

# The FSA Risk Communication Toolkit

This document should be used as a checklist when developing risk communications. A fuller document is available. The principles in this toolkit are complementary with the Government Communications Services' OASIS model.

This toolkit sets out seven principles which we always consider when communicating with the public about risk

## **Context - consider who your audience are and the context the risk has for them**

- Who are you communicating with?
- Do you know what consumers are thinking and saying about this issue now? Where are they getting their information from?
- Can you target them by demographics, life stage, where they live?
- Have you considered levels of literacy, comprehension?

## **Purpose – have you got a clear idea of the outcome you want your communication to achieve?**

- What do you want people to feel, think and do?
  - Is there a specific action you wish people to take and is this clear in your messaging? For example, encourage consumers not to wash chicken or sign up for food alerts
  - Are you reacting to a particular situation?
  - Are you safeguarding confidence in UK food? The reputation of the FSA?
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**Control - managing the situation (including the narrative) as much as possible means you can influence how things go**

- Do you need to understand more about the risk?
- Have you tested your communication with the target audience?
- Have you thought about sequencing, the right order of messages and how you might back them up on other channels?
- Have you thought about the impact of timing?
- Do you know what questions you might be asked?

**Transparency - be open and honest in all communications, even if uncertain**

- Have you presented the evidence behind decisions?
- Have you set out the facts? What we are doing to gather more information?
- Have you acknowledged when and if advice or evidence changed and why?
- Are you being clear about both the risk and how certain you are about the risk?

**Presentation - consider the language, format and type of data you use to express the risk. The way you provide information can affect how it is perceived**

- Quantitative data - when you describe the risk and uncertainty using numbers (e.g. using percentages or frequencies). Too much quantitative information can be overwhelming
  - Qualitative data - when you use words (e.g. high, medium low) to describe the risk and uncertainty. Can be easily interpreted in different ways
  - Framing - presenting the risk using expressions of probability
  - Visuals – present risk using illustrations (graphs, pie charts etc). Can be emotive and engaging but need to be clear, relevant and not too complex
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## **Delivery – have you considered the impact of channels (as well as the messenger) chosen to disseminate your messaging**

Consider the pros and cons of different channels and types of messenger

- Traditional media channels are expected for serious risk communications but allow your message to be filtered through the media's agenda
- Social media has potential to engage consumers quickly but can be considered less trustworthy
- Messages from independent organisations are viewed as impartial but it is important independence is backed up with expertise
- Third party 'endorsement'/perspective - experts can add credibility and reinforce independence

## **Evaluation - understand how they have contributed towards successful outcomes**

- Can you evaluate the effectiveness of what you've done?
  - Are there clear lessons to be learned?
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