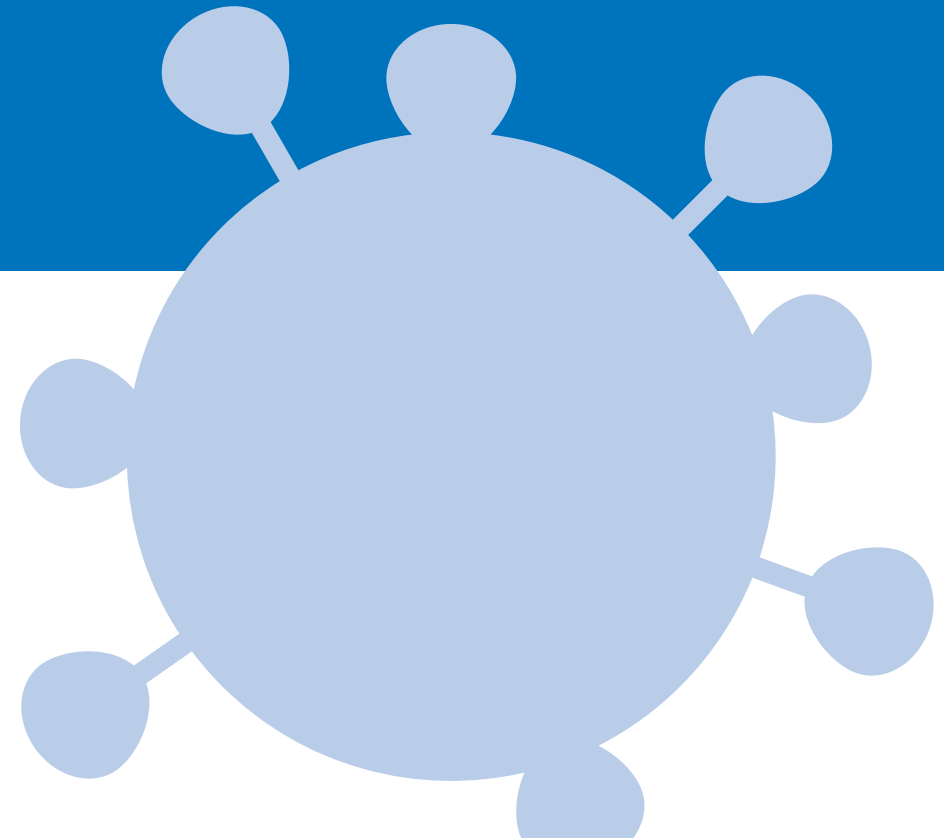
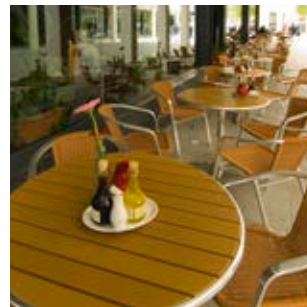


Coronavirus outbreak business communications toolkit



Introduction

Who's this for?

In the event that your business is affected by COVID-19, good communications will go a long way to support your staff, reassure customers and neighbours, and protect your reputation. This toolkit will help your business take the right steps to recovery. It complements the support that your local public health team will give you on operational matters.

Why bother?

