

One Journalist's Perspective: Managing Misinformation & Covering Crisis in Real Time

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A few words on HPV

- ♦ Close to **HALF** of American adults are infected with HPV –National Center for Vital Statistics, April 2017
- ♦ How are we doing on vaccinations? According to CDC: 6 out of 10 girls started vaccination series and 5 out of 10 boys

*Slower, less visible crisis (than Ebola or Zika, which I will talk about), but tips I will provide still apply for media interaction! And here, too, landscape of fear, misinformation, miscommunication, distrust...

Agenda

- ♦ How news is covered (quickly) on health issues
- ♦ What to do with evolving information
- ♦ When misinformation goes viral
- ♦ What you can do as public health professionals, policymakers, etc.



Breaking News

My goals (as media): get out the facts, dispel rumors, raise awareness, highlight gaps in knowledge, tell a good story, elucidate science, humanize the problem(s), get clicks/eyeballs

But how?

Case Study: Navigating Ebola



Community health workers and volunteers are an essential part of the Ebola response in Liberia. *Credit: Morgana Wingard/ UNDP/Flickr*

Navigating misinformation during an outbreak

- ♦ Health department or agency
- ♦ Researcher or physician
- ♦ Advocacy group
- ♦ Crowdsourcing/social media

Ebola virus disease in Guinea

Disease outbreak news

23 March 2014

23 MARCH 2014 - The Ministry of Health (MoH) of Guinea has notified WHO of a rapidly evolving outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in forested areas of south-eastern Guinea. As of 22 March 2014, a total of 49 cases including 29 deaths (case fatality ratio: 59%) had been reported.



Fact or Fiction?: The Ebola Virus Will Go Airborne

September 16, 2014 — Dina Fine Maron



Weaponized Ebola: Is It Really a Bioterror Threat?

September 25, 2014 — Dina Fine Maron



Let's Talk about Ebola Survivors and Sex

October 31, 2014 — Dina Fine Maron



Is the Blood of Ebola Survivors an Effective Treatment?

December 1, 2014 — Dina Fine Maron

Quarantines and Travel Bans: Could They Work to Thwart Ebola?

October 16, 2014 — David Biello

Disease & fear know no borders

Why We Shouldn't Quarantine Travelers Because of Zika

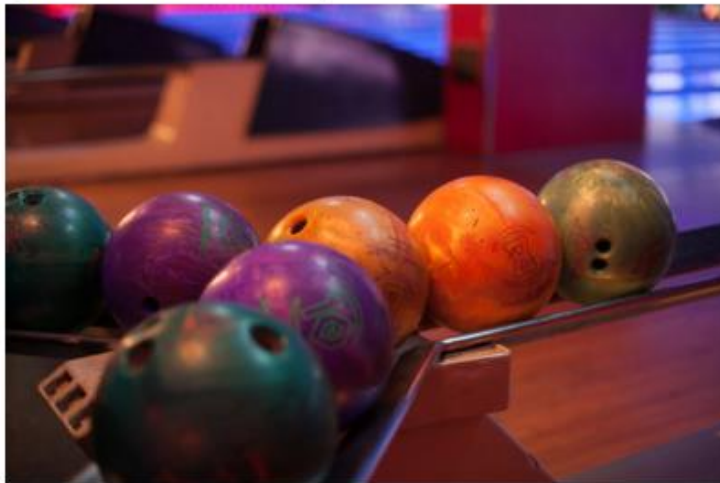
Contrary to some Republican presidential candidates, public health experts say there should not be any travel or trade restrictions because of the virus

By Dina Fine Maron on February 7, 2016

ASK WELL

Can You Get Ebola From a Bowling Ball?

By DONALD G. MCNEIL JR. OCTOBER 23, 2014 9:41 PM 79



Anthony Lanzilote for The New York Times

Q: Can you get Ebola from a bowling ball?

A. Dr. Craig Spencer, the patient with Ebola currently in isolation at Bellevue Hospital Center, went bowling in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn on Wednesday evening. According to city health officials, he had been taking his temperature twice a day since he left Guinea on Oct. 14. His temperature was normal on Wednesday evening, and he did not yet have any other symptoms, such as nausea or diarrhea. Ebola experts say the disease cannot be transmitted before the appearance of symptoms.

I never had Ebola. I never had symptoms of Ebola. I tested negative for Ebola the first night I stayed in [New Jersey](#) governor Chris Christie's private prison in Newark. I am now past the incubation period - meaning that I will not develop symptoms of Ebola.

I never had Ebola, so please stop calling me "the [Ebola](#) Nurse" - now!

This is what did happen: I was quarantined against my will by overzealous politicians after I volunteered to go and treat people affected by Ebola in west Africa. My liberty, my interests and consequently my civil rights were ignored

Email

Share

Tweet

Save

Media is not only info. source for public

- ♦ Viral twitter or Facebook message can alert media to a story/area of interest
- ♦ But it can also fuel public problems if information is inaccurate/public health officials are not able to react quickly to halt spread of misinformation...

