

# Definitive Guide to Pandemic Communications





## Included in this booklet:

### **Pandemic Communications Best Practices Limit Operational Disruptions**

- P4. What are Pandemic Communications?
- P5. Developing a Pandemic Communications Plan
- P6. Sample Pandemic Communications Response Plan
- P6. Following Pandemic Communications Guidelines
- P7. Evaluating Your Pandemic Communications Process

### **Top 3 Pandemic Communications Templates**

- P12. Creating Your Pandemic Communications Plan
- P13. Determining Modes for Pandemic Communications
- P14. 3 Sample Pandemic Communications Templates
- P15. 4 Key Components of Pandemic Communications Templates
- P16. Refining Pandemic Communications Messaging

### **Blueprint for Higher Education Pandemic Communications**

- P18. Pandemic Communications Considerations
- P18. Pandemic Communications Planning Checklist

### **What You Need To Know About The Clery Act and Pandemic Communications**

- P20. What is the Clery Act?
- P20. What is the New Guidance Regarding Pandemic Communications and the Clery Act?
- P20. What Does the New Clery Act Guidance Mean for You?

### **Omnilert Makes Free Version of Emergency Notification System Available**



## Pandemic Communications Best Practices Limit Operational Disruptions

The government and the World Health Organization (WHO) are working to communicate the measures we should take to contain the coronavirus, but schools and organizations must also take these steps. The pandemic will be a test of your emergency communications processes and systems. **Are you up for the challenge?**

Communication lies at the heart of public health and plays a significant role in disease prevention. Effective pandemic communications are increasingly seen as crucial in the prevention and management of health risks.

Throughout the pandemic life-cycle, organizations and schools play a critical role in protecting public health and safety, as well as in minimizing the negative impact on our economy and on our society. Effective pandemic communications are essential in

limiting mortality caused by communicable diseases, such as the coronavirus, in addition to minimizing the damage these diseases can cause to the economy and public health infrastructure.

Planning for the pandemic coronavirus is critical. Now is the time to proactively prepare for this rapidly spreading health emergency. Proper preparation will minimize the disruption of business operations to the greatest extent possible.

The goal of this booklet is to review the general principles of effective pandemic communications to aid in the prevention and control of communicable diseases, as well as provide examples of best practices to be used in pandemic communications policies, guidance, research, implementation, and scenarios.

# What are Pandemic Communications?



Pandemic communications refer to the exchange of information about health risks among individuals, groups, and institutions. It involves dynamic and interactive processes with exchanges between different groups of key stakeholders and audiences.



## Developing a Pandemic Communications Plan

A Pandemic Communications Plan enables you to respond to stakeholders in a focused and strategic manner. Organizations need to put a plan in place to communicate with employees, customers, and other stakeholders. A coordinated pandemic communications plan will ensure consistent and relevant messaging. Ideally, the plan is automated in order to reach the right people at the right time.

Trust is the key principle in pandemic communications. Lack of trust can be attributed to a number of factors, such as a lack of belief in the competence, knowledge, fairness, and honesty of sources. The reasons can vary from situation to situation. Unfortunately, when people are upset, they often do not trust authority. Proactive outreach is one of the most effective means for achieving trust.

Constructing a proper Pandemic Communications Plan will help you in building trust with your external stakeholders and will result in a higher likelihood of them following your instructions. It will also build trust with your internal stakeholders to ensure more seamless execution of the plan and, ultimately, quicker and more reliable communications. You will need to achieve and maintain consistent communications and messaging with both internal and external stakeholders during these emergency situations.

Pandemic Communications Plans are important because events, such as the spread of the coronavirus, can have a dramatic impact on health, safety, business operations, and recovery. You must plan for sustained contact with carefully crafted messaging around both health matters, as well as impact on business operations. The Pandemic Communications Plan should include the identification of key contacts and back-ups, the chain of communications, and the processes for communicating business and employee status.

Collaborate with federal, state, and local public health authorities and emergency responders on planning processes, your pandemic plans, and how to leverage their capabilities. Local and state public health agencies and emergency responders may have assets and/or services your business could use to its benefit.

Assuring business continuity also means planning for active shooters and inclement weather situations. With that said, those events are typically restricted to certain geographic areas and limited time frames. Global health pandemics require more extensive planning, as it will be more geographically dispersed and could last months at a time.