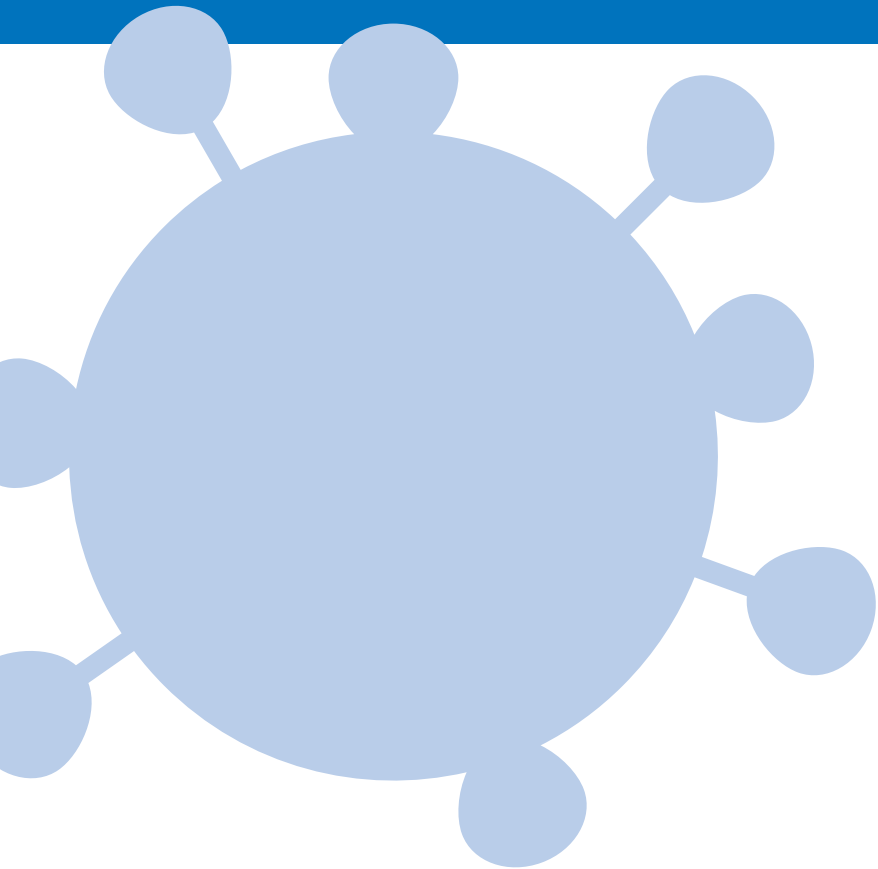
By communicating well, you can keep your customers and supply chain in the know to help your business bounce back faster. It's not about blame but it is about being clear and transparent in order to give people confidence. An outbreak situation may be out of your hands but taking control of the situation and **telling people what you are doing will be one of the most important actions** you can take.

I'm in the middle of a crisis and way too busy to do this

There are two phases, outbreak and recovery. How you communicate in each will be different. Outbreak communications will focus on what has happened and any actions you are taking. This will help staff, customers and suppliers understand what is changing and is vital if these changes are to become embedded within business activity. Recovery communications focuses on restoring confidence and promoting business as usual once operations are covid-secure.

This toolkit aims to provide guidance in the event of a small outbreak in a business, alongside the support provided by Public Health England and the local authority. It's not intended to cover every single situation, but will give you help to say the right thing to the right people at the right time, giving your business the best possible chance to recover.

The top dos and don'ts of communications



Do

- **Be clear**
Stay 'on message' (everyone saying the same thing) or you'll risk credibility.
- **Be concise**
Stick to the facts to prevent confusion.
- **Be timely**
Regular communications will stop others from filling in the blanks and prevent rumours by making sure you are heard first.
- **Be transparent**
Being open about the situation and any actions you are taking to improve matters will help repair confidence and trust.
- **Be aware**
Monitor what is being said by others about the situation (e.g. social media).
- **Reinforce national messages**
i.e. get tested and don't try and hide it.

Don't

- **Victimise or blame**
- **Give out any personal information**

Phase one: the outbreak

This section is to help you manage your communications in the event of a limited outbreak. However, you must make sure you follow the latest government advice in terms of reporting. Firstly, you must inform Public Health at your local authority. More advice is on www.plymouth.gov.uk including the action cards which set out your operational actions.

What to say in the event of an outbreak – in general

What you say in the initial outbreak does not need to be complicated, but the following points are essential to establish, and then cover in any communications:

- **What has happened**
Detail the outbreak (but avoid giving out any personal information).
- **When it happened**
The time period of the outbreak (if known).
- **Where it occurred**
Location of the outbreak, e.g. the town or if there are several premises, approximate location, e.g. South Branch of Teatime Treats.
- **What is being done**
If mitigating measures are required, list them, e.g. *“We are doing a risk assessment and adjusting business activities if necessary.”*
If no action is being taken, you should explain why.
- **Where people can go for more information**
Where will you be putting more details? Website, social media, internal emails, signs etc.

