

**Subject:** Crisis Comm & Media Relations E-Newsletter May 1, 2009 Special H1N1 Swine Flu Edition

**From:** Bruce Hennes <advocate@stratos.net>

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LLC

Crisis Communications Media Training  
Media Relations Litigation Communications  
www.crisiscommunications.com

## Crisis Comm & Media Relations E-Newsletter May 7, 2009

# Special H1N1 Swine Flu Edition

Bruce M. Hennes

hennes@crisiscommunications.com [LinkedIn](#)

Barbara Paynter, APR

paynter@crisiscommunications.com [LinkedIn](#)



## Special H1N1 Swine Flu Edition

**In response to the many calls and emails we've received about the possibility of a pandemic flu, asking us what to do and what to say, this special edition of the Hennes Communications Crisis Comm E-Newsletter has but one subject: H1N1 (swine flu).**

**Below, here's what we know, what we don't, what you should prepare for and links to official sources and information.**

**We welcome your comments and suggestions.**

As of today (Thursday, May 7, 2009), the news about the H1N1 (swine flu) outbreak is better.

Media hysteria aside, we know this to be true:

- Most who get this particular H1N1 (swine flu) *do* recover.
- Outside of Mexico, few people have died from this flu around the world.

- The single best way to protect yourself from getting this particular flu is to frequently wash your hands, practice good hygiene and avoid people who are obviously ill. Those who are ill should remain at home or in the hospital.
- In our opinion, the vast majority of government and health officials have handled the potential for a pandemic flu exactly in the right manner by being objective, sticking to scripts that have been well-prepared in advance and neither overstating nor understating the situation. We disagree with politicians and news commentators who are accusing these officials of fanning the flames of hysteria in the face of what now looks like (for the time being) a decreasingly serious situation. The fact is that if officials wait too long and understate things – and then the situation takes a dramatic and dangerous turn – they will be accused of failure to adequately respond by the same politicians and commentators accusing them now of exactly the opposite.

>From the May 5, 2009 edition of The New York Times:

“It’s the classic problem in public health, trying to prove a negative,” Laurie Garrett, senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of “The Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance” said. “If, after an intervention, nothing happens, then everybody says, ‘What was the big deal?’ ”

But the course swine flu will take in the Southern Hemisphere — and, this coming fall, in the Northern Hemisphere — still isn’t clear. And it’s worth considering what might have happened if public health officials hadn’t sounded the alarm.

“I think the whole world should be saying, ‘Gracias, amigos,’ to the Mexicans for the tremendous sacrifice they have made,” Ms. Garrett said. “That may have stopped what otherwise would have been a serious pandemic.

“Some people will look back and say: ‘Wasn’t that ridiculous? Didn’t we overreact?’ But in New Orleans, wouldn’t we have preferred an overreaction that built too many levees too tall, than doing nothing and allowing the city to be flooded?”

What remains troubling to us:

- Yes, few people have died outside of Mexico from this flu, as opposed to the more than 36,000 people who die each year in the U.S. alone from the “regular” (seasonal) flu. However, those who die from the seasonal flu are usually the very young or the very old. The majority of people who have died from the current swine flu were young and healthy.
- This H1N1 swine flu is a “new” flu. It hasn’t been seen before, which means that no one in the world has built-in immunity. If it spreads, almost everyone who “catches” this flu will become sick.
- It is quite possible we’ve seen the worst of this particular flu, that the media hype will subside and that life will return to normal, with few worries (for now) about a pandemic flu this year. What really troubles us is that complacency has already set in.

The real danger:

- **It is absolutely possible this flu virus will subside throughout the hot summer – and come roaring back in the fall and winter, perhaps in a mutated and more deadly form – which is what happened during the Influenza Pandemic Flu of 1918.**
- If this flu, which is currently not particularly lethal, mutates AND becomes more deadly (i.e. a higher percentage of people who get it die) and it spreads across the world, the simple fact is this: schools will close, as will movie theaters, restaurants, malls, sports venues and other places people congregate; we may not have the correct anti-flu vaccine to inoculate everyone; and our hospitals simply do not have the capacity for this kind of surge. In addition, experts suggest that as much as 40% of your workforce may not show up for work for an extended time because they are either home sick – or they are home caring for children and/or others who are sick.