## Sample Pandemic Communications Response Plan

- 1. Designate a communications coordinator and spokesperson**
- 2. Identify communications needs**
  - Who is the target audience?
  - What are your goals and objectives?
  - What are the key messages?
  - What materials are needed? Develop and disseminate materials covering pandemic fundamentals, personal health protection, and response strategies. It is important to ensure pandemic communications materials are easy to comprehend.
- 3. Create the Pandemic Communications Plan**
  - How will you disseminate messages?
  - What are your communications resources?
  - What are your update procedures?
  - What are your talking points?
- 4. Monitor information and responses**

## Following Pandemic Communications Guidelines

In addition to gaining trust, there are other key guidelines to consider in strengthening your organization's pandemic communications:

**Timing:** The sooner you can get out notifications, the better. Anxiety will grow if your stakeholders do not hear from you. Timely communication can also prevent the spread of coronavirus, thereby reducing the duration and severity of outbreaks and, ultimately, saving lives.

**Transparency:** Being open and honest with your stakeholders will aid in gaining their trust, which is incredibly important in emergency situations. If you are still determining the best path forward, communicate what is being done to assess next steps.

**Specificity:** Notifications should provide specific guidance and actions stakeholders can take in order to limit their exposure to such pandemic outbreaks as the coronavirus.

**Testing:** If possible, pandemic communications messages should be pretested. Effective pandemic communications engages with and responds to its stakeholders, including pretesting of messaging and tailoring to specific audiences.

## Guiding Principles for Pandemic Communications



- **Do more good than harm**
- **Exhibit fairness in decision-making**
- **Leverage pandemic communications resources**
- **Impose flexible, evolving processes**
- **Understand the complete elimination of risk is not possible**



## Evaluating Your Pandemic Communications Process

Providing the right messaging at the right time to the right audience can help protect your stakeholder's health and minimize disruption of business operations throughout the pandemic life-cycle.

## Evaluating Your Pandemic Communications Process (cont.)

### PHASE 1

#### Assessing the situation

---

You will want to invest in tools and resources that enable you to detect potential emergency situations early. Assign teams to monitor the news and government announcements. Your company's managers, human resources, and employees should pay attention to the guidance provided by local and state health departments, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the WHO.

It is important for them to rely on credible sources in a time where there may be a lot of misinformation. The CDC has adopted Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) practices, which stress that successful communication is:

- **Accurate**
- **Credible**
- **Showing empathy**
- **Promoting action**
- **Showing respect**

CERC is a valuable and internationally recognized communication model. It consolidates the traditional principles of risk communication with more recent work in crisis and disaster communication. CERC offers course materials, books, videos, online training, on-site training, and accredited certification.

It may be difficult to balance speed and credibility in a time when information is rapidly changing. Presenting information as factual and then later found inaccurate will undermine trust and make it less likely for your audience to follow future instructions.

The coronavirus pandemic will likely affect different regions at different times and with varying degrees of severity. Your organization's messaging will need to address the current situation in the regional, national, and global context and dispel any misinformation that may be circulating.

### PHASE 2

#### Segmenting your audience

---

Ultimately, the main objective of pandemic communications is to inform your audience about potential risks posed by the pandemic so those individuals can take the appropriate actions. This is achieved by conveying relevant information in formats that are easily accessible and tailored to your audience through various communication channels.



It is highly likely that you will need to communicate different information to your various stakeholders depending on their connection to your organization and the role they play. The diversity within your organization will require a multifaceted approach so the right message is delivered at the right time to the right people using the right channel(s). The characteristics of each target audience should help guide the information you are communicating. Segmenting will enable you to automate messages, while still ensuring the most relevant messages are being sent to the appropriate individuals.

### PHASE 3

#### Execution

While notifications can be sent out manually, many schools and organizations in emergency situations choose to rely on automated notifications in order to reach their stakeholders as quickly as possible.

Successful pandemic communications can be achieved using routine messaging leveraging emergency notification systems. These systems provide a scalable approach to pandemic communications and incorporate best practices.

They align pandemic communications strategies with trends in how people currently access and utilize health information.

Regardless of the method you choose, it is important to keep the following in mind...

- Put the health of your stakeholders first and ensure they have the information needed to protect themselves and others.
- While regular communication is important, try to consolidate messaging and spread notifications out over time to avoid overwhelming your stakeholders. Communication overload can be a major challenge in emergency situations, as lots of information is being dispersed from multiple sources.
- Keep your messages brief and to the point. You want your audience to remember the key messages after your communication is complete.
- Uncertainty during a pandemic can increase fear, anxiety, and the rapid spread of misinformation. All pandemic communications operate in a realm of uncertainty. If you are apprehensive about the information you are communicating, make that clear and inform your audience of what is unknown, what is being done to increase understanding, and that the information you are providing may change. Communicating risk effectively requires explanation of the uncertainties associated with the nature, magnitude, and control of the situation.
- Ensure the information provided is coordinated, consistent, and appropriate across all sectors of your organization.
- Whenever possible, let your audience know when they can expect to hear from you again. You will need to establish procedures for how your pandemic communications team will provide updates.