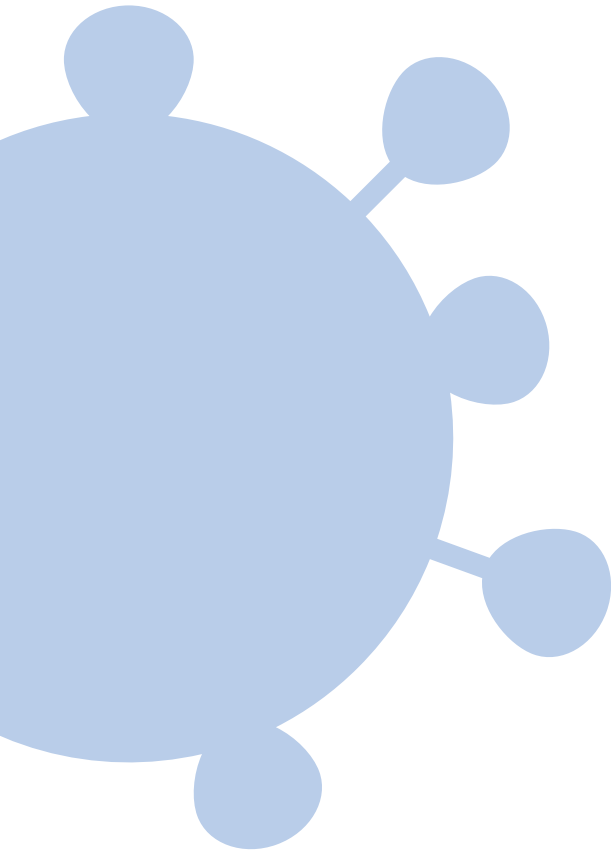
Communication with your team

An outbreak in the workplace is likely to be a worrying time for staff. Regular updates will be essential to make sure that everyone is aware of what is happening and what measures, if any, will be put in place, and how they should comply. Even if it is business as usual, keeping in touch with colleagues will provide much needed reassurance while the outbreak is dealt with. It's also an opportunity to look at what you need people to do in the meantime.

Whatever the situation, you might want to consider the following:

- **Keep staff in the loop**
Regular communications to support your team and prevent possible unrest, anxiety or rumours.
- **Encourage good public health behaviours**
Help them to understand how the business will support them if they need to self isolate. This will be vital to ensure that if people feel unwell they will get tested and do not hide it.
- **Be clear on actions**
If you are changing business activities in order to make it more covid-secure, make sure the staff are aware of these changes at an early stage so these activities become embedded within your business operations. You may need to review actions to make sure staff understand them, and are carrying them out in line with the requirements.
- **Set out expectations**
If your business has an active social media presence, remind staff of any social media policy, and also set out what they should do if media approaches them. If someone comments adversely on social media, how do you want the team to react?
- **Be visible and contactable**
And if that is not personally possible, have a dedicated contact where staff can report and concerns or issues.





Communications with your customers, suppliers and local community

Customer communications help protect your business. This section is designed to help you navigate any initial outbreak issues, and setting out how you can spread the message wider to clients, your supply chain and your local neighbourhood – if appropriate.

- **What to say**

Keep it clear and concise and stick to outbreak details. Ask yourself who you need to talk to and what you need to tell them. Do you need to send bespoke communications to your clients – are there temporary closures, additional safety measures or is it businesses as usual? Are there any changes suppliers need to be aware of?

- **How to say it**

How would you normally reach your customers? Use the tools your business already has in place to do this - website, social media, client emails signage, media.

- **When to say it**

This will depend on the nature of the situation. No matter what the situation though, talk to your workforce first. All communications will need to provide real-time updates.

- **Social media awareness**

Social media is a useful tool for many businesses but it can also be a place where discontent can galvanise quickly. If you are using social media as part of your outbreak communications there are two basic options at this stage:

- turn off commenting
- if you do continue with commenting, you can challenge negative comments by stating basic facts and positive messages but beware of balance. It's hard to counter a full scale pile on when you're trying to deal with many other operational aspects.

What to do if the media approaches the business

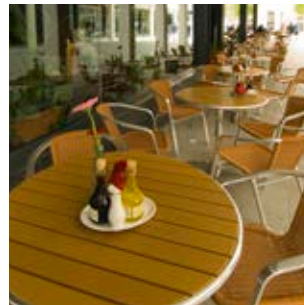
Speaking to the media can be daunting, especially during stressful times but there are a few things to bear in mind, so that you can come across well. The media will usually ask for an interview or a written (emailed) comment. In either case the following will help:

- **Decide in advance if talking to the media will be beneficial**

If no, you can handle this with a 'no comment, comment' which is better than a straight refusal

"We are aware of the outbreak situation but at this stage we are still investigating, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment further."

If pressed you can also say: *"We will come back to you when we have more detail. We cannot comment until we know more from the investigation currently underway"*



- **Decide who is going to be the spokesperson**
This should ideally be someone in senior management who will be responsible for speaking to the media or can be quoted by name if it's a written statement. If you're not used to speaking to the media, a written statement can be an easier option – just offer to email it to the journalist.
- **Be prepared**
Do not speak to the media until you have the full picture. You do not need to have the all details for this but you should be able to set out the situation and what will be done in order to manage it as well as where people can go for further details.
- **Follow the rules**
Make sure staff know what is expected of them – not to speak to media or give an off the cuff statement, and direct any media enquiries to the designated representative for example.

You do not have to give a media statement, and there can be challenges in being proactive about it – but it can help if you are asked, to restore confidence in the business.

