enter a name, or leave blank, for a complete list of numbers, then press “ok”.
- d. Highlight the phone number you wish to dial and press “ok”.

4. WebEOC

Every computer in the RESC has access to WebEOC. Only computers with internet access that are connected to the DSHS network can reach the WebEOC’s login page.

a. Logging In

To log into WebEOC, open Internet Explorer. In the address bar, input url and press the “enter” key. Note: WebEOC uses pop-up windows, so if you are using Windows XP with service pack 2 or any pop-up blocker, disable them, otherwise WebEOC will not be accessible.

5. Video Conferencing System

The RESC is equipped with a video conferencing system. Communication can be had with the DDC or other locations via video. The video conference system is always on but not connected to any site or location. It is normal for the screen to show black or blank. The system is in sleep mode but can be activated by picking up the remote control.

a. Answering a Video Call

When the phone rings for an incoming call, you should see a message that includes the number of the person calling. If the person is listed in the address book, you’ll see their contact information. The system administrator configures the system to answer incoming calls in one of these ways:

- i. The system prompts you to answer the calls manually.
- ii. The system answers incoming calls automatically.

To answer the call manually:

- When the system notifies you that a call is coming in, select Yes, or press Call-Hang Up on the remote.

To answer the call when your system is set up to automatically answer calls:

- The call connects automatically, so there is no need for further steps.

b. Placing a Video Call

You can use your system to place a video call in one of the following ways:

- (1) Using the system's address book
- (2) Entering a name or number
- (3) Choosing from the Frequently Called list(s)

(1) To place a call from the address book:

- a. Select the Address Book from the main screen and select Address Book.
- b. Use the arrow buttons on the remote control to scroll through the list of names in the address book. The alphabet tabs can also be used to scroll through the address book to the contact information you need.
- c. Press Call-Hang Up to place the call.

(2) To place a call by entering a name or number:

- a. Select Video Call from the main screen
- b. In the Video Phone screen, enter one of the following:
 - The ISDN number
 - The IP Address

The system will automatically determine the type of call to make based on the information you enter.

(3) Enter any additional information needed for the call.

The available settings depend on the type of call and your system's configuration. Some calls may require the following:

- a. Call Quality: Specify the bandwidth for this call. For most calls, choose Auto to let the system determine the best quality for the call.
- b. Second ISDN number: Use two numbers only when the party you are calling instructs you to do so.
- c. Gateway extension: If you need to dial an extension, enter the extension in the second entry field. If your system is not configured with a second entry field, you can enter the extension when the gateway prompts you.

c. Using Call-Hang Up to Place the Call

Call progress indicators will appear on the screen to show that the call is in progress. When the call is connected, the indicators will turn green.

d. Calling by Using the Speed-Dial List

Depending on how the system administrator has configured the system, you may be able to place a call by choosing from the speed-dial list. The speed-dial list displays the calling information of the last six sites that were called. To place a call using the speed-dial list:

- i. Select Speed Dial (if it is present) or Address book from the main screen.

- ii. Press the speed-dial number of the site you are trying to reach. For example, to call the second site on speed-dial, you would press 2 on the remote control.
- e. Ending a Video Call
- To hang up from a call:
- i. Press Call-Hang Up on the remote control.
 - ii. Select Disconnect Video Call from the Call-Hang Up Choices screen. If you don't confirm that you want to hang up, the system disconnects the call automatically after 60 seconds.
 - iii. If the number you called is not in the address book, a dialog box asks if you want to enter the number. Select Yes to enter the number or select No to return to the main screen.

6. MICOM-3F HF-SSB Radio

Note: Radio will revert after 5 seconds of no Activity to ale scan.

- a. Calling Another Location
 - i. Hit F1, Enter, and use the arrow up or down to find the location.
 - ii. Hit Enter, then hit Transmit.
 - iii. When Finished, Hit the Red P Button (Escape), or F1.
- b. Sending Text Message
 - i. Hit F1, Enter, use the arrow up or down to find the location.
 - ii. Hit F2, use the arrow up or down to find the text message.
 - iii. Hit Enter.
- c. Editing Text Message
 - i. Hit F1, Enter, use the arrow up or down to find the location.
 - ii. Hit F2, use the arrow up or down to find the text message.
 - iii. Hit F2, use the number keys and the F1 through F4 keys to allow editing.
 - iv. Hit F1 to send.
- d. Inserting Non-Programmed Frequency
 - i. Hit Menu, F2, then enter FREQ using the number keys (no decimal point), then hit Enter.
 - ii. To escape, hit Menu, then F3 for ALE (normal mode), then hit Enter, or F1, to dial Channel by entering the channel number or use the arrow keys, then press Enter.
- e. Normal Mode
 - i. Hit Menu, then hit F3 (ALE), then hit Enter for normal mode (automatic link establishment).

7. Other Equipment and Supplies

The following Table, Table 1: Equipment and Supplies, should be set aside and be ready to be moved into the RESC when activated.

Table 1: Equipment and Supplies

Equipment	General Supplies (In RESC Supplies Box)
2 LCD projectors (ERT/PHP)	Steno Pads, Sticky Notes, Scratch Pads
Copier	Pens, Highlighters
Fax (ERT/Zoonosis area)	Pencils, Pencil Sharpener
Telephones	Scissors
Quartet Idea Share Board (Smartboard)	Stapler, Staple Remover, Staples
Furniture	3-Hole Punch, Tape Dispenser, Tape
Easels	File Boxes (Pick up empty boxes)
1 White Board	Large and Small Paper Clips
Flip Charts (will be with easels)	Staple Remover
Waste Baskets (take from offices)	Medium and Small Binder Clips
Admin Supplies (In RESC Supplies Box)	Tab Sets
Tasking Log	Labels
Tasking Log Summary	Disks
Activity Log	Bulletin Board (with supplies)
Number Stamp	Stick Pins
Call Books	Flip Chart Markers
Sign In Sheet & Sign	Binders

Hidalgo County



Appendix 2: Communication Plan

Attachment 2: Crisis Emergency Risk Communication Plan

April 2023

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Table of Contents

Record of Change	iii
Approval and Implementation.....	v
Authority	vii
Purpose.....	vii
Explanation of Terms.....	vii
Acronyms	vii
Definitions	viii
Situation & Assumptions	ix
Situation	ix
Assumptions	ix
Concept of Operations	ix
General	ix
Communication Methods	ix
Internal Communication	x
Public Information Procedures, External Communication	xi
Routine Communication Activities.....	xiii
Infectious Diseases/Outbreaks	xiv
Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) Media Procedures	xv
Dissemination of Messages	xvii
Joint Information Center (JIC)	xviii
Organization & Assignment of Responsibilities	xviii
Organization.....	xviii
Assignment of Responsibilities	xix
Information Release	xix
Direction & Control	xx
General	xx
Agency Media Policy	xx
HCHHSD Public Information Officers.....	xx
Administration & Support.....	xx
Security	xx
Reporting.....	xx

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

Plan Development & Maintenancexxi
Tabsxxi
Health Alert Email Message Template xxvii

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Approval and Implementation

**Appendix 2:
Communication Plan
Attachment 2: Crisis Emergency
Risk Communication Plan**

This attachment is hereby approved for implementation and supersedes all previous editions.