*continued on next page*

## Evaluating Your Pandemic Communications Process (cont.)

- Utilize multiple communication channels (text, email, social media, web, voicemail, etc.). These channels must be used responsibly to inform, educate, and help prepare your stakeholders, without causing panic.
- Promptly address rumors, misconceptions, and inaccuracies.
- Observe the communication skills of other organizations and learn from their successes and failures.

Use this information to continue to improve upon your pandemic communications strategy. Reflect on what is working well and what needs to be improved. This will enable you to be even more prepared and effective in future emergency situations.

Pandemic communications are based on ongoing projections and the potential degree of future harm. You can prepare for future events by researching the ongoing improvements and innovations in the area of pandemic communications.

## PHASE 4

### Next steps

---

There is a need for systematic evaluation of your pandemic communications. Provide an easy way for your stakeholders to ask questions and provide input. Continually monitor the questions, concerns, and feedback you receive from them.

You will also want to monitor and adapt to your stakeholder's perception of risk. Risk perception is a strong indicator of their willingness to change behavior during the pandemic. Risk perception is perhaps as significant as the threats to which we are exposed. Therefore, perception of risk presents substantial challenges for pandemic communications efforts. A conceptual mental map can help your audience better understand the risk and the information provided. As you develop messaging, you should be mindful of how the public is perceiving risk and responding to your communications. Listening to and addressing concerns will enable you to be more effective in getting messages across.

## CONCLUSION

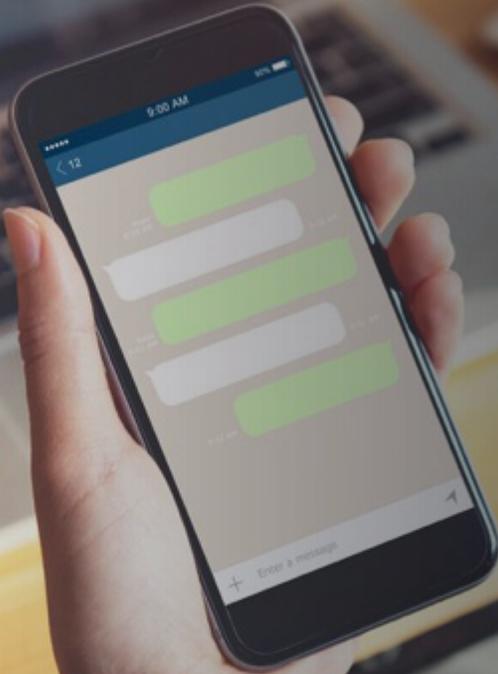
The urgent and unpredictable nature of the coronavirus requires a systematic approach to pandemic communications. Effective pandemic communications are essential in responding to infectious health threats, such as the coronavirus. Schools and organizations should embrace pandemic communications best practices, such as being explicit about uncertainties.

Pandemic communications messaging should be carefully considered and transparently communicated. The stakes of effective pandemic communications are high. They are extremely important in building trust with stakeholders in your school or organization.

There is an ongoing need to consider new pandemic communications tools and methodologies. Getting it right will protect lives and enable you to lead effectively during emergency situations.



# Top 3 Pandemic Communications Templates



“Disease outbreaks are inevitable, and often unpredictable, events. The environment surrounding an outbreak is unique in all of public health. Outbreaks are frequently marked by uncertainty, confusion, and a sense of urgency. Communication, generally through the media, is another feature of the outbreak environment. Unfortunately, examples abound of communication failure which have delayed outbreak control, undermined public trust and compliance, and unnecessarily prolonged economic, social, and political turmoil. The World Health Organization (WHO) believes it is now time to acknowledge that communication expertise has become as essential to outbreak control as epidemiological training and laboratory analysis.”

—WHO Outbreak Communication Guidelines

Times like these can leave you speechless. As much as you plan for emergency situations, there is still an element of surprise when something happens that you've never experienced before in your lifetime. Pandemic communications templates will enable you to plan for continued emergency notifications during and after the coronavirus crisis, as well as help you to strategically prepare for future events. Emergency preparedness ensures quick and reliable execution when the time comes.

## Top 3 Pandemic Communications Templates (cont.)

There is no doubt that during this pandemic your organization will have a need for emergency communications and alerts. A pandemic can affect many areas of the business and the communications process can make or break your reputation. It can influence how stakeholders ultimately react to the incident. Communication is critical in keeping your people safe and minimizing the potential negative impact of the event. As you know, your people are your most valuable asset.

While the coronavirus pandemic may have come about unexpectedly, it is never too late to plan. During emergencies such as these, you will be better equipped to address the well-being of your people if you prepare. The success of your emergency response is dependent on proper preparation.

When you need to deliver critical messages, make sure they are already in the queue. Part of your planning process should include drafting pandemic communications templates to enable your team to respond quickly and limit potential errors. Speed and accuracy will determine the effectiveness of your communications.