Template statement

Example for you to tailor to your needs and key points to include:

- **Your business**
The name, what you do, how long have you been running.
- **What has happened**
Detail the outbreak but avoid giving out any personal information.
- **When it happened**
Detail the time period of the outbreak if known.
- **Where it occurred**
Location of the outbreak.
- **What is being done**
If mitigating measures are expected, list them i.e. undertaking a risk assessment and adjusting business activities if necessary.
If not action is being taken you will need to explain why.
- **Where people can go for more information**
Where will you be publishing more details?
Website, social media, internal emails etc.

“

..... has been based in [location] for years, employing people. Our services are

We can confirm that there [have/has] been identified case[s] of COVID-19 on site.

The cases were identified on [date] at our [location] premises.

We take health and safety of our employees, our customers and our community very seriously. We are taking appropriate steps to contain any transmission and [business is currently continuing / business has been temporarily suspended / business is continuing but restrictions are in place].

Safety is our number one priority and we are working closely with officers from public health and Council to ensure we are taking the right actions to protect our staff and customers.

We will be monitoring the situation closely and more information will be available [on our website / on date / on conclusion of any investigation].

”

Communications checklist

Here's a helpful checklist to set out some key points to use in outbreak communications. Not all may be relevant to your business, but this tool can help ensure you have covered all the bases you need. In addition we have produced an overview of a communications plan, which can be found in Appendix 1 for more detailed planning.

Can you define who is in charge?

Who will be in charge to coordinate a response in the event the business is affected by COVID-19? Are you taking instructions or working with a team from the local authority? What happens if they are on leave? What happens if they become a case?

Name of person in charge... [contact details]

Name of deputy... [contact details]

Do you have a list of key contacts within the team that are easily accessible?

Management team

Spokespeople

Outside organisations – Local Authority, Public Health England etc.

Do you have the facts and your messages?

What has happened?

When it happened

Where it occurred

What is being done?

Where people can go for more information

Have you informed your staff?

What about those not on shift or on holiday?

Have you informed your suppliers?

Do you need to make calls / write emails?

Have you informed directly affected customers?

Do you need to make calls / write emails?

Need to consider the wider public and customer updates?

Website statement

Newsletters

Social media

Signage on premises

Press release

If you have been approached by the media, have you:

Decided if it is beneficial to accept the media request? If yes:

Nominated a spokesperson

Prepared the facts

Monitoring – do you have a system for finding out what's being said about the situation? On social media for example – and how will (or even should) you respond?

Recovery phase

Once the initial outbreak has been dealt with, recovery communications can take place as soon as possible. This will be important to promote business and restore confidence.

The main focus will be setting out any changes to business activity to ensure operations are covid-secure as well as promoting business as usual.

Communicating these additional measures will provide reassurance and encouragement to your staff, your customers and your community around you. If no changes to business activities were required, setting out why no changes were implemented will be key.

If you have any issues, concerns or need further advice, please email the Public Health Team at covid19@plymouth.gov.uk or call 01752 66800

Comms plan: a checklist

Setting down your plan on a page can help you manage the situation much more easily – you and everyone else knows what needs to be done, by when and by whom.

A plan should set out:

1. Who's going to do it?

The management team or person who will be in charge of the recovery communications. Are you taking instructions or working with a team from the local authority?

2. Who are you talking to?

Audiences – how you will reach them and when.

- a. Employees
- b. Those directly affected by the outbreak
- c. Customers and clients
- d. Community
- e. Suppliers
- f. Media, if required or approached

3. How will you reach them?

What options do you have?

- a. Website
- b. Social media

- c. Door drops / leaflets
- d. Advertising
- e. Radio or press statements
- f. Posters
- g. Word of mouth! It's the best way for people to hear good things about your business, and they're far more likely to trust someone they know expressing a positive opinion
- h. Are there any industry or trade bodies that can help?
Virtual networking?
- i. Loyalty schemes
- j. Mailouts

4. What will you say?

Define the messages – date; location; brief details; mitigating measures, if any; where people can go for further information.

5. Who will say it?

Spokespeople and contacts – those who will be in charge of speaking to the media etc. Prepare and keep your messages simple.

6. Monitoring

How will you find out what's being said about the situation? For example in the community, or on social media – and how will (or even should) you respond? Could you offer to talk to people about it, perhaps in an online meeting, if there's real concern? What are your staff hearing about it – and can they put an alternative view point?

7. Key contacts

- a. Crisis team
- b. Spokespeople
- c. Outside organisations – Local Authority, Public Health England etc.

8. Post-crisis recovery considerations

Is there anything else you need to factor in?