



How to talk about health

Language guide for health communicators

This document is for health communicators working in health interventions. It is based on the testimonies and lessons learned from health communicators consulted by TWB.

Why is language important?

People speak different languages, it is important that they receive information in a language which they feel comfortable with, and that they can express their needs and concerns.

Misunderstandings and poor communications can lead to rumors and confusion. It makes your job more difficult, and puts communities at risk. Clear information in the right language helps build trust, allowing you to do your job better and for the community to get the help they need.

Speak the preferred language of those you are talking to

To be understood, you must use the preferred language of those you are speaking to in the community. The best way to find out which language they prefer is to ask them from the start.

When working in the field, you can:

- Ask what language people prefer to speak and try to facilitate that. Record the requirements so that you can later provide them with information in a more appropriate language if you are unable to meet their preferences correctly at that time.
- Consider ways to provide information in the language preferred by the community to complement the spoken information you have shared. Share printed information or tell them how to find more information in their preferred language (for example, radio, television, telephone hotlines).

Use words that are easy to understand and respectful of patients and their loved ones

In addition to choosing which language to speak in, it is necessary to decide which words to use.

Choosing the wrong word can lead to offense, confusion, mistrust and poor communication.

- Certain terms commonly used to speak of illness arouse fear, because they are considered to be too raw or associated with death. **isolation - community resistance**. Prefer less violent alternatives or explanations.
- Others are confusing because they are unknown or too technical; sometimes they are words and expressions in French or English, or acronyms. **PPE - community death - triage**. Prefer alternatives or explanations that are clearer and easier to understand.
- Others are seen as denigrating or stigmatizing the patient or their loved ones. **suspect case - contact of contacts - case of contact**. Prefer more humane and respectful alternatives or explanations.



Term to avoid	Suggested terms*	Congolese Swahili	Nande
ETC	Ebola treatment centre	kituo cha Matunzo	ekilamiro
PPE	Medical clothing and equipment which protects against the illness	mavazi ya kinga ya kujikinga kwa ugonjwa.	esho njimba cha vanganga
case	person with an illness	mgonjwa	omukoni oyuwaviriminywa kwa kwire ovulwere
contact case	Person who should be tested because they have been physically close to a person with the illness	mtu ambaye anapashwa kupimwa kwasababu aligusa wala alikaribiana ugonjwa	oyulya tula kutse oyulyavya hakuhi n'omulwere, kutsi hakuhi na maghetsi wossi wossi awakalwa omo muviri w'omundu oyu
suspect case	a person with signs of an illness, but this diagnosis must be confirmed by a laboratory test.	mtu ambaye anaonesha halama(dalili) ya ugonjwa, alikini inaomba kuhakikishwa kisho majibu ya kipimo	oyukatikatikaw'eribya inyaviri himbikwa
contact of contacts	someone who was physically close to others who were physically close to a person with the illness	mtu wa karibu na mgonjwa	oyulya yi tulaya oko yulya tul'okomukoni, kutse oko maghetse omomuviri wiwe
community death	Death of a person with the illness in a place other than the treatment centre	mutu mwenyi hakukufia kwenyi kituo ya matunzo	oyukaholera ahate kilamiro chasivwe n'ovutavali
isolation	physical separation of a person with the illness from other people to avoid spreading the illness	tengo la mtu mgonjwa na wengine watu kwa kuepuka kusambaza ugonjwa	erivissa
resistance	mistrust	ukosefu wa uaminifu	ovuniyi
triage	patient monitoring to check for signs of illness	uchunguzi wa wagonjwa kwa kutambua halama za ugonjwa	eritsopolya

**you can find a more complete list in TWB glossary*

Prepare well for interactions in the field. Consistent use of words is preferable. This means that people receive the same information. In order to find the most appropriate way to explain yourself, you can:

- Make sure you understand the meaning of the words and how to translate them into the relevant languages. Speak to your team leader if you are unsure.
- Refer to the TWB glossary for the Democratic Republic of Congo. There you will find the suggested language and terms to use.
- Discuss with your team members how they translate or explain difficult concepts. Agree with them on the versions that you find most precise, clear and appropriate.
- Consult with communications teams from other organizations in your area to agree on the best translations and explanations.

Speak with respect

Illnesses and talking about health can scare people. They may be confused and need support. Make sure they feel comfortable talking to you and asking questions. Speak politely, don't be discouraged. Respect is essential for information to be well received. Consultations indicate that:

- People are more trusting of information provided by someone they know and trust.
- Face-to-face communication is important, especially for women, because it is often women who take care of the sick and accompany them to health centers.
- Respect for others is shown by speaking their language and choosing appropriate words, as explained above. It's not respectful to talk to people condescendingly or to talk to them like they are lower than others.
- Talk about the diagnosis or symptoms of a particular person to them directly, sensitively and without others hearing.
- It is important to be aware of subjects which are sensitive for people to talk about and talk about them appropriately and carefully.

If you don't know the answer to a question:

- It is better to admit it than to give incorrect information.
- Assure the person asking that you will get back to them with the correct answer, and make sure you do.
- You can tell people where they can find more information.