

HOW TO PLAN FOR AND RESPOND TO A COVID-19 OUTBREAK IN YOUR TOWN

Communications Support for Municipalities
from the State of Connecticut

10/27/2020

1.0 Introduction



One of the most essential elements in battling the spread of COVID-19 is preparation.

COVID-19 spreads with alarming speed, and all our towns can be vulnerable to outbreaks if even one person doesn't take precautions. Planning and action can decide the course of how far and how serious outbreaks become.

As a local leader, you can make a critical difference in people's lives simply by following the recommendations in this plan.

Know your resources. Know your action steps. Save lives.



2.0 State resources ready right now

The State of Connecticut has a variety of resources that can help you communicate with the public about COVID-19 - and is working consistently to add more. Resources address popular topics like testing, contact tracing, public health guidance, and include materials like:

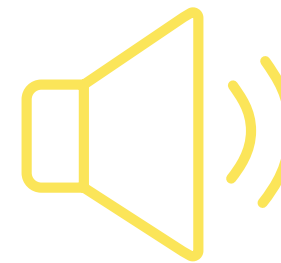
- Fliers
- Posters
- Conversation Guides
- Videos
- Digital Assets

For materials, please visit:
<https://portal.ct.gov/coronavirus/communityresources>

Be sure to bookmark the site and return often for updated information.

3.0 How to plan & How to respond

3.1 Planning Measures: What you should do now



3.1.1 Routine communications

- **Monitor public health metrics and the news**

Check the Governor’s Daily Updates. Daily briefings will keep you current on hot spots and infection rates. Read the Governor’s press releases at <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/Pages/Governors-Press-Releases>.

Know the Yellow, Orange, and Red Alert system. The system identifies actions based on the number of daily COVID-19 cases/100K people. Town classifications are released on a regular basis, and can be found at <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/COVID-19-Data-Tracker>.

Get updates from other city officials. In addition to staying in constant communication, sign up to receive available public communications from the Office of the Mayor, the Health Department, and school system.

Keep an eye on the news. Signing up to receive alerts from media outlets can help you keep a pulse on what your residents are hearing.



- **Maintain public communications**

Continue to send information to the public about the basics they need to stop the spread of COVID-19. Use social media and your conversations with the press. Make sure to remind people:

- There are facts and fiction about COVID-19. Report new information, and remember that sharing information that has been validated by legitimate sources is incredibly important.
- Public health best practices will make a difference – stay home if you feel sick, wear a mask, social distance, and hand wash your hands – it’s critical to our success.

Keep it simple. It’s easy to overthink communications when guidance is changing every day, but typically – the most important guidance is basic.

Communicate regularly in multiple languages. You know your neighborhoods best – and ensuring that your communications are multilingual where they need to be could make a difference when you’re working to avoid an outbreak.

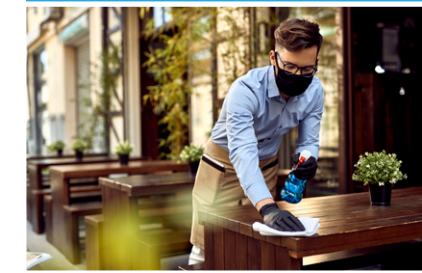
Communicate regularly with hard to reach populations. Elderly, disabled, low-income, and isolated residents are usually the hardest to reach – and may be more vulnerable in the event of an outbreak. Ensuring they have up to date information consistently is critical.

Make sure your community knows where to get tested – at all times. Anyone can find a test by visiting ct.gov/coronavirus, typing in their zip code, and hitting “GO.”

Those who live in densely populated areas, congregate in small settings, or reside in a town experiencing an outbreak are encouraged to get tested regularly, even if they’re asymptomatic. Those communities can find a free test, regardless of insurance, or immigration status by visiting ct.gov/prioritytesting.

Both links about will direct you to a site near you with detailed information collected by the United Way of Connecticut including, but not limited to:

- Location
- Hours, and appointment information
- Types of tests offered
- Availability of pediatric testing

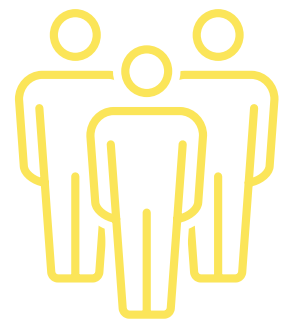


- **Build your communications and coordination network**

Set, and participate in regular local coordination meetings. It's critical that local public health officials, town CEOs, housing authorities, healthcare facilities, testing partners, and others touch base weekly to discuss any emerging issues and help plan for the future.

Develop a list of key contacts and be sure to update and engage them regularly. This includes elected officials, local leaders, local organization leadership, leaders in places of worship, service providers, and anyone in a position to amplify communication to residents. See sections below for specifics.

Stay in close coordination with your local health department. In the event of an outbreak, local health departments will coordinate directly with all of those needed to participate in response efforts. Local health departments can and should also keep in touch with local long-term care facilities, primary care facilities, and others.



3.1.2 Identify a response team of staff and volunteers

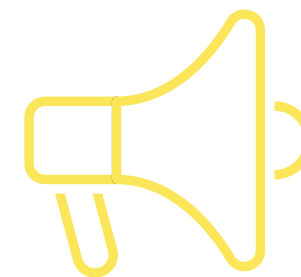
- **Have a contact list of pre-screened employees and volunteers that can lend extra support during an outbreak situation**

Ensuring your staff is working during an outbreak is critical to the response efforts. When considering who to add to a response team, you should think about:

Bilingual and multilingual employees. Communicating to residents in their own language is critical to response efforts.

Those with communications and public information experience. You will need additional support staff to communicate within town channels and out to the general public. Have staff ready to communicate on the phone and online, by updating website content, and sending information out through social media.