Eduardo Olivarez
Director, Health & Human Services

Date

Ricardo Saldaña
Emergency Management Coordinator

Date

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Authority

The Hidalgo County Commissioner’s Court has the authority to approve and implement the Public Health & Medical Services Plan. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan includes 12 appendices. The County Commissioner’s Court approved the Public Health & Medical Services Plan on [REDACTED], 2023. This plan aligns with the County’s Emergency Basic Plan, ESF-8: Public Health that was approved by the County Commissioner’s Court on September 7, 2021.

Purpose

The purpose of the CERC Plan is to prepare and guide the Public Information Officer (PIO) in communicating information to key audiences, including the general public, before, during, and after a crisis or disaster. The plan recommends measures for handling crisis and emergency risk communication efforts and is designed for staff familiar with communication activities (C4T1).

Additionally, this attachment will provide processes that will supplement and integrate with the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department in a communication system. Emergency preparedness is crucial to minimizing the negative effects to public health in the event of a bioterrorism attack or public health emergency. It is essential to have a plan that addresses the needs of the entire population. Most information and safety instructions are given through traditional media such as television, radio and print as well as through local emergency agencies. For some, however, additional measures are required. These hard-to-reach populations may need alternative alert systems, nontraditional means of communications and additional instruction or assistance. If the event is a local health or medical emergency or disaster, this plan works in conjunction with overall Hidalgo County emergency planning and operations.

Explanation of Terms

Acronyms

CERC	Crisis Emergency Risk Communication
DDC	Disaster District Committee
DSHS	Department of State Health Services
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
HCHHSD	Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department
ICS	Incident Command System
JIC	Joint Information Center
MOC	Medical Operation Center
PHEP	Public Health Emergency Preparedness

Definitions

Crisis Emergency Risk Communication (CERC): Urgent disaster communication combined with communication about risks and benefits to stakeholders and the public. Crisis and emergency risk communication provides expert information that helps the receiver and advances a behavior or an action that allows for rapid and efficient recovery from the event.

Emergency: The occurrence or imminent threat of a condition, situation, or event that requires immediate response actions to save lives, prevent injuries, and protect property, public health, the environment, and public safety, or to lessen or avert the threat of a disaster.

Emergency Public Information: Information that is disseminated primarily in anticipation of or during an emergency. In addition to providing situational information to the public, emergency public information also frequently provides instructional information to be used by the general public.

Joint Information Center (JIC): A collocated group of representatives from agencies and organizations involved in an event that are designated to handle public information needs. The JIC structure is designed to work well for large or small situations and can expand or contract to meet the needs of the incident.

Healthcare: The prevention, treatment and management of illness and the preservation of mental and physical well-being through services offered by the medical and allied health professions.

Incident: An emergency that is limited in scope and potential effects on lives and property and is typically handled by one or two local response agencies acting under an incident commander. An incident may require limited external assistance from other local response forces.

Incident Command System: A standardized incident management system used to organize emergency response and designed to offer a scalable response to incidents of any magnitude.

Medical Operation Center: A site that is activated when the Medical Health Authority and the Emergency Management Director deem it necessary to collect, collate, interpret medical information and response, and formulate recommendations for the overall medical response.

Teletypewriters (TTY): A device that is equipped with a screen that allows users to send and receive messages via a keypad as opposed to spoken words. It is also known as Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TDD).

Situation & Assumptions

Situation

1. Public information and rumor control are vital to help the public process an emergency, avoid panic, and maintain the public's cooperation. Bioterrorism, other infectious disease outbreaks, and other public health threats and emergencies are considered highly sensitive issues. Negative consequences may affect those who experience a disaster either firsthand as survivors or observers. The effects include anxiety, depression, family disruption and violence, substance abuse, absenteeism, and other related physical and mental health symptoms. These consequences can adversely affect public health, and public health officials are to educate the public and alleviate the public's anxiety or fear to help prevent such negative health outcomes following large-scale public health threats and emergencies, especially ones that include numerous casualties.
2. Hidalgo County is at risk of several hazards that could threaten personal safety and property, public health, and government safety.
3. Emergency situations could result in the loss of communication and normal social assembly, creating potential mental health hazards.

Assumptions

1. Adequate communications are available for effective and efficient warning, response, and recovery operations. Any number of natural or manmade hazards may neutralize communications currently in place for emergency operations. The County Sherriff Department has adequate communications that are effective and efficient in warning, response, and recovery operations.
2. Additional communications equipment required for emergency operations will be made available for citizens, businesses, volunteer organizations, and/or other governmental agencies.

Concept of Operations

General

The Hidalgo County Sherriff Department has a network consisting of telephone, teletype, and radio facilities that will serve to perform the initial and basic communication efforts for emergency operations.

Communication Methods

During a disaster, emergency, or an act of terrorism event, the HCHHSD Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) program, through HCHHSD PIO, will coordinate and deliver risk communication and public health information to the public through every available channel, including the media (through the Joint Information Center (JIC)), HCHHSD website, HCHHSD phone bank, community meetings, distributed flyers, and HCHHSD partners or stakeholders.