### Creating Your Pandemic Communications Plan

Pandemic planning can help to reduce the spread of the virus, the number of cases, and the economic and social impact. Lack of continuity planning can be extremely damaging as you attempt to address the pandemic challenges with limited resources.

You should be proactive in communicating with your stakeholders in the early stages of the pandemic lifecycle. Planning will enable you to be proactive and can have a big impact on how your people perceive and respond to the pandemic. It will also help you to respond in a focused and strategic manner.

*Take the following steps as you develop your comprehensive pandemic communications plan:*

1. Determine the proper channels or modes to get your message out. You can disseminate information through a variety of ways. The success of your communications will depend on determining the most

appropriate methods of dissemination for your particular target audience. The key is to identify which vehicle will get your critical information out quickly and accurately.

2. Select credible resources from which you will rely on for new information. If possible, try to identify which resources you will leverage PRIOR to any crisis situation. Additionally, consider involving community planners and integrating your plan into local and state plans. You may be able to leverage the resources of local community planners to support your efforts in keeping your people safe and informed.
3. Prepare your first notification. Your stakeholders will likely expect to receive communications on recommended actions as soon as the news of a potential pandemic breaks. It is critical for you to make sure your communications are clear, accurate, credible, and consistent. Ensure the information released is the same across all platforms. Inconsistent messages increase anxiety and skepticism.

4. Establish procedures for sending updates. You will need to develop a process for how to provide new information to your audience. It is important to keep all stakeholders informed of the progress, especially if they are unable to be on-site. Regular updates on the actions being taken will instill confidence.
5. Develop your talking points. It is helpful to lay out your key messages, specific talking points, and supporting information in advance.

Planning and preparing what you are going to say is absolutely essential in emergency situations. It will save you time in the long run, which will enable you to focus your efforts on other mission critical responsibilities. Additionally, drafting pandemic communications templates will provide you with more time for proofreading and optimizing the content for maximum readability and comprehension. Pre-written and pre-approved notifications will help to prevent panic. The general outline of your communications plan can then be reused in other emergency situations.

You will be able to instantaneously send your messages to the masses by utilizing emergency notification scripts written into templates. The messages can be drafted for specific groups within your school or organization, as well as for various issues that may arise. For instance, you may create a template to announce when particular buildings on your campus will close or reopen.



## Determining Modes for Pandemic Communications

Now is the time to assess your available emergency communication systems and technologies. You may want to explore enhancing and procuring a more robust system.

There are a variety of ways to send emergency alert messages. Text and email are probably the most popular. Whether you are conscious of it or not, most of us are now in the habit of checking our text and email quite regularly. These channels are the lifeblood of both social and corporate communication. These forms of communication are also key in disseminating information during a crisis.

Evaluate the types of incidents that may occur during a pandemic to help determine the best channels to deliver your messages. The various modes of communication may require the messages to be crafted differently. Part of your planning process should include deciding on the most appropriate and effective channel(s) to get your message out. For instance, you may choose to employ text messages for maximum immediacy and reach. Text messages should be kept relatively short, but you can direct the recipient to a URL with additional information. Voice calls can also be used for short, concise messages and can be especially helpful if you are unsure of your audience's access to text message functionality. For slightly less urgent or more extensive messaging, you may choose to use email or social media feeds. There are also ways to integrate your emergency notification system with special hardware like signs and alarms.



## ▶ Top 3 Pandemic Communications Templates

If possible, you will want to predefine your risk communications messages. We've used our emergency communications background, as well as input from our partner organizations, to develop a set of effective pandemic communications templates. These particular messages are geared more for delivery via text message.

When preparing your templates, consider the various events that may occur throughout the lifecycle of the pandemic and the key messages you will need to get across to your stakeholders when those events occur. Draft tailored pandemic communications to address all the phases of the pandemic, including recovery.

**The first step is to develop a general emergency alert message template.** This message will provide you with a wide degree of coverage for many situations, including those you may not necessarily anticipate. Use the template to the right as a starting point for your own general emergency message template.

**Closures are likely necessary as the risk increases in large gatherings.** Let your people know as soon as a decision is made on closings to help prevent confusion and provide them with time to reassess and reschedule their plans. You may want to create a template to announce those closings, such as the one to the right.

**Finally, everyone's favorite, a pandemic communications template to announce all is clear!** You will want to let everyone know when the pandemic has been contained and when they can return to work, school, and previously scheduled activities.

