WORKSHOP - RISK AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN MAJOR CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL HEALTH-THREATS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION IN BIOLOGICAL OR CHEMICAL TERROR ATTACKS

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DOI: 10.5937/BatutPHCO24092B

Background: The EU-funded Joint Action Terror project aims to address cross-sectoral gaps in the health preparedness to respond to a biological or chemical terror attack. An important part of the project is risk communication. Risk communication is defined as a core capacity in the International Health Regulations (WHO).

One of the deliverables from the project is a guideline for risk communication. What can we learn from existing guidelines, what are the experiences from known incidents, and what sort of recommendations can give added value to European countries?

This article aims to present the recommendations on risk communication, alongside with supplementary experiences from exercises and real events over the past year.

Methods and Objectives: The methodology underlying the recommendations has been to identify best practices, existing guidelines, main theoretical concepts, literature reviews, case studies, and input from workshops and exercises.

The objective for the recommendations has been to identify gaps in existing guidelines that this project could fill in for.

Results: The recommendations highlight the need for cross-sectoral planning of risk communication on a strategic level, the need for updated preparedness plans, public awareness, communication targeted against vulnerable groups, disclosure of information that could protect people´s health and life, trust and healing, social media and the handling of disinformation. Since biological or chemical terror attack are rare, the recommendations should be implemented using an all-hazards approach.

Conclusions: A biological or chemical terror attack will challenge how to communicate quickly and in a coordinated manner both to the public and between the sectors responsible for the response. Specifically, the need for cross-sectoral planning for risk communication in an all-hazards approach at a strategic level is recommended.

Keywords: biological, chemical, terrorism, CBRNE, risk communication