1. Telephone (Common Carrier)

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

- a. **Overloaded Circuits**

To avoid overloaded circuits during emergencies, citizens will be advised to listen to EAS for information and to use telephones only if they have a genuine emergency. If overloaded circuits do become a problem, coordination with the current Hidalgo County phone carrier company will begin immediately to restore priority circuits.
 - b. **Emergency Service**
 - i. During major emergencies, a direct line to the County Sherriff Communications Center is activated in the EOC for emergency service calls.
 - ii. The County operates the Emergency Notification System utilizing FirstCall Network, Inc. technology. This system is used to relay information to the community for those who have subscribed to receive communications.
 - iii. In addition, the HCHHSD will activate a hotline to handle public calls during an emergency. The hotline would consist of at least four (4) lines operated by HCHHSD staff and first responders to answer questions from the public and/or to provide guidance to medical providers during extended hours of operation.
 - iv. If the volume of calls overwhelms the HCHHSD hotline, the public would be advised to call 211 for information. If this were to occur, HCHHSD staff would be in constant contact with 211 administrators to provide accurate information and guidance.
 - v. If a hotline could not be established in a timely fashion, 211 would serve as the official phone bank during the emergency.
2. **HCHHSD News Media Relations Procedures**
- a. During a bioterrorism event, infectious disease outbreak, and other public health threats and emergencies, HCHHSD's open-door media procedure is suspended.
 - b. All news media inquiries on bioterrorism, other infectious diseases and public health threats and emergencies, including requests for participation on radio and television talk shows and other programs, must be directed to the HCHHSD Director.
 - c. The HCHHSD Director will:
 - i. Provide the information requested, or
 - ii. Arrange an interview with the appropriate HCHHSD staff, or
 - iii. Refer the reporter to another source, or
 - iv. Decline the request.
 - d. Once a reporter is referred to the HCHHSD Director, the referring staff member must not talk with the reporter unless otherwise instructed by the HCHHSD Director.

Internal Communication

HCHHSD operates a mobile command asset capable of immediate deployment, in an "always ready" configuration, at a moment's notice; fully operational within one hour. This asset can connect multiple local, regional, state, and federal agencies via radio

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

patching protocols under various frequencies to create interoperable communications among all responders and partners.

HCHHSD communicates across multiple platforms. Primary communications are via email for daily operations. During emergency operations communications within the health department include:

- a. Landline phone
- b. Cellular phone/networks
- c. Email
- d. 800MHz trunked radio systems
- e. WebEOC

Redundant communications include Ham Radio HF/VHF/UHF.

Additionally, the Health Department maintains a mobile communications trailer asset on health department grounds. This communications asset is equipped and capable of:

- a. Satellite phone
- b. Satellite internet
- c. Satellite video conferencing
- d. Ham radio HF/VHF/UHF
- e. Cellular phone
- f. Email (satellite and mobile us carriers)

Communication outside of the health department to other departments within the city, emergency management, police, fire, city management, and local partners, inside or outside the city emergency operation center, is primarily via:

- a. WebEOC (local and state servers)
- b. 800MHz trunked radio system
- c. Landline phone
- d. Email
- e. Cellular phones

Public Information Procedures, External Communication

Depending on the situation, a Joint Information Center (JIC) may be formed to make sure the information reaches most county residents; multiple JIC locations will be used when circumstances of the incident require it. The Hidalgo County JIC includes the County PIO and the HCHHSD PIO. The final release authority in a multiple JIC system is the County PIO. In the event a JIC may not be established in a physical location (EOC), PIOs will use the WebEOC platform (as set up by Hidalgo County Emergency Management) to maintain communication with JIC representatives. The JIC includes representatives of each jurisdiction, agency, private-sector entity, and nongovernmental organization involved in incident management activities. The JIC enhances information coordination, reduces misinformation, and maximizes resources by co-locating PIOs as much as possible. With the JIC in place, special emphasis will be placed on reaching the county's vulnerable populations in urban and rural settings.

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

The process of getting information to the public during an incident involves gathering information from the incident site, incident command, call centers, and monitoring media to identify trends and issues. The JIC verifies the information collected by consulting other PIOs in the JIC, EOC sources, and PIOs in the field. Information is then coordinated between PIOs in the JIC to establish key messages to ensure consistency and obtaining approval from those in authority to ensure that the information is accurate, complete, and current. The dissemination of information to the public involves interviews, PSAs, coordinated radio and television messages, and community meetings conducted by field PIOs provided with talking points and flyers. The JIC will monitor media response and coverage to ensure that messages disseminated are understood and reported accurately and completely to the public.

The JIC will be staffed and configured to meet the needs of the incident. Regardless of the number of PIOs and the scope of the operation, the JIC will be organized so that it can effectively get information to the public and may include the following sections:

- a. JIC Management: the positions of the lead PIO, deputy lead PIO, and JIC Coordinator. Should the event require extended operational periods or require many staff to effectively disseminate information, support staff will be assigned to the PIO to conduct necessary research, on-going media operations, and any administrative duties as applicable; the PIO will submit an ICS Form 213 – Resource Request form to request additional staff, as needed.
- b. Lead PIO: advises IC on matters related to public information and to direct the overall public information effort. The lead PIO also manages the JIC.
- c. Deputy Lead PIO: assists the lead PIO to ensure that all JIC functions are operating efficiently. As directed, the deputy lead represents the lead PIO as needed and assumes responsibilities of the lead PIO, as assigned.
- d. JIC Coordinator: supervises daily operations of the JIC, executing plans and policies as directed by the lead/deputy lead PIOs. The JIC Coordinator provides direction and support to the JIC staff to ensure that all functions are operating efficiently and establishes internal communications procedures.

If necessary, a Public Inquiry Center (PIC) will be activated to respond directly to questions from the public using trained operators and under the direction of the lead PIO. The PIC serves a dual purpose: It disseminates information by responding to requests from the public, and it gathers information by identifying trends, inaccurate information, misunderstandings, or misperceptions reported by the public or reflected by their inquiries.

The Information Gathering and Analysis Section may include the following functions:

1. News Analysis and Media Monitoring
2. PIO Liaison Operations

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

The Information Coordination and Production Section may include the following functions:

1. Research and Writing
2. Photo Documentation
3. Graphics and Production

The Information Dissemination Section may include the following functions:

1. Media Relations
2. Field PIO Operations
3. Demographics and Media List Development

The Administration and Logistics Section includes the JIC administrative support function. The Administration and Logistics section of the JIC is largely responsible for the documentation of JIC activities and products. Documentation includes:

- Draft, revised, and final news releases and Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
- Approval records (signoffs) of all products
- Media contact logs
- Newsclips
- Videos of televised interviews and other coverage
- Photographs
- Copies of all products (talking points, backgrounders, briefing booklets, news conference agendas, flyers, etc.)
- Staffing information (contact information, assignments)
- Copies of legal notices

The Medical Health Authority, in conjunction with the EMC, the County PIO, and the HCHHSD Director, will direct and control the public release of information regarding incident-specific health alerts/threats, continuity of operations and recovery, orders for isolation or quarantine, and instructions for vulnerable populations. The EMC, along with the PIO, will designate times set by the operations battle rhythm, and methods for release of information to the public. For information on the training available for the PIO, see *Appendix 12, Workforce Development Plan*.