### General Emergency Alert

**Subject:** Pandemic Alert @ [Organization Name]

Shelter in place. Stay indoors and await further information. Check [SAFETY HUB URL] for details.  
[TIMESTAMP]

### Closing

**Subject:** [Organization or Building Name] Closed on [Date]

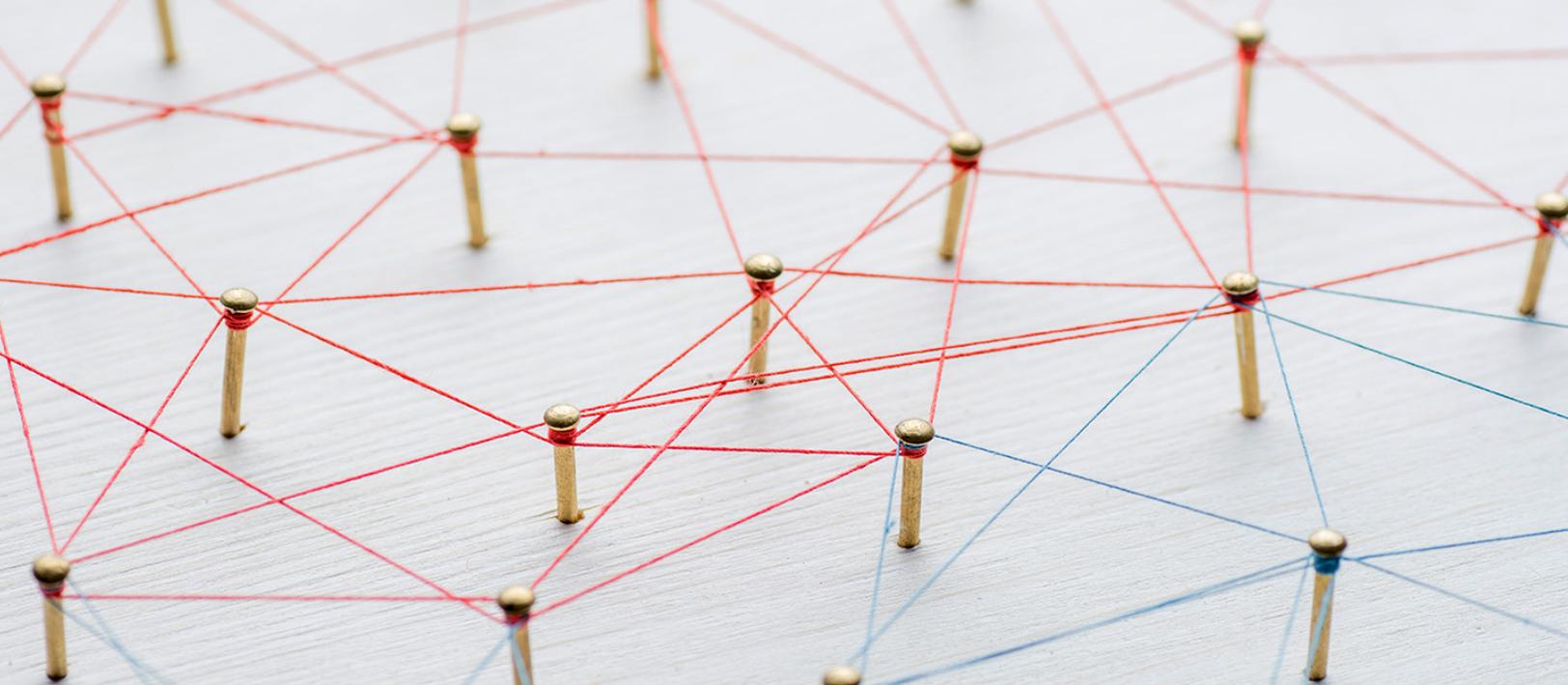
[Organization or Building Name] is now closed due to the pandemic. Await further info. Check [SAFETY HUB URL] for details.  
[TIMESTAMP]

### Reopening

**Subject:** [Organization or Building Name] to Reopen on [Date]

[Organization or Building Name] will reopen on [Date]. Check [SAFETY HUB URL] for details.  
[TIMESTAMP]

You may also consider drafting templates for general awareness of preventative measures, new diagnoses, travel restrictions, and monitoring those who are ill or suspected to be ill. Additionally, don't forget to notify external stakeholders of restrictions on your premises and the alternative procedures.



## 4 Key Components of Pandemic Communications Templates

Messages should be concise and specific to keep those you care about safe and informed. Whether it is a general alert or a closing/reopening announcement, you will need to get the word out in a calm and collected manner.