Community liaisons. This may be the leaders of local nonprofits, religious organizations, school/education based groups, and civic groups who talk to and listen to many residents.



3.1.3 Identify places to amplify your message

- **Identify key outlets and key contacts where people go to get information in the event of a spike**

Popular town & community websites. Compile a list of links to these sources and contact information for the administrators, so you are prepared to share updates.

Ethnic media. Local news and entertainment outlets that attract specific ethnic groups, particularly monolingual communities.

Radio. Know your local stations, if any, and the news director or programming director.

Local TV. Have a list of the main network affiliates and their news directors as well as health reporters.



Social Media. There are frequently “friends & neighbors” or local social media groups that connect residents. You can search within social media platforms to identify the largest ones in your town. For example, WhatsApp is widely used among immigrant communities.

Newspaper. Small weekly papers may only print on a weekly or monthly basis, but they can be an important way that residents get their news – and they often have well-followed social media platforms, and are generally a trusted source for people in specific communities. Keeping local papers informed in the same way as other community leaders can be incredibly helpful in response efforts.

Department of Transportation (DOT) signage

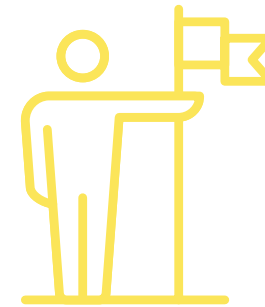
Locations: Identify DOT signage locations that may be helpful in reaching a large group of people.

Billboards: Identify billboard locations in high traffic locations that may be helpful in amplifying information.

Monitor popular public gathering spots. Places where people congregate can be great places to post public information. (These places can also be “hot spots” in the event of a COVID-19 spike, and useful to local public health officials)

Consider locations like:

- Community centers
- Retail
- Libraries
- Grocery stores
- Senior Centers
- YMCA/YWCA
- Schools
- Places of worship
- Local events



3.1.4 Build a list of local leaders

- **Compile contact information for, and communicate regularly (even before an outbreak) with:**

Elected and appointed officials. This should include local, state and national representatives.

Healthcare practitioners. Healthcare professionals have been some of the most reliable public messengers during the pandemic, and can be invaluable if they are kept up to date about what’s happening in your town.

Chamber of Commerce and other business organizations. Coalition groups are a strong way to centralize communications with local business leaders.

Police and Fire. First responders are effective ways of distributing information, and often have well-followed social media channels.

Non-profit organizations. Non-profits touch a broad group of people in every community. The larger you can build your list, the better.

Local influencers. This may include neighborhood leaders, popular retailers such as beauty salons, shop keepers, and popular DJs at local radio stations.

SMERFs. This refers to all Social, Military, Educational, Religious, Fraternal groups.

3.2 Response Measures: What to do if an outbreak occurs



3.2.1 Know the basic message

- **Know the call(s) to action.**

Get tested. If you feel sick, get tested. If your town is at an orange level or experiencing a red alert you should get tested, even if you are asymptomatic.

Stay home. If you think you may have been exposed, or are having symptoms of COVID-19, you should get tested and stay home. If anyone needs food, housing, or monetary resources to self-isolate or quarantine, the contact tracer in touch with you will be able to direct you to resources that can help. Remember, the safest place you can be is your home. While we recognize people need to leave for work, school, and other responsibilities, consider staying home from recreational or social activities.

Continue to follow public health guidance. Keep on social distancing, wearing masks, and washing hands. It could make a significant difference.



3.2.2 Mobilize your communications networks.

- **Reach out to local officials who can extend the reach of the message**

Leverage your list of local leaders. Encourage them to share content via email, social media, and other communications channels

- **Reach local media outlets**

Observe best practices for media/outreach communications.

Most media communication takes place online via email. Other media contacts may prefer a phone call. This will be clear if you've developed 2-way communications with local media including:

- Social Media
- Community & news websites
- Radio
- TV
- Newspaper

- **Post information in local gathering spots identified in your preparation. Consider placing posters in high traffic areas for underserved populations such as ethnic supermarkets, restaurants, barbershops, beauty salons, and any other locations that make sense.**

- **Activate public alert systems**

Issue strongly worded alerts that an outbreak is happening NOW. Be definitive that there is a serious public health situation at hand.



Reverse 911 notification, robo-call, email, and text notifications. If your town has reverse 911, robo-call, or mass email or text capabilities, they should be utilized if your town is experiencing a Red Alert - or there are additional updates or emergencies your residents need to know about quickly. You may also want to utilize any resources available through your school systems.

Public roadways. DOT signage on highways can be used to alert motorists of a local COVID-19 outbreak. The local Public Works department may have portable signage that can be used to divert traffic from hot spots.

- **Contact local printing resources**

Schedule printing of needed materials.

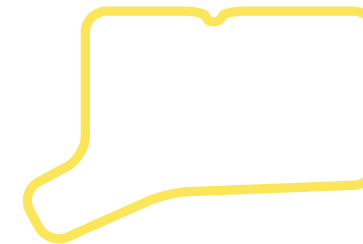
Remember that you already have a list of high-traffic sites where you may want to post materials. Printing companies can often process electronic files quickly in an emergency.

- **Cover essential content areas**

In public communications regarding a COVID-19 outbreak, deal in specifics.

- The number of new cases
- Possible source(s) of outbreak
- Testing data and what it shows
- Testing options and locations

- Symptoms of COVID-19
- Safety reminders such as PPE and distancing
- Travel advisory information



3.2.3 If you need support from the State

- **If you see a communications need and don't have a way to meet it:**

Remember you can visit

<https://portal.ct.gov/coronavirus/communityresources> for resources from the state.



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