Routine Communication Activities

Communications play a critical role in emergency operations. Extensive communications networks and facilities are in existence throughout the County of Hidalgo. Existing communications network consisting of telephone, cell telephone, internet, fax, and radio facilities will serve to perform the initial and basic communications effort for public health emergency operations.

During emergency operations, HCHHSD will maintain their existing equipment and procedures for communicating with their field response personnel.

Infectious Diseases/Outbreaks

HCHHSD will maintain a contact database of applicable agencies and key personnel in order so that local responders have ready access to information required to initiate and maintain communications during an infectious disease outbreak. This list may be found electronically on regional servers as part of the regional contact database called PHR 11 Contacts and will be made available to regional first responders. It will include information defining communication logistics and methods for contacting city, county, regional, state, and federal departments, via pagers, cell phones, telephones, satellite transmission, fax, voice messaging, email, and radio, and other such means as may be available.

Due to HIPAA regulations, HCHHSD does not release specific information regarding disease outbreaks to neighboring jurisdictions. HCHHSD will enter disease outbreak information into the National Electronics Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS). NEDSS facilitates electronically transferring public health surveillance data from the healthcare system to public health departments. Texas DSHS can view and determine what information would be helpful or applicable to partners in neighboring jurisdictions to facilitate the rapid formulation of an appropriate response.

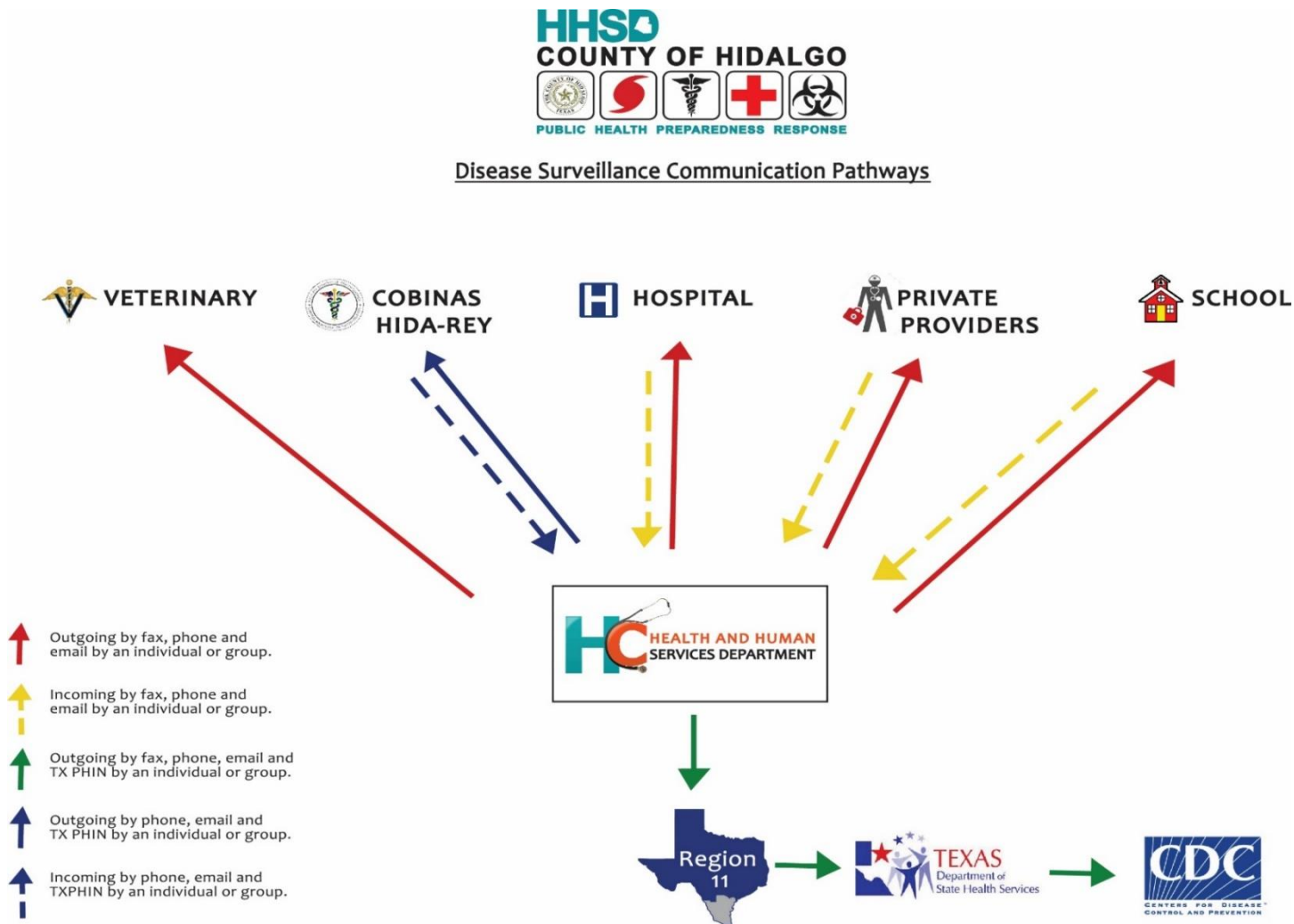
HCHHSD Communications Plan will ensure capability to communicate and disseminate information quickly through established communication plans. These plans outline support of 24/7 connectivity through the public health information network, blast fax broadcast, auto-dialing voice messaging, telephones, mobile phones, pagers, email, or other means necessary to provide and receive alerts with:

- a. Local officials, including health care departments and other providers, 911 call-down systems, law, fire, hazardous material responders, county judges, emergency response managers, and other designated officials.
- b. DSHS, Office of the State Epidemiologist, and its call-down system.

Tests of alert notification communications systems will be conducted quarterly to ensure contact database accuracy and system operability.

