



Communicating
in a crisis

AVIAN FLU

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Avian flu – media reaction

- 2003: A veterinarian died in NL (Europe!)
 - Big story only in Dutch media
- 2004: Avian flu is raging in Asia
 - No front page coverage in EU
- 2005: Avian flu arrives on the shores of Turkey
 - “pandemic” crisis in media coverage

Crisis: 4 media phases

1. media frenzy – doomsday and myths born
 2. pedagogic information – experts advice
 3. “business as usual” – routine reporting
 4. Avian flu fatigue – public and media tired
- Avian flu – a classic example for crisis development
- Cycle will start again if new events occur

Lessons to be learned

- Early stages of crisis shape minds and perceptions
 - Doomsday scenario resulted in:
 1. People buying vaccine with unknown success rate
 2. People getting vaccinated at against flu, rather than AI
 3. Massive drop in poultry/meat/eggs sales
 4. Worthy cases were short of medication for “normal” flu
 5. Poultry sector in serious economic difficulties

Lessons to be learned

- Why doomsday?
 - Plenty of information on AI was available
 - Information was transparent
 - Information was quick
- Fear factor
- Risk perception

Public authorities response

- Be prepared – always
 - Commission prepared flu crisis communication plan
- Understand fears of public
 - Eurobarometer on AI + focus groups
 - Media monitoring
- Clear messages of complex issues
 - Ten key messages on AI
- Co-ordinate with each other to avoid public insecurity
 - Health experts at all levels, particularly MS/international organisations
 - Communication experts at all levels

What will happen if

- All our “tools” will be available to help you to do your job
 - Spokespersons’ Service: crisis team, “pandemic spokesperson”
 - Press room open 24/24, 7/7 or web-streaming
 - AV-support via Europe by Satellite
 - Call centre for citizens in all languages: Europe Direct
 - “Flu crisis” website

“You” and “us”

- Different roles but same objective: accurate information without generating panic
- Need to help people to protect themselves appropriately
- Public authorities interested in open crisis communication policy
 - Peer review groups with journalists?
 - Fora with journalists?