>From the May 2, 2009 edition of The Wall Street Journal:

Indeed, to the epidemiological community, the Influenza Pandemic of 2009 is one of the most widely anticipated diseases in history. Epidemiologists have been shouting from rooftops that a pandemic (or, a world-wide epidemic) of influenza is overdue, and that it is not a matter of "if" but "when." The current pathogen creating the threat is actually a mixture of viral genetic elements from all over the globe that have sorted, shifted, sorted, shifted, drifted and recombined to form this worrisome virus.

No one knows if the 2009 swine flu will behave like the 1918 Spanish flu that killed 50 million to 100 million world-wide, or like the 1957 Asian flu and 1968 Hong Kong flu that killed far fewer. This 2009 flu may weaken and lose its virulence, or strengthen and gain virulence -- we just do not know.

### **Here's the bottom line: We have been warned.**

So what does this mean for your business, government agency or nonprofit?

- Now is the time to pull out your crisis communications plan and make sure everything is up to date. Do you have current contact information for your staff and a mechanism in place to quickly notify them if, for example, one of your employees is diagnosed with the flu? Do you have a way for employees to quickly notify you if they are affected by the illness? Have you communicated your policies about what they should do if a member of their family becomes ill?
- While the current H1N1 (swine flu) situation remains fluid and problematic, at this point, your communications should be precautionary: dispelling rumors; telling your employees and stakeholders what preventive measures to take, what symptoms to look for, what to do if they or a family member become ill; and how to find accurate information. It's important to let your stakeholders know that you are monitoring the situation and how they will receive updated information from you as it becomes available.
- Transparency is very important, especially in this tough economy. If employees are worried about losing their jobs, they are more likely to come to work even if they might be a carrier for the illness. Test the tone of your communications now to make sure that you've not only adopted the right policies but that you're communicating those policies in a credible fashion. So that you can quickly dispel rumors, consider setting up a way for your employees to get their questions answered anonymously. This will be especially important if this develops into a full-fledged emergency.
- If you don't have a crisis communications plan, start immediately to gather the information you need to communicate quickly and effectively. Bottom line: Everything you do should reinforce the message that there is no need to panic because you are in control of the situation.
- If you need help creating a crisis communications plan, please give us a call at 216-321-7774. We're happy to assist you so that H1N1 (swine flu) does NOT lead to a crisis for your organization.
- Our suggestions: ignore the misinformation on TV and on talk radio. Instead, spend a little time on official websites (see below for specifics) and know how to access and navigate those websites in an emergency.
- In the meantime, go ahead and enjoy that pulled pork sandwich or have dinner at your favorite Mexican restaurant. (Our favorite: Luchita's on West 117th in Cleveland).

### **Resources for credible information on H1N1 (swine flu):**

- Center for Disease Control (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov>
- World Health Organization (W.H.O.): <http://www.who.int>
- Another excellent place to go for official information is <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>. Of particular use to you on that website will be a grid comparing the CDC and WHO alert levels. You can view that grid here: <http://tinyurl.com/cqws89> This grid is especially useful for its descriptions of the mandatory restrictions that will come into play should alert levels rise.
- Information on symptoms: <http://webmd.com> or <http://my.clevelandclinic.org>