Please see Figure 1: Disease Surveillance Communication Pathways below for additional information:

Figure 1: Disease Surveillance Communication Pathways



Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) Media Procedures

1. Independent School Districts
 - a. HCHSD will forward (fax, email) appropriate materials for public release (students, parents, teachers).
 - b. Publication must be approved by HCHSD before being released to and by school districts to prevent any wrong/misprint information released.
 - c. Schools are encouraged to utilize School PIO for any information addressing

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

School District (students, parents, staff, and city).

2. Point of Dispensing Sites

- a. All information (status, updates, requests) needs to be directed to County EOC. Designated person will give updates via phone conference, TV, or radio. WEB EOC will be utilized to give updates and requests.
- b. County EOC will direct information needed to assist agencies (DSHS Region 11, MACC, DCC, Independent School Districts, RMOC, and Cities).
- c. ICs will redirect any request for information to County EOC.
- d. There will be a representative of Hidalgo County at RMOC, MACC, Area Command, and DDC who can give updates to participating agencies.

Please see Figure 2: SNS Communication Pathways for Hidalgo County below for more information.

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

SNS Communication Pathways for Hidalgo County

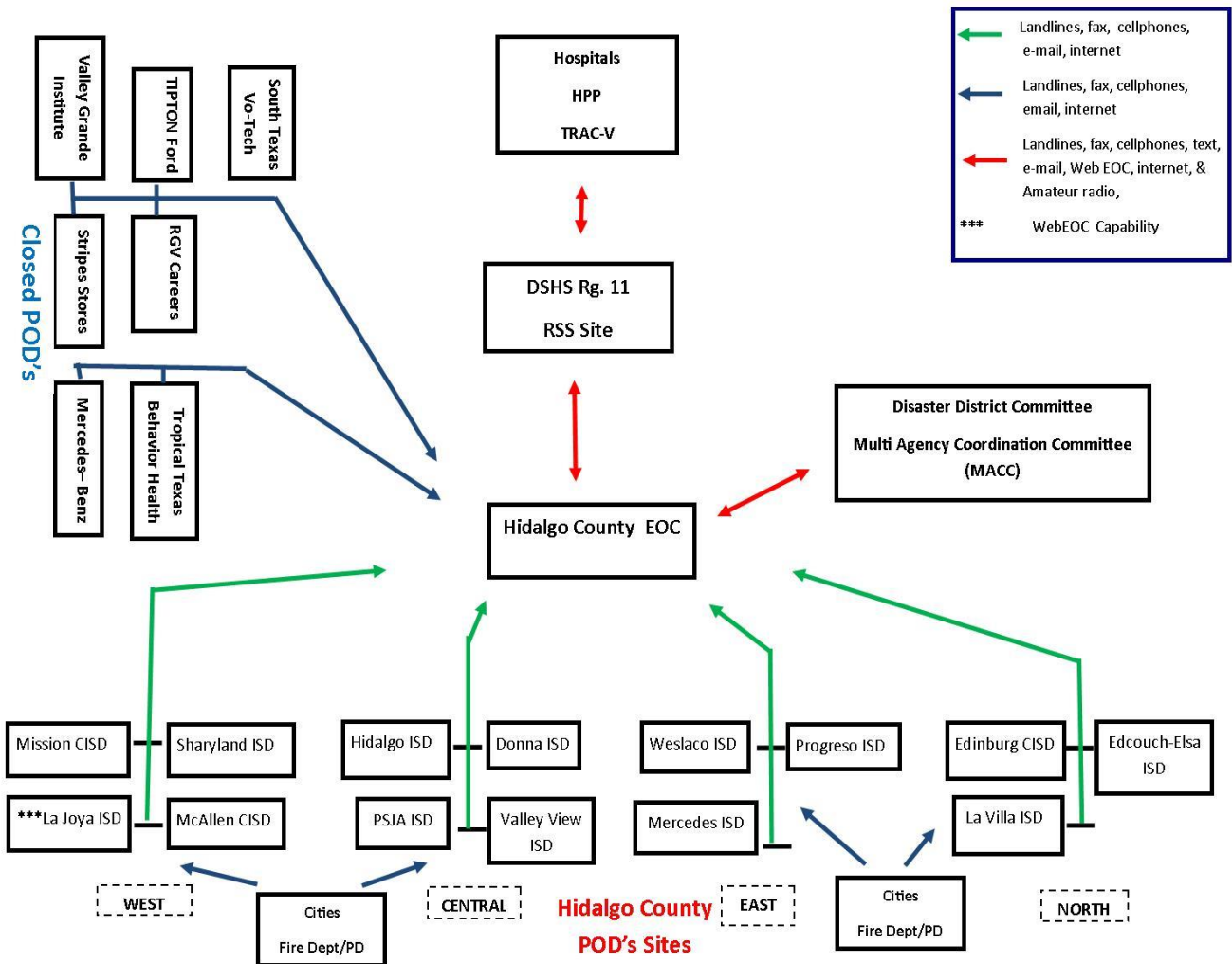


Figure 2. SNS Communication Pathways for Hidalgo County

Dissemination of Messages

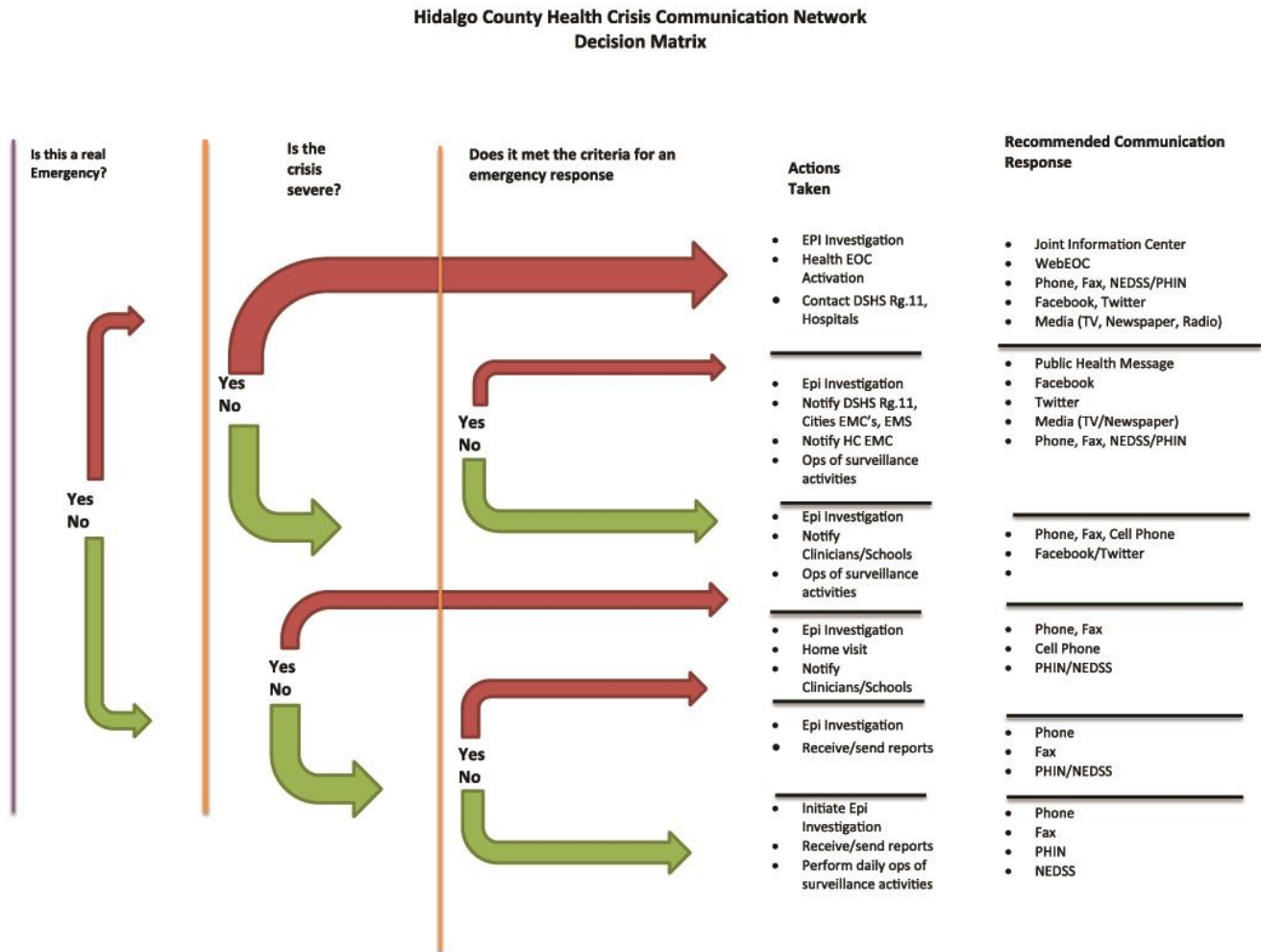
Under the authority the HCHHSD Director, the PIO will forward pre-scripted messages to local radio stations, newspapers, and TV stations by fax, email, or in person, upon activation of the health EOC once Command and General staff have been briefed and the type of communications needed are determined. Contact information for TV/Radio stations and newspapers can be found in the Media Relations Contacts database.

The PIO will also utilize Twitter, Facebook (social media), and the County’s website to provide up-to-date information, instructions, and safety information to the community. Phone applications (Twitter/Facebook) can be used for the community to respond to

Hidalgo County Appendix 2: Communication Plan

questions and concerns. Please refer to Figure 3: Hidalgo County Health Crisis Communication Network Decision Matrix below for additional information:

Figure 3: Hidalgo County Health Crisis Communication Network Decision Matrix



Joint Information Center (JIC)

Hidalgo County Health EOC will request the Hidalgo County OEM to establish a JIC during events of emergencies or disasters where there are substantial external responders from other jurisdictions and/or state or federal agencies and the response and recovery effort may continue for an extended period, a JIC may be established.

The Hidalgo County PIO serves as the official County Representative in the JIC.

Organization & Assignment of Responsibilities

Organization

The HCHHSD Director or designee will ensure that warning information received is disseminated to appropriate city, county, regional, and state officials and, where