Viral Tweet With Deadly Consequences

- ♦ August 7, 2014 tweet
 - ♦ In Nigeria, an undergrad student tweets that the country's Ministry of Health is urging public to prevent Ebola attack by drinking and bathing in *salt water*
- ♦ Another problem tweet: "Please ensure that you and your family and all your neighbours bath with hot water and salt before daybreak today because of Ebola virus which is spreading through the air"
 - ♦ <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/nigerian-ebola-hoax-results-deaths/story?id=25842191>

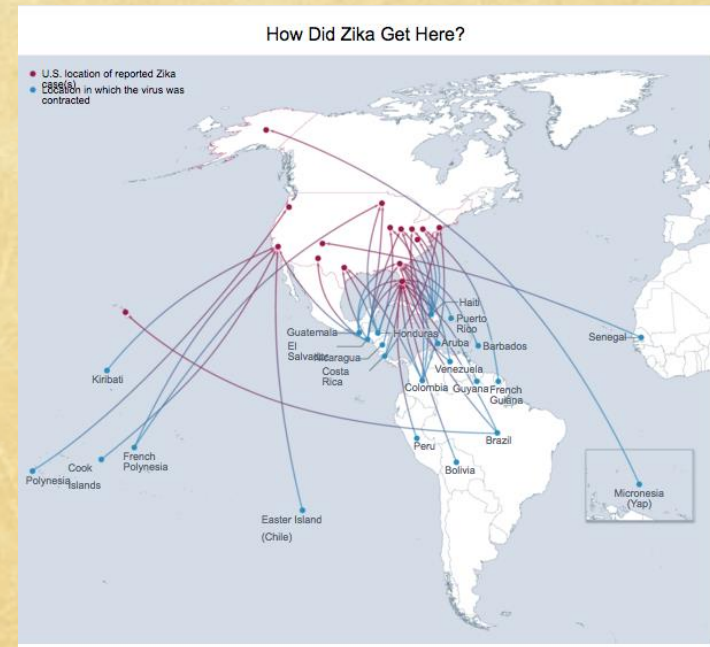
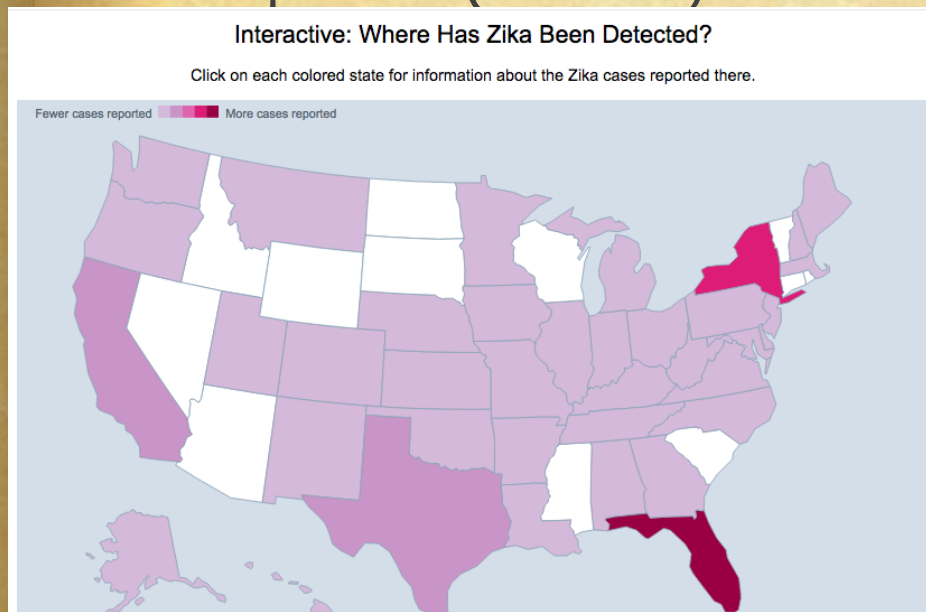
Bad news

- ♦ On Aug. 8, the Nigerian newspaper Vanguard News reported two dead and 20 more hospitalized due to excessive consumption of salt water. The deceased were believed to have had high blood pressure, a condition that is especially sensitive to high salt intake.
- ♦ Federal officials eventually tweeted out that this was a hoax, WHO put out an advisory
 - ♦ By Aug. 10, there were almost no tweets mentioning the bogus treatment
 - ♦ “All rumours of any other effective products or practices are false. Their use can be dangerous. In Nigeria, for example, at least two people have died after drinking salt water, rumoured to be protective.” – WHO advisory

DATA GAPS

Zika example

- ♦ I called state health depts. and provided regular updates (Jan. '16)



<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/zika-virus-threatens-u-s-from-abroad1/>

What you can do

- ♦ Get accurate information out fast before rumors take hold. Be comfortable talking about gaps in knowledge/uncertainty!
- ♦ Be vigilant online to see what misinformation is spreading
- ♦ Contact media/hold press conferences to get out accurate information as fast as you can including what you DO NOT know
- ♦ Share information on multiple platforms
- ♦ Be sure to value different media outlets where vulnerable audiences may look
- ♦ For something like HPV help journalists with fresh angles relevant to type of coverage they do: profiles of researcher/patient? Cutting edge research? New study on incidence? New legal actions?