



**Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF),
Ministry of Public Health, Thailand & Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan
Joint Event:
High-level Meeting on
Risk Communication for Public Health Emergencies:
Risk Communication beyond the country borders**

18-19 September 2019, Bangkok, Thailand

Scope & Purpose

Background

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Ministry of Public Health Thailand and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA Japan) have partnered to host a multi-country and multi-sectoral High-level Meeting focusing on managing risk communication for public health emergencies.

Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) Public Health Network

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)¹, founded in 1997, is an intergovernmental not-for-profit organisation representing the 53 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)² Partners: 30 European and 21 Asian countries, plus the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat. Following the 6th ASEM Summit (ASEM6; 2006; Helsinki, Finland) where the leaders expressed their determination to combat avian influenza and a possible human influenza pandemic, the “ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza”, financially supported by the Government of Japan, was launched at the 9th ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (ASEM FMM9; 2009; Hanoi, Viet Nam). Since then, the two components of the Initiative, ASEM stockpile of anti-viral drugs and personal protective equipment, as well as ASEF Public Health Network (ASEF PHN) have contributed to strengthening ASEM Partners’ capacity for managing public health emergencies.

ASEF PHN’s scope is not limited to pandemic influenza – it extends to infectious disease control as well as pandemic preparedness and response. To strengthen multi-sectoral pandemic preparedness and response, ASEF PHN hosted several workshops in its initial phase between 2009 and 2013. Among the recommendations developed from these workshops, strengthening risk communication emerged as a common need across Asia and Europe. Following this recommendation, ASEF has implemented six workshops and meetings on different aspects of risk communication since 2013.

Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) Thailand

During the reign of King Rama VIII, the MoPH was established on 10 March 1942 as a result of the enactment of the Ministries and Departments Reorganisation Act (Amendment No. 3) of B.E. 2485. Later in 1966, the date 27 November was chosen as the commemoration day of the MoPH’s founding. The Royal Thai MoPH is the main national health agency that plays an important role in the development of health programmes and the improvement of the health status of Thai people, including foreigners living in Thailand. The MoPH’s mission is as follows: 1. Develop a health policy and strategy for the country and between countries; 2. Develop a holistic health service in both normal situations and emergencies, with an emphasis on the basic health services package, specialised services and delivery system; 3. Encourage all sectors of society to participate and have an awareness of health promotion and a healthy development of healthy behaviour; 4. Develop a health management mechanism according to quality standards and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP); and 5. Develop priorities for health research and knowledge development.

¹ <http://www.ASEF.org>

² <https://www.ASEMinfoboard.org/about/partners>

Thailand has implemented the International Health Regulations (IHR) since they were first introduced in 1969, and has been actively involved in improving the Regulation since the 1980s. Thailand volunteered to host a joint external evaluation (JEE) mission in 2017. This showed tremendous foresight and demonstrated the Government's commitment to providing world-class health care and public health protection to its citizens. Thailand is also recognised for its role as a leader in the region in several technical areas, including responding to emergencies and requests for technical support, and supporting ongoing capacity development, including risk communication capacity. Risk communication in Thailand has evolved significantly since the first detection of SARS cases in Thailand in 2002, and the incursion of H5N1 highly pathogenic avian influenza in 2003. Thailand has progressively moved from a reactive approach, with ad-hoc task forces, towards national plans and strategies that incorporate One Health: a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach to risk communication. Key successes in this area include: use of event-based risk communication; enable better communications with Thai nationals and foreigners living in Thailand about existing and acute health-related crises; and to provide timely, clear, and credible information to key partners and stakeholders about all types of impending public health issues of international concern.

Risk communication beyond the country borders

As global connectivity increases, the risk of epidemics and pandemics also increases. In an interdependent world, public health incidents in one country can rapidly affect its neighbours and even trigger emergency situations in other continents – as was seen during the Ebola epidemic of 2014-2016. It is well established that risk communication plays an essential role in protecting the public from health threats. However, it also has an important role in reducing the negative consequences these threats can have on countries' economies, trade, and tourism industries. Because of this, countries' risk communication strategies should not focus only on audiences within their national borders. They should also consider international audiences and how their perception of the threat might impact economic activities and travel.



Different types of Risk Communication, source: Tomoya SAITO; NIPH, Japan

In 2019, ASEF, MoPH Thailand and MOFA Japan will jointly host the “High-level Meeting on Risk Communication for Public Health Emergencies” with a focus on how best to communicate national health emergencies to the global public. This certainly means going beyond the basic requirements of the International Health Regulation (IHR 2005) to share information with WHO and other Member States. Nonetheless, how much time and effort should national health authorities devote to communicating with global audiences? Who do health authorities need to partner to reach these audiences? Moreover, how should they adapt their communication for them?

Objectives of the High-level Meeting

The overall aim of this High-level Meeting is to strengthen countries' capacity to support emergency risk communication (ERC) for public health emergencies (PHE), especially with regards their communication to global audiences. The relationship between PHEs and tourism will be examined to demonstrate the importance of effective risk communication and its influence beyond the health sector. It will explore the challenges national health authorities face in communicating effectively to global audiences during PHEs and share best practices in overcoming these challenges. It will also explore opportunities and challenges for risk communication cooperation with partners beyond the health sector during these emergencies.

Specific objectives of the Meeting are:

- To identify the challenges for national authorities in informing diverse audiences beyond their country's borders during PHEs;
- To develop recommendations on good practice in communicating to global audiences during PHEs; and
- To build an “economic case”, which can be used to convince other sectors such as Ministries of Finance regarding the importance of investing in PHE preparedness and response capacities, including risk communication

Target Audience

The High-level Meeting will aim to address diverse audiences: i) Government officials in charge of health emergencies and health emergency risk communication; ii) Government officials from sectors beyond the health sector that may be impacted by PHEs; and iii) representatives from private sector organisations that may be affected by PHEs. More specifically, the Meeting would aim to reach:

- Senior-level officials, advisors and/or other decision-makers from ASEM Partners' Ministries of Health or equivalent
- Spokespersons/senior-level media personnel from ASEM Partners' Ministries of Health or equivalent
- Senior-level officials, advisors and/or other decision-makers from ASEM Partners' Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs, Tourism and other related Ministries
- Representatives from private sector organisations, including tourism sector, aviation industry, hotel sector, etc. whose economic activity can be heavily impacted by PHEs
- Representatives from organising committees of mass-gatherings such as the Olympics, South-East Asia Games, etc.
- Representatives of international organisations and NGOs

Expected Outcomes

The High-level Meeting will foster the exchange of good practices in establishing and improving PHE risk communication processes between Asia and Europe. A graphic artist will attend the event and produce a live-scribed report summarising the key recommendations and conclusions.

Date and Location

This High-level Meeting will take place on 18-19 September 2019, in Bangkok, Thailand.



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