appropriate, to the public. The responsibility of ensuring the communications system is operational and incorporates all available resources rests with the Operations Manager.

HCHHSD uses three main forms of health alert notification to partners and stakeholders: group e-mails, the Health Alert Network (HAN), and direct phone calls, if necessary. HCHHSD epidemiologists are responsible for preparing and transmitting these messages. The HAN system acknowledges messages sent by generating reports showing percentages of messages sent, received, or not received, and the phone numbers dialed. The group e-mails provide receipt notification. Data from these various transmissions is compiled and used to verify the validity of contact information. Partner and stakeholder contact information is updated on a bi-annual basis to ensure that communication is effective during an emergency.

Assignment of Responsibilities

1. The Public Information Officer or designee will ensure the accomplishment of the following:
 - a. Coordination of common communications procedures.
 - b. Development and maintenance of a communications resource inventory (Director of Operations).
 - c. A communications capability between the local EOC, the supporting DDC, the DSHS/Region 11 and DSHS Austin.
 - d. Creation of communication restoration procedures.
 - e. Provision, to local emergency management officials, of a list of circuit restoration priorities that support HCHHSD emergency communications. This list will also be provided to the local telephone carriers.
 - f. Development of procedures for the dissemination of public health messages that will address agency media policy, disaster mental health, and special population.
 - g. Development and maintenance of SOP's/SOG's to include message handling procedures and recall rosters for essential personnel.
 - h. Utilize Shelf Kits (Tularemia, Smallpox, Anthrax, Botulism, Plaque, and Viral Hemorrhagic Fever) for support of operations.

Information Release

All information released by HCHHSD will come from the PIO or through a Joint Information Center, which will include representatives from a variety of agencies and departments.

Please see the end of this document for a health alert email message template.

NO MATERIALS ARE TO BE RELEASED TO THE MEDIA WITHOUT APPROVAL OF THE PIO AND THE IC. These materials are provided for information only.

Direction & Control

General

The HCHHSD Director establishes general policies for emergency communications. In the event of any actual or suspected criminal activity, or other causal agent resulting in a public health threat or crisis, the Director or Designee, in liaison with Hidalgo County OEM and the Hidalgo County Public Affairs Office, will determine the spokesperson for the JIC. The appropriate messages or appropriate materials for public release will be developed in a collaborated manner. The Director or Designee, in collaboration with HC OEM, will determine the management and release of public information to the media.

Agency Media Policy

HCHHSD staff have been informed and trained in proper procedures for risk communication dissemination for the department.

HCHHSD Public Information Officers

Primary: Director

Secondary: Assistant Director

Tertiary: Administrative Services Manager

Administration & Support

Security

Measures will be taken to ensure that only authorized personnel will have access to communications equipment.