**When drafting a pandemic communications template, there are four key components to increase the effectiveness of your message and keep your people safe:**

- 1. Keep it brief and to the point.** Use as few words as possible to communicate the most critical information. Your message should instantly inform your stakeholders of exactly what they need to do. Use very direct words that are easy to understand, while trying not to cause panic. Initiate the instructions that have been previously used with your people during training exercises.
- 2. Be specific with directions, but general with information.** When an emergency situation arises, you don't always have all the details right away. In fact, some of the information you have may be inaccurate and the last thing you want to do is send out misinformation. What is most critical is to direct your stakeholders to safety without causing any unnecessary confusion.
- 3. Include a timestamp.** This simple, automated feature may actually be more important than you think. A timestamp will confirm the message is in real-time and inform your people that it could be outdated if they read it at a later time. This will help to prevent confusion when executing your pandemic communications plan.
- 4. Link to a Safety Hub URL.** Ideally, your school or organization should already have a webpage that people can access at anytime from anywhere with all of the latest emergency updates and preventative tips. The webpage provides a platform for delivering more detailed information that may not fit in a text message or email. You can also include links to external resources that may be helpful. Those in charge of safety should be able to easily access and edit the webpage. Your audience should also be trained on how to access and use it. This will ensure everyone is always up to date with the most recent information at any given time.



## Refining Pandemic Communications Messaging

As you continue to develop your messaging, be mindful of how your audience is perceiving the risk and responding to your pandemic communications. At-risk groups, testing availability and distribution may change over time and that information needs to be shared as it is received. Assess your predefined messages and alter them as necessary for changing conditions.

All public health emergencies present risk communication challenges and this coronavirus pandemic isn't any different. Listening to and addressing concerns is key in effective messaging. Monitor ongoing developments and refine your messaging by:

- Regularly watching, reading, and listening to the news
- Evaluating how the news is presented
- Learning from the communication successes and pitfalls of others
- Addressing misinformation quickly