- A long list of flu-related links, including instructional videos: <http://www.ccep.ca/ccepbird.html>
- Without a doubt, social media (e.g. Twitter) is a useful tool and it's here to stay. Check out Brian McDaniels' comments about the use of social media in public health situations: <http://www.brianmcdaniel.org/2009/04/16/using-social-media-in-a-public-health-emergency/>
- One Twitter feed we count on for the latest news, in real time, comes from Veratect, a private company providing timely and actionable information about emerging risks to companies and agencies around the world. You can follow their minute-by-minute Twitter feed here: <https://twitter.com/Veratect>
- Business Contingency Planning Checklist (for coping with pandemic flu from the operational side of your organization): <http://www.continuitycentral.com/feature0664.html>
- You will find essential information about putting together a basic Business Continuity Plan (aimed at the operational side of your business or organization) at <http://www.ready.gov/>. If your needs are more complex, please call Hennes Communications and we can refer you to people in our community who are adept at putting those plans together.
- The Business Emergency Planning Institute and The American Red Cross are offering classes for businesses and nonprofit organizations on the subject of planning for a pandemic flu. For further information: [www.bepinstitute.com](http://www.bepinstitute.com)
- Here's a good Q&A about the flu virus, what to do if you're ill, etc., from The New York Times: <http://tinyurl.com/c2cjt1> (free registration may be required)
- Some additional common sense advice from The New York Times about hygiene to share with your staff, in an article titled, "Swine Flu: First, Sow No Panic": <http://tinyurl.com/djtdd8> (free registration may be required)
- And finally, if you're located in the Greater Cleveland area and would like local information about H1N1, you can check the following local health department websites. All three post a daily local update on issues as well as all press releases and statements:
  - Cuyahoga County Board of Health 216-201-2091 <http://www.ccbh.net>
  - Cleveland Department of Public Health 216-664-3609 <http://www.clevelandhealth.org>
  - Shaker Heights Department of Health 216-491-3170 <http://www.shakeronline.com>

Many thanks to the following people for vetting the information above:

- Rebecca Hysing, Cuyahoga County Board of Health
- Kathy Seigerst Rothenberg, Cleveland Department of Public Health
- Christy Mosier, Coshocton County Board of Health
- Tara Blackley, Cleveland Department of Public Health
- Renee Witcher-Johnson, Cleveland Department of Public Health
- Ann Gynn, Business Emergency Planning Institute

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**Check Out Bruce & Barb's Schedule....**

Many thanks to Christy Mosier from the Coshocton, Ohio County Board of Health who spent much of the last year orchestrating a half-day seminar, held on April 23, for us to speak to 114 public health commissioners, public information officers, mayors, fire chiefs, police chiefs and other public safety and health responders about crisis and risk communications. Little did we suspect that just a few days later we'd be faced with the possibility of a pandemic and the immediate need for some of the communications techniques discussed in this seminar.

Interestingly, in the seminar audience was the managing editor of the two daily newspapers covering this area, Len LaCara, from the Zanesville Times Recorder and Coshocton Tribune. It's not terribly often we have reporters or editors in the audience for our seminars, so it's always interesting to hear or read what they have to say about the advice we give on "managing the media." Here's what ran in both newspapers this past weekend: <http://tinyurl.com/cm2g34>

If you'd like to bring us to your community for a 4-8 hour seminar, please let us know and we'd be happy to put you in touch with Christy Mosier so she can tell you how she brought us to Coshocton.

Please scroll down to see our upcoming seminars.



**5/13/09 Lake County Communicators**

How the Media Manipulates the News (1 hour)

**5/14/09 Portage County Safety Council Annual Meeting**

How the Media Manipulates the News (1 hour)

**6/22/09 American Red Cross Ohio Training Institute Disaster Day**

Extreme Crisis Communications (2 hours)

**7/21/09 Ohio Fire Chiefs Association Annual Conference**

Extreme Crisis Communications (2.5 hours)

**9/17/09 Ohio Human Resource Conference**

Standing Tall: When Your Company is In the Media's Crosshairs (1.25 hours)

**10/12/09 Ohio Association of School Superintendents Association**

How the Media Manipulates the News (1 hour)

**5/11/10 Akron Sales & Marketing Executives**

How the Media Manipulates the News (1 hour)

NOTE: Most of the above are open-to-the-public. Some of the seminars are free; others require a fee, payable to the sponsoring organization. Please call or write us for further information.