Reporting

HCHHSD will communicate with DSHS/Region 11, DSHS Austin and federal response partners using the PHIN, an electronic communications system especially created to communicate crucial epidemic and treatment information.

HCHHSD will communicate with the public through media and specialized communication capabilities available within affected areas such as reverse 9-1-1 and private telecommunication industries. In rural areas, the *promotoras* organization will assist within the community.

During an emergency, HCHHSD will suspend its “Open Door” Media Policy to limit media contact to the HCHHSD Press Officer or designee. All requests from the media for information and all requests from HCHHSD staff and HCHHSD partners for news releases, advisories, or other media releases will be directed to the HCHHSD Press Officer or designee. The HCHHSD Press Officer will coordinate public information dissemination with the PIO with DSHS/Region 11 and other agencies and organizations, as needed.

Plan Development & Maintenance

1. The Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department Director is responsible for maintaining and reviewing the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan annually. Recommended changes to this plan should be forwarded as needs become apparent and may reflect any changes within our jurisdictional risks and/or community capabilities.
2. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan and its attachments are living documents and require revision to account for changes in roles/responsibilities and resources within Hidalgo County such as the acquisition of new equipment, training of staff, and increased partnerships from the private sector.
3. Once the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan has been updated, the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department Director will present to Commissioner's Court for final adoption and ratification. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan is updated and presented to Commissioner's Court every five years with input from Emergency Management and various stakeholders. Departments and agencies assigned responsibilities in the Public Health & Medical Services Plan are responsible for developing and maintaining SOPs. Copies of the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communication Plan are kept at HCHHSD's main offices at **1304 S. 25th Avenue, Edinburg, TX 78542** in the following locations:

Office of Administration

Public Health Emergency Preparedness Division (PHEP)

Clinical Health Services

Information Technology Services

Safety Officer

Hidalgo County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Hidalgo County Emergency Management Coordinator

Each HCHHSD division manager is responsible for informing and instructing public health personnel about the location of the plan copies, as well as each employee's emergency response role and responsibilities. The supervisors/managers are also responsible for ensuring that employees attend appropriate training, according to their assigned response tier.

Tabs

Tab 1 - Incident Command System

- [County Incident Command System - Public Information Template \(.doc\)](#)

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

Tab 2 - Job Action Sheets

- [Public Information Officer - Job Action Sheet \(.doc\)](#)
- [Spokesperson-Subject Matter Expert - Job Action Sheet \(.doc\)](#)
- [Media Messaging - Job Action Sheet \(.doc\)](#)
- [Media Monitoring - Job Action Sheet \(.doc\)](#)

Tab 3 - Equipment Checklists

- [Recommended Public Information Office Equipment and Supplies \(.doc\)](#)
- [Recommended Personal Equipment and Supplies \(.doc\)](#)
- [Equipment and Supplies Submittal Spreadsheet \(.xls\)](#)

Tab 4 - First 48-Hour Checklist

- [First 48-Hours Checklist \(.doc\)](#)

Tab 5 - Call-Down Rosters

- [Media & Public Information Graph](#)
- [Call-Down Roster Template \(.doc\)](#)
- [Contact List Template \(.xls\)](#)

Tab 6 - Media Relations Resources

- [Media Contact List \(.xls\)](#)
- [Anticipated Q and A \(.doc\)](#)
- [Initial News Statement Worksheet \(.doc\)](#)
- [News Release Clearance Form \(.doc\)](#)
- [Media Monitoring Report Form \(.doc\)](#)
- [Media Tips \(.doc\)](#)
- [Interview Tips \(.doc\)](#)

Tab 7 - Health and Safety Education Information

Chemical Emergencies

- [Sheltering Facts \(.pdf\)](#)

Dirty Bombs

- [CDC Role in Nuclear or Radiological Terrorist Attacks \(.pdf\)](#)
- [CDC Dirty Bombs \(.pdf\)](#)

Disaster Safety

- [EPA Emergency Drinking Water Disinfection \(.pdf\)](#)
- [EPA Emergency Drinking Water Disinfection - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Keeping Food and Water Safe After a Natural Disaster \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Keeping Food and Water Safe After a Natural Disaster - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Preventing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning After an Emergency \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Preventing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning After an Emergency - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Protection from Electrical Hazard after a Natural Disaster \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Protection from Electrical Hazard after a Natural Disaster - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Protection from Animal and Insect Hazards After an Emergency \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Protection from Animal and Insect Hazards After an Emergency - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [What to Know for an Unexpected Power Outage \(.pdf\)](#)
- [What to Know for an Unexpected Power Outage - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)

Extreme Weather

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

- [CDC - After a Tornado \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Lightning Safety \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Tornado Safety \(.pdf\)](#)

Floods

- [After Flood Returning Home Precautions \(.pdf\)](#)
- [After Flood Returning Home Precautions - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Clean Up Flood Water \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Clean Up Flood Water - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [EPA - Flood Booklet \(.pdf\)](#)
- [EPA - Septic System After Flood \(.pdf\)](#)
- [EPA - Septic System After Flood - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [EPA - What to do After a Flood \(.pdf\)](#)
- [EPA - What to do After a Flood - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Flood Recovery Key Health Messages \(.doc\)](#)
- [Sanitation and Hygiene \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Sanitation and Hygiene - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [HCHHSD Recommended Precautions \(.doc\)](#)
- [HCHHSD Mold Information \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Key Facts About Flood Recovery \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Key Facts About Flood Recovery - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Re-entering Your Flooded Home \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Re-entering Your Flooded Home - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)

Mold Information

- [CDC Facts About Mold \(.pdf\)](#)
- [CDC Mold Q&A \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Check HVAC System for Mold Flyer \(.pdf\)](#)
- [EPA Mold Guide \(.pdf\)](#)
- [EPA Mold Guide - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Get Rid of Mold Flyer \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Get Rid of Mold Flyer - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Protect Yourself from Mold \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Protect Yourself from Mold - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [PSA Disaster Mold - Male Voice \(MP3\)](#)
- [PSA Disaster Mold - Male Voice Transcript \(.pdf\)](#)

Terrorist Bombing

- [Preparing for a Terrorist Bombing \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Weapons of Mass Destruction Poster \(.pdf\)](#)

Fact Sheets

- [Anthrax \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Anthrax \(.doc\) Spanish](#)
- [Botulism \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Botulism \(.doc\) Spanish](#)
- [Brucellosis \(.pdf\)](#)