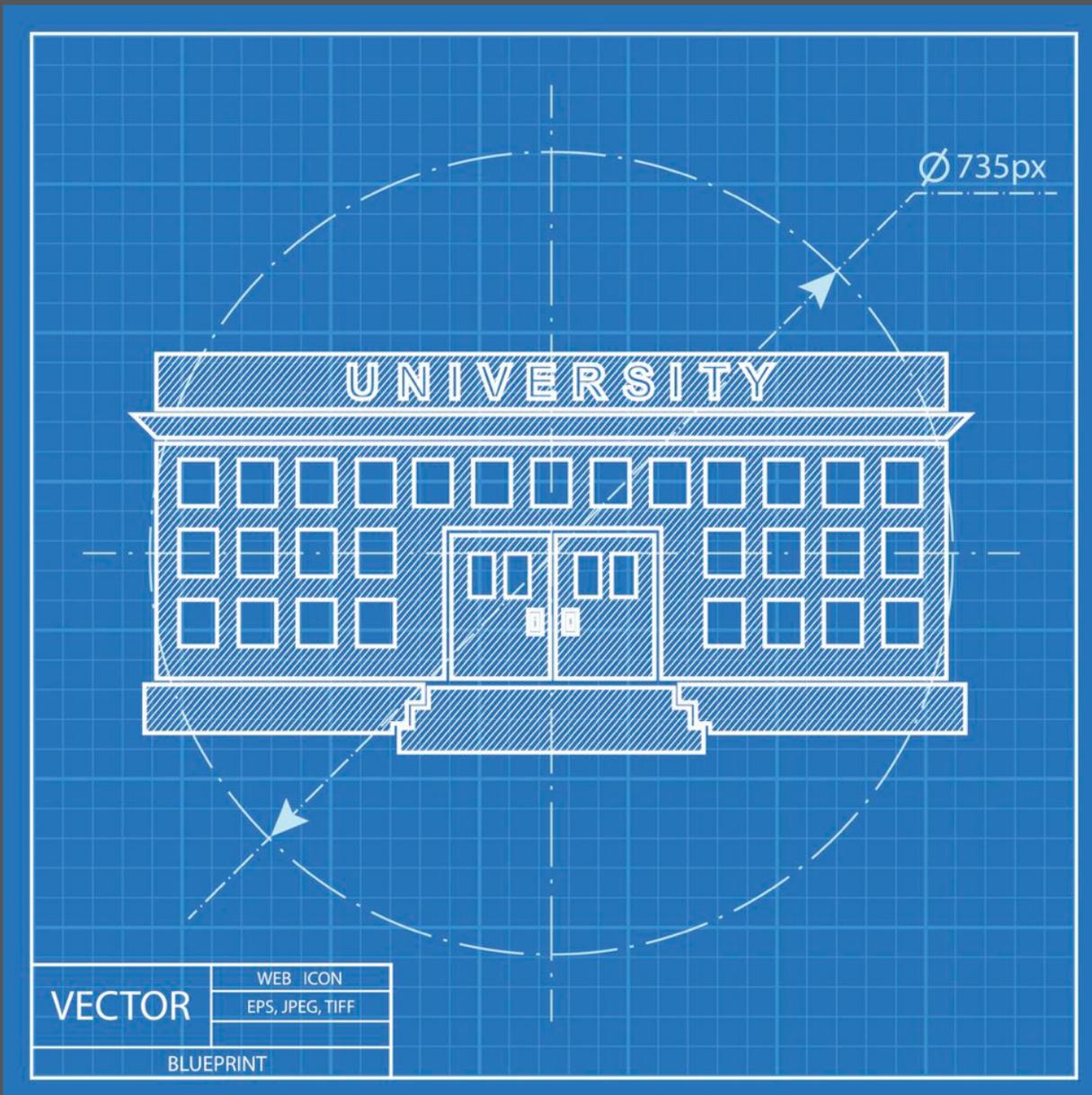
## Conclusion

Essentially, the main goals of your communications plan should be to:

- Reduce the spread of the pandemic virus to employees, customers, students, partners, etc.
- Minimize the illness itself among your stakeholders
- Maintain operational business continuity as much as possible
- Minimize the overall economical impact of the pandemic

These pandemic communications templates can provide coverage for a variety of issues over a period of time. Once in place, you can use the templates to build specific messages, as necessary, to increase the effectiveness of your emergency communications plan. As you create your own templates, it is important to keep in mind the four key components outlined to make communications clear and minimize confusion. It will be exciting to send out the final "all clear" message notifying everyone they can resume normal activities.

With this information you are now ready to create effective pandemic communications templates and further ensure the safety of your people. While you can't predict the future, at least you can do your best to proactively prepare for it.



## Blueprint For Higher Education Pandemic Communications

How do you console a graduating senior who will likely have to postpone commencement? How do you temper the anxiety of a teacher who has to shift all lesson plans online? These are probably some of the most difficult messages for institutions to draft and communicate, but perhaps the most valuable of them all is what you say to keep your campus community safe.

## Blueprint For Higher Education Pandemic Communications (cont.)

Colleges and universities play a key role in protecting the safety and security of students, faculty, staff, and their families during critical events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Conveying the right information at the right time can expedite response efforts and provide clarity to all of the various stakeholders. With stakes so high, you can't afford for your messages to miss the mark.

The uncertainty of when the pandemic will end and the unknown extent of its long-term impact has made communication that much more challenging. At this point, the vast majority of higher education institutions have developed some sort of pandemic communications plan, but the coronavirus pandemic is not over and improvements can also be made in preparation for future emergency situations.

### Pandemic Communications Considerations

Well planned and executed pandemic communications can help unify your campus community during this difficult time and promote campus safety. Without proper preparation, it is easy to rush to get a message out and end up falling short. Spend the time to think about what needs to be communicated and the best approach. With that said, do not wait for questions to start pouring in before you start drafting your emergency notifications.

In the checklist to the left, we mention the various channels for disseminating emergency notifications, such as text messaging, mobile device apps, email, voice calls, social media, etc. When drafting your message, it is important to keep in mind the mode of communication and the way in which it will be received. For instance, text messages and voice calls should be kept fairly short. More extensive messaging can be sent via email or social media. Also outlined to the left is the importance of educating students, staff, and faculty on your pandemic preparedness, response plan, and emergency management. Transparency can be comforting, especially when they hear about all of the various resources you are mobilizing and the infrastructure you are building. Provide them with the specific actions that are being taken to ensure campus safety and security. It will ensure them that they are not alone.

In longer-form messages, you have the space to make it clear that your number one priority is the safety and security of your campus community. Keep in mind there is a fine balance in providing the right amount of information across the right number of platforms. Information overload may cause your constituents to tune the messages out.

### Pandemic Communications Planning Checklist

- Designate a lead spokesperson, likely a school administrator
- Identify credible information resources
- Develop a dissemination plan for mass communication to students, staff, and faculty (you may want to consider implementing a campus emergency alert system)
- Identify the endpoints (ex. text messaging, mobile device apps, email, voice calls, social media, etc.) that will be most effective in communicating your emergency response and actions to students, staff, and faculty -- Best practice is to utilize multiple communication channels for expedited transmission and ensured receipt of information
- Consider providing communications in multiple languages depending on the makeup of your student body and campus community, especially if you have overseas satellite college campuses
- Once your campus mass notification system is in place, it is imperative to perform testing and drills
- Inform students, staff, and faculty of where and how to access the school's emergency notifications, as well as credible pandemic updates from local, state, and federal resources
- Educate your campus community on your pandemic preparedness, response plan, and emergency management, including campus closures, contingency plans, and the importance of campus safety
- Provide students, staff, and faculty with information from public health resources on personal and family protection, pandemic response strategies, and at-home care
- Plan for the potential of fear and anxiety caused by external misinformation



# What You Need To Know About The Clery Act And Pandemic Communications

Higher education institutions are currently facing unique circumstances due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Many questions have been swirling around how to ensure compliance with the Clery Act. The United States Department of Education has now released updated guidance in accordance with the lawful declaration of the national emergency.