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**Our Permanent Collection**

**A. Our favorite blog on the subject of public and citizen preparedness.** Undoubtedly, you will find it helpful to you, your family, your business, nonprofit, government agency and your community when it comes to preparing for emergencies -- big and small: <http://incaseofemergencyblog.com/> Written by John Solomon, he's also the writer of "It's An Emergency – We're Not Prepared," which can be read here (free registration required): <http://tinyurl.com/5twym9>

**B. Our favorite radio program is Homeland Security Inside & Out.** This is a weekly broadcast on the internet featuring interviews with key figures in Homeland Security, crisis and disaster response. The weekly program can be accessed live via their website, as a podcast email sent to you and listenable on your computer at your leisure or as a free, subscribable podcast, using your iTunes software. For more info: <http://tinyurl.com/5pca64>

**C. Our favorite book about Homeland Security is “Our Own Worst Enemy: Asking the Right Questions About Security to Protect You, Your Family, and America” by Randall Larson, director of the Institute for Homeland Security.** The book provides a solid, practical, logical approach to personal security for all Americans and explains why the government is not prepared to help us in a time of crisis. For more info: <http://tinyurl.com/5ad3dz>

**D. As we learned on 9/11 and after Hurricane Katrina, when landline and cell phone telephone lines go down or are jammed to overcapacity, short text messages (150 characters maximum) can often get through.** This is because person-to-person voice phone calls basically require an “open pipe” while text messages occupy very little bandwidth and can be “lined up” for delivery. The easiest way to send a text message is cell phone to cell phone (for instructions on how to do so, we suggest you find a 13 year old – they all appear to be quite capable of texting).

You can also use your computer or Blackberry-type device to send a text message, also known as SMS, to a cell phone, just like a regular email. Here are the exact email addresses you can use to send computer-to-cell phone emails (the x’s represent the cell phone’s area code and phone number, without the “1” and without any dashes):

AT&T xxxxxxxxxxx@txt.att.net

Nextel xxxxxxxxxxx@messaging.nextel.com

Sprint xxxxxxxxxxx@messaging.sprintpcs.com

T-Mobile xxxxxxxxxxx@tmomail.net

Verizon Wireless xxxxxxxxxxx@vtext.com

Virgin Mobile xxxxxxxxxxx@vmobl.com

For a complete list of all cell phone company "texting domains", type in <http://sms411.net>.

**WARNING:** 1. Depending upon the recipient’s cell phone contract, they may pay a few cents to send or receive a text message; 2. Sometimes computer-to-cell phone text message are nearly instantaneous, sometimes they can take hours to go thru the system. Best bet: we suggest you try sending a few computer-to-cell phone text messages now – before you need to do this in an emergency.

**E. It’s been seven years the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and three years since the issuance of The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States Report. Are we safer today?** The authors of that official report think the answer is no. You can read what they recently wrote here: <http://tinyurl.com/25zzxz>

**F. Want a short refresher on crisis communications?** Check out this short, six-minute video of Bruce Hennes on the web: <http://tinyurl.com/ybfdeq> If you’d like to post something similar on your own website, Steve Petti is the guy to call. For more info: <http://www.newimagemedia.com>

**G. Dan Hanson at GreatLakesGeek.com, interviews Bruce Hennes:**<http://www.greatlakesgeek.com/podaudio/bios/brucehennes.htm>

**H. Make a Plan: With ready.gov/business, the business you've worked so hard to build can be as prepared as possible should a disaster strike.** Download free, easy-to-use checklists, templates and other resources to help you develop an affordable plan. Protect your business or life's work - start or update your plan today. Becoming a success is hard work. Protecting it isn't. Here’s how: <http://www.ready.gov/business/>

**I. Emergency & Crisis Info: Do you live in Greater Cleveland? If so, you may be in range of these new, low-power, community and emergency information stations:** Mayfield Heights 1700-AM; Mayfield Village 1640-AM; Beachwood 1630-AM.; Pepper Pike 1670-AM; Lakewood 1660-AM; Strongsville 1640-AM; Brunswick 1700-AM; Westlake 1680-AM. In the event of an emergency, you will find these stations to be an important source of information. Please consider setting a button to one on your car radio.