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

- [Burcellosis \(.doc\) Spanish](#)
- [Cholera \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Cholera \(.doc\) Spanish](#)
- [Glanders \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Glanders \(.doc\) Spanish](#)
- [Influenza, Pandemic \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Influenza, Seasonal \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Plague \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Plague - Spanish\(.doc\)](#)
- [Q Fever \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Q Fever - Spanish\(.doc\)](#)
- [Ricin \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Ricin - Spanish\(.doc\)](#)
- [Smallpox \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Smallpox - Spanish\(.doc\)](#)
- [Tularemia \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Tularemia - Spanish \(.doc\)](#)
- [Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers \(VHFs\) \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers - Spanish\(VHFs\) \(.doc\)](#)
- [West Nile Virus \(.pdf\)](#)

Public Service Announcements

- Anthrax
 - [Powder Awareness PSA \(.doc\)](#)
 - [Cutaneous Awareness PSA \(.doc\)](#)
 - [Gastro Awareness PSA \(.doc\)](#)
- Botulism
 - [Botulism Awareness PSA \(.doc\)](#)
- Plague
 - [Plague Awareness PSA \(.doc\)](#)
 - [CDC Plague Radio Scripts \(.doc\)](#)
- Ricin
 - [Ingestion Awareness PSA \(.doc\)](#)
 - [Inhalation Awareness PSA \(.doc\)](#)
- Smallpox
 - [Smallpox Awareness PSA \(.doc\)](#)
- Tularemia
 - [Tularemia Awareness PSA \(.doc\)](#)
- Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers (VHFs)
 - [VHFs Awareness PSA \(.doc\)](#)

Emergency Preparedness

- [Caring for Pets and Livestock in an Emergency \(.doc\)](#)
- [Caring for Small Children in a Disaster \(.doc\)](#)
- [Emergency Readiness for Persons with Disabilities \(.doc\)](#)

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

- [Emergency Readiness for Seniors \(.doc\)](#)
- [Make a Kit- Make a Plan-Stay Informed \(.doc\)](#)
- [Observe, Document and Report \(.doc\)](#)
- [Shelter in Place or Evacuate \(.doc\)](#)
- [Storing an Emergency Supply of Water \(.doc\)](#)

Tab 8 – Phone Bank Resources

- [Sample Phone Bank Policy \(.doc\)](#)
- [Phone Bank Operator Message Template \(.doc\)](#)
- [Phone Bank Referral List \(.doc\)](#)
- [Phone Bank Hotline List \(.doc\)](#)
- [Phone Bank Call Tracking Form \(.doc\)](#)

Tab 9 – Special Populations

- [FEMA General Guide for Special Populations \(.doc\)](#)
- [Sample Message Template for Disabled Persons \(.doc\)](#)
- [Resource Guide for Disabled Persons \(.doc\)](#)

Tab 10 – Strategic National Stockpile

Clinic News Release Templates

- [SNS Clinic News Release Template \(.doc\)](#)
- [SNS Clinic Update News Release Template \(.doc\)](#)
- [SNS Clinic Closure News Release Template \(.doc\)](#)

Medication Dosing Instructions

- [Disease and Drug Listing \(.doc\)](#)
- [Anthrax \(.zip\)](#)
- [Brucellosis \(.zip\)](#)
- [Influenza \(.zip\)](#)
- [Plague \(.zip\)](#)
- [Tularemia \(.zip\)](#)
- [Doxycycline Tablet Labels - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)

SNS Education Campaign Tools

- [CDC Mass Dispensing Public Information and Communication Message Overview \(.pdf\)](#)
- [SNS Communications Campaign Planning Template \(.doc\)](#)
- [SNS Communications Campaign Evaluation \(.doc\)](#)

Tab 11 - Pandemic Influenza

Checklists and Educational Materials

- [Individuals Checklist \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Business Checklist \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Law Enforcement Checklist \(.doc\)](#)
- [Media Checklist \(.doc\)](#)
- ["Cover Your Cough" School Poster - Small \(.pdf\)](#)
- ["Cover Your Cough" School Poster - Large \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Planning Guide for Individuals and Families \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Health Information Sheet \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Personal Steps to Preventing the Flu \(.pdf\)](#)

Hidalgo County
Appendix 2: Communication Plan

- [Vaccine Key Facts \(.pdf\)](#)
- ["Bird Flu & You" Poster \(.pdf\)](#)
- ["Cover Your Cough" Health Care Provider Poster - Large \(.pdf\)](#)

Fact Sheets

- [Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet - English \(.doc\)](#)
- [Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet - English \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet - Spanish \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet - German \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet - Korean \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet - Lao \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet - Simple Chinese \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet - Vietnamese \(.pdf\)](#)
- [CDC Anti-Virals Fact Sheet - English \(.pdf\)](#)

News Release Templates

- [Avian-Pandemic Influenza News Release Template 1 \(.doc\)](#)
- [Avian-Pandemic Influenza News Release Template 2 \(.doc\)](#)
- [Avian-Pandemic Influenza News Release Template 3 \(.doc\)](#)
- [Avian-Pandemic Influenza News Release Template 4 \(.doc\)](#)
- [Second Vaccine Dose News Release Template \(.doc\)](#)

Public Service Announcement Scripts

- [Influenza PSA 1 - Prevention \(.doc\)](#)
- [Influenza PSA 2 - Protective Actions \(.doc\)](#)
- [Influenza PSA 3 - Enhanced Protective Actions \(.doc\)](#)
- [Influenza PSA 4 - Limited Resources \(.doc\)](#)

Health Alert Email Message Template

To: *Designated recipients will include all applicable partners in our contact list within our jurisdiction.*

Subject: Hidalgo County Emergency Preparedness

Alert Level

Alert Level will correspond to the appropriate Level of Readiness as described in Appendix 2 – Communication Plan.

Description

The Health Alert Description should include information regarding the incident including the date and time of the incident, the location of the incident, and the affected areas including the areas possibly affected.

Background

Depending upon the type of incident, information should be provided to orient the message recipient on any pertinent history including methods of transmission and prevention.

Recommended Action(s)

Depending upon the type of incident, the recommended actions follow guidance from the CDC, the Emergency and Acute Infectious Disease Guidelines, January 2016, or the Hidalgo County Basic Plan and should focus on public safety.

Contact Information

Contacts for the incident will be included to facilitate the reporting and sharing of information.