## What is the Clery Act?

The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Clery Act) is the federal law which requires campuses to issue immediate alerts about any emergency situation that is a threat to the health or safety of students and employees. The US Department of Education recently issued new guidance regarding how higher education institutions can meet the requirements of the Clery Act as it relates to their pandemic communications.



## What is the New Guidance Regarding Pandemic Communications and the Clery Act?

While the Clery Act requires institutions to notify the campus community when a significant emergency or dangerous situation occurs, the Department of Education will not require ongoing updates on COVID-19 or proactive identification of positive coronavirus cases. Additionally, it does not apply to positive cases among students and employees who aren't attending classes or on-campus.

## Higher education institutions will satisfy the Clery Act requirements as it relates to pandemic communications by:

- Providing students and employees with a single notification through its emergency notification system informing them of the coronavirus and safety precautions, as well as suggesting they review the information provided by health care providers, state authorities, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Adding a banner at the top of the college or university website with the information above, a statement about the pandemic, and a link to the CDC

## What Does the New Clery Act Guidance Mean for You?

Adhering to the updated guidance from the Department of Education will promote campus safety while the coronavirus remains an ongoing threat. The previous section, "Top 3 Pandemic Communications Templates," provides a general emergency alert message template. The template can be used as a starting point for your pandemic communications.

The Department of Education guidance states that, "institutions may provide adequate follow-up information to the community as needed." This may include any significant change in the situation or the conclusion of the crisis. Even though most colleges and universities have now made all classes virtual, many essential employees and some students are still on campus. The regulations provide that an institution may "determine the appropriate segment or segments of the campus

community to receive a notification” in addition to the required “single notification” outlined above. The previous section includes templates for closures and re-openings should you decide to plan for continued notifications during and after the coronavirus crisis. The templates will also help you prepare for future critical events and incidents.

If you haven’t already added a banner to the top of your homepage informing students and employees of the coronavirus and safety precautions, you may be able to do so using your emergency notification system. For instance, Omnilert enables you to add a web widget on your website to keep stakeholders abreast of the latest pandemic communications.

The Department of Education is recommending that higher education institutions document any and all actions taken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in their records. You may want to consider alert and notification systems that store information on a secure cloud. It will eliminate the time and expenses associated with software patches, upgrades, back-ups, security audits, virus scanning, firewall configuration, etc. Regarding the distribution of the annual campus security report, fire safety report, and equity in athletics disclosures, the Department of Education will provide additional guidance as it continues to monitor the emergency situation and may possibly provide deadline extensions.



## Additional Resources

While not required, the Department of Education suggests in its guidance that higher education institutions review FERPA and Virtual Learning Related Resources and related materials from the Student Privacy Policy Office (SPPO). The resources include toolkits, letters, and Q&A on information security best practices and the use of virtual learning tools. The SPPO also put out an FAQ on the health or safety emergency exception under FERPA.

## Conclusion

Given the current global pandemic emergency situation, the US Department of Education released new guidance related to compliance with the Clery Act. The guidance requires higher education institutions to provide students and employees with at least one notification informing them of the coronavirus and safety precautions. It also requires a banner to be added at the top of the university or college homepage with the above information and a link to the CDC. The guidance states that institutions may provide adequate follow up as needed. The Department of Education suggests documentation of all pandemic communications.



# Omnilert Makes Free Version Of Emergency Notification System Available

Omnilert, the pioneer in emergency notification and management solutions, today announced the availability of a free version of its crisis communications product to small organizations and businesses throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Omnilert will enable organizations to deliver important, time-sensitive messages via multiple communication channels to ensure everyone has the latest updates on the ongoing emergency situation.

The complimentary version of this product includes one administrative account for one-way communication to subscribers through text message, email, and Twitter for the duration of the crisis, up to six months. Free pandemic communications templates and best practices can also be found on the Omnilert blog. The secure, cloud-based infrastructure is accessible from any desktop or mobile device.

“With so many people working remote and widely dispersed, organizations are in need of an instant and reliable means of mass communication for emergency notifications, as well as a way to maintain continuity of operations,” said Dave Fraser, CEO of Omnilert. “Omnilert is pleased to contribute to the safety and security of small organizations and businesses during these difficult times.”

**To register for the free version of Omnilert’s emergency notification system, please visit:**  
<https://www.omnilert.com/free-crisis-communication-tool-during-pandemic>



omnilert®

Contact us today to request a demo. **800.600.3911** | [omnilert.com](https://omnilert.com)