**J. Pandemic Flu Links:** <http://www.ccep.ca/ccepbird.html>

**K. Disaster Links:** <http://www.disasterlinks.net/>

**L. More tips to keep your family & business safe:** <http://att.sbc.com/gen/general?pid=1325>

**M. Apologizing – Vanity Fair’s All-Purpose Public Mea Culpa Kit:** <http://tinyurl.com/ysu4ch> Keep a copy handy - the reputation you save may be your own.

**N. When disaster strikes and telephone lines are jammed, how can you assure your critical calls go through?** The National Communications System (NCS), part of the Department of Homeland Security, offers priority telecommunications services to first responders, police, fire and rescue, public safety officials at all levels of government, and other national security and emergency preparedness personnel to ensure ongoing communications during crisis situations. Sign up today at [www.ncs.gov](http://www.ncs.gov) or call 800-NCS-CALL.

**O. Give your family, friends and clients The Gift of Safety.** You can find a wide assortment of emergency wind-up radios (with built-in flashlights and cell phone chargers), first aid kits and other home/business emergency preparation items, all at reasonable prices. Best of all – 100% of the proceeds go directly to The American Red Cross, Greater Cleveland Chapter. All you need to do is download the two PDF's below, print them out and send your order in.

Red Cross Radios: <http://tinyurl.com/6lmqhy> Other emergency gifts: <http://tinyurl.com/5a4ybu>

**P. Tell me, again, about crisis management:** <http://tinyurl.com/b7no3>

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Do you know how to handle a high-pressure TV interview? Do you know where to look? What to wear? Where to put your hands? Do you look at the camera – or at the interviewer?

It takes a lifetime to build a reputation and only a few seconds to destroy one. In a split second you could find yourself in a position where you need to know how to handle the media or be a public spokesperson. Would you know what to do or how to respond?

More important – will you “manage the message” and advance the cause of your business, agency or nonprofit?

You can be certain the senior executives at virtually all of the Fortune 500 companies have been thru media training, working with a media coach, where they’ve learned to deal with adversarial situations with journalists. Perhaps it’s time for you to learn this specialized set of media survival skills?

We also offer straight spokesperson & presentation training and coaching, which consists of ways to improve a spokesperson's skills and daily interactions with peers, subordinates, investors, journalists and other outside parties.

Call Bruce Hennes and the staff at Hennes Communications today at 216/321-7774 and talk to us about media, spokesperson and presentation training and coaching for you, your top execs -- or anyone who might have to hold the fort down with a reporter until the appropriate spokesperson can be located.

Ask us, too, about how we can help you create, implement and test a crisis communications plan.

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**Call Hennes Communications For Media Training & Crisis Comm Plans**



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We can do our signature seminar - Managing the Media: Lawyers & The Press - in your office for the benefit of your firm's attorneys, corporate counsel and clients. A number of firms have used our seminar as an effective marketing tool to reinforce existing business relationships and prospect for new business. For more information, including a list of the nationally-known firms that have retained us for this service, please call us at 216/321-7774.

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**About Hennes Communications LLC**

Hennes Communications is a crisis communications, media training and media relations consulting firm based in Cleveland. Serving corporations, government agencies, nonprofits and individuals who are "on trial" in the court of public opinion, Hennes Communications also offers litigation communication support and public relations services to their clients. The firm is a coalition member of ProtectingAmerica.org and National Preparedness Month (US. Department of Homeland Security).

We can be reached by calling 216/321-7774 or by email at [hennes@crisiscommunications.com](mailto:hennes@crisiscommunications.com).

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OUR FAVORITE QUOTE: You simply can't communicate your way out of a situation you've behaved your way into (credit to Don Etling at Fleishman-Hillard for this insight).

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**When your business or reputation is threatened, you  
need a specialist.**

**A crisis communications specialist.**



2841 Berkshire Road  
Cleveland, Ohio 44118  
216-321-7774

<http://www.crisiscommunications.com>

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