



## **Managing Misinformation, Disinformation, and Rumours in CBRN Situations Guidance For National Societies and IFRC Field Staff**

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### **WHY THIS MATTERS**

In times of concern around Chemical, Biological, Radiological, or Nuclear (CBRN) incidents whether actual or perceived harmful information can quickly undermine humanitarian response, cause panic, or lead to unsafe behaviours. Misinformation thrives where there are gaps in trusted, clear communication.

As part of the IFRC's Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) approach and in line with Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) standards, National Societies should:

- Recognize access to timely, accurate, and actionable information as a form of humanitarian assistance
- Gather, analyze, and respond to community feedback through established two-way communication systems
- Coordinate a consistent, calm, and culturally appropriate approach that builds trust, reduces fear, and supports informed decision-making

**Purpose:** To ensure a unified, calm, and informed approach across country operations in response to CBRN-related concerns, supporting timely and trusted communication with communities.

### **KEY ACTIONS FOR NATIONAL SOCIETIES**

#### **1. Understand Harmful Information Types**

- **Misinformation:** False info shared without intent to harm
- **Disinformation:** Deliberately false or manipulated content
- **Malinformation:** True but used out of context to cause harm
- **Rumour:** Unverified, rapidly spread info filling an information gap

#### **2. Apply the Infodemic Management Cycle**

Adapted from RCCE/WHO best practice, the following cycle ensures dynamic response:

- ✓ **Listen:** Detect harmful narratives through feedback, media, and social listening
- ✓ **Understand:** Analyze fear, intent, and who is affected
- ✓ **Engage:** Use trusted messengers and community leaders
- ✓ **Explain:** Share simple, culturally relevant, actionable information
- ✓ **Evaluate:** Monitor community reactions, adapt messaging as needed

### **3. Detect Through Feedback and Listening**

Use two-way communication tools to track emerging fears and misinformation:

- Adopt and use existing feedback channels (e.g., hotlines and WhatsApp channels) ensuring that the communication channels are the preferred ones by communities)
- Social media listening (e.g. Sprinklr, Telegram, Facebook)
- Volunteer observations and community reports
- In person sessions

Tip: Log rumours, questions, and trends in a central system, with daily review and escalation for high-risk content. Please check Tool-3 for logbook.

### **4. Assess the Harm and Decide When to Respond**

Use this quick assessment:

- Is it causing panic, exclusion, or unsafe behaviour?
- Is it spreading widely or rapidly?
- Are marginalized or high-risk groups affected?
- Could our silence be interpreted as confirmation?

If the answer is “yes,” coordinate a response quickly with health, protection, or relevant leads.

### **5. Respond Using ‘Information as Aid’**

- Provide calm, clear, and actionable information, not just debunking
- Focus messages on:
  - What is true
  - What is false or misleading
  - What people should do now
- Use multiple preferred and trusted channels of communities, both digital and non-digital:
  - Social media, SMS, AccessRC
  - Local radio, printed FAQ flyers, community meetings
  - Mobile teams

Where possible, test messages with community members to ensure clarity and resonance, especially for sensitive topics like radiation, iodine use, or evacuation alerts.

### **6. Coordinate and Stay Consistent**

- Use agreed messaging cleared with public health authorities and Movement partners
- Do not label anything a CBRN incident unless officially confirmed
- Train staff and volunteers to use key messages, FAQ answers, and safe referral practices
- Ensure internal briefings are regular and based on up-to-date community feedback

**Example:**

- “There is no confirmed CBRN event. We are prepared, and you will be informed immediately if there is a threat.”
- “Only take iodine if advised by health authorities.”
- “We’re here to answer your questions, ask us anytime.”

## 7. Monitor, Adapt and Build Trust

- Monitor community responses, what are people doing, saying, or asking?
- Update FAQs, Q&A sheets, and message banks regularly
- Share changes with staff and community channels
- Capture learnings to integrate into CBRN preparedness plans and future RCCE materials

## 8. Field Checklist – Based on CEA and RCCE Standards

Step	Core Focus	What to Do
<b>Detect</b>	Feedback & Listening	Use hotlines, social media, and volunteer networks
<b>Assess</b>	Humanitarian Risk	Prioritize based on harm, spread, and who’s affected
<b>Respond</b>	Info as Aid	Share calm, trusted, and actionable guidance using digital and non-digital channels
<b>Coordinate</b>	Messaging Consistency	Align with public authorities, NS branches, and RCC partners
<b>Monitor</b>	Learning & Adaptation	Evaluate reactions, update content, and inform future preparedness

## 9. Staff & Volunteer Reminders

- Stick to approved FAQs. Don’t speculate. Refer to designated sources.
- Explain the actual risks/threats (if any) and avoid “what if” discussions.
- Validate the preferred communication channels and trusted sources of information of communities to disseminate information.
- Be kind and calm. Acknowledge fears. Offer reassurance where appropriate.
- Use Psychological First Aid (PFA) skills and support peers.
- Use feedback mechanism, rumour logbooks and escalation systems to track rumours.

## References

- [Managing Misinformation In A Humanitarian Context \(Internews, 2017\)](#)
- [Rumour Has It: A Practice Guide to Working with Rumours \(CDAC, 2021\)](#)
- [IFRC CEA Feedback Kit \(CEA Hub\)](#)
- [Addressing Harmful Information In Conflict Settings \(ICRC\)](#)