Operational guide
for engaging communities in contact tracing

28 May 2021

World Health Organization

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GOARN
Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network

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for every child

WHO continues to monitor the situation closely for any changes that may affect this operational guide. Should any factors change, WHO will issue a further update. Otherwise, this operational guide will expire 2 years after the date of publication.
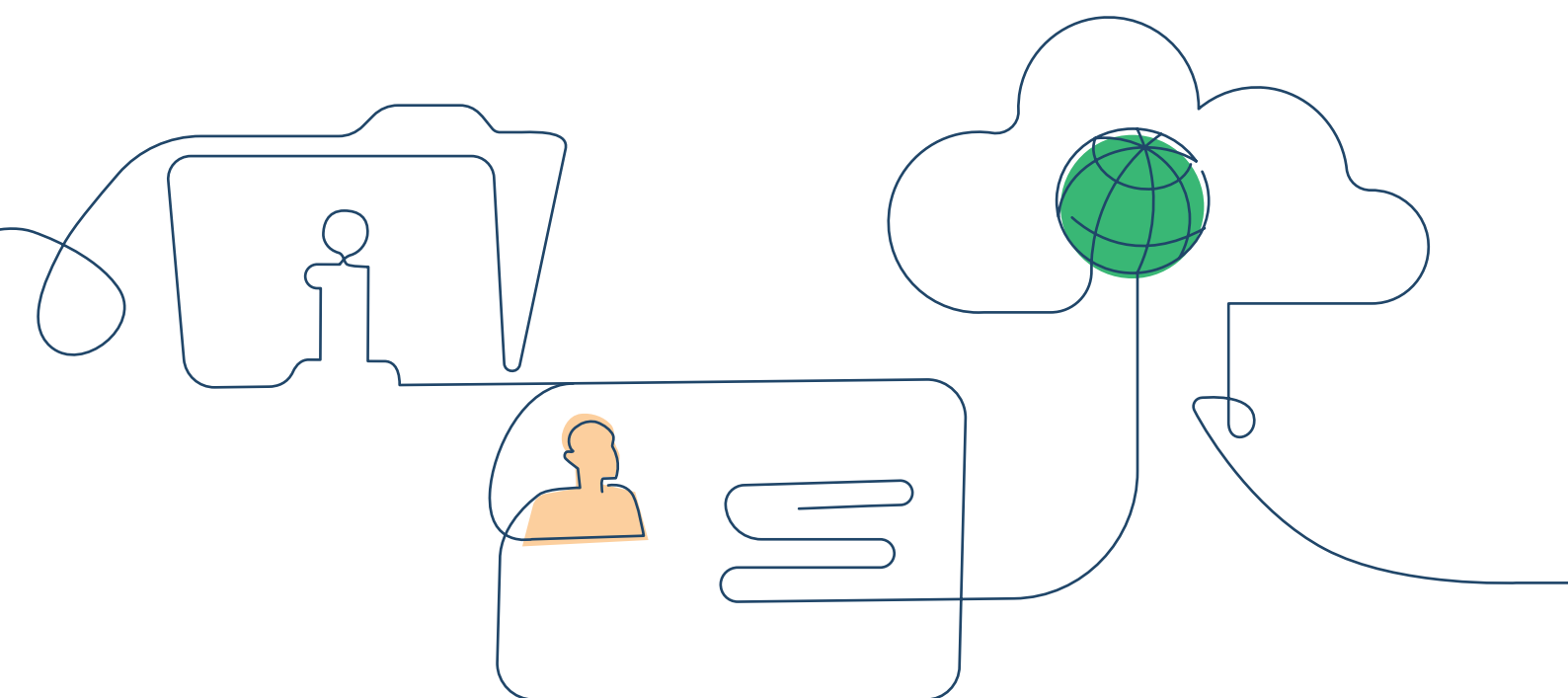
Contents

Useful terms

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Communities	are groups of people that may or may not be geographically connected but who share common interests, concerns or identities. These communities could be local, national or international, with specific or broad interest (1).
Community Engagement	Community engagement is an approach to directly involve local populations in all aspects of decision-making implementation, and policy. Building on a participatory approach, community engagement strengthens local capacities, community structures and local ownership to improve transparency, accountability and optimal resource allocations across diverse settings (2).
Community feedback mechanism	A system developed to listen, analyse and act on people's needs and opinions in order to provide organizations with deeper insights on the priorities of affected communities and ultimately improve programme development, implementation and sustainability. The information collected can also serve as an early warning system to address unforeseen challenge (3).
Contact Tracing	The identification, assessment, management and monitoring of persons who may have come into close contact with a person infected with COVID-19.
Contact Tracing Pillar	Overarching term to include all contact tracing entities and activities in a COVID-19 outbreak response.
COVID-19 Contact	A person who has been exposed to someone else infected with COVID-19, at any time between 2 days before or at least 13 days after the person begins to show symptoms for a symptomatic case; and for asymptomatic cases, 2 days before and 10 days after the sample that led to a positive test was taken. For the detailed definition of a Contact and Exposure criteria, please refer to WHO's guidance: Contact tracing in the context of COVID-19 (p.4).
Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)	Physical or virtual location that brings together highly trained experts and state-of-the-art technology to coordinate resources, information and crisis and emergency risk communication during emergencies.
Incident Management System (IMS)	The IMS provides a standardized, yet flexible approach to managing a response to an emergency. The IMS includes six primary functions: leadership; partner coordination; information and planning; health operations and technical expertise; operations support and logistics; and finance and administration. The IMS is an internationally recognized model for responding to emergencies (4).

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Indicator	A tool that measures change and progress as a result of the intervention.
	Input: indicators for monitoring performance - measure the contributions necessary to enable the programme to be implemented.
	Process: indicators for monitoring performance - measure the important processes (i.e. activities) that contribute to the achievement of programme outcomes.
	Outputs: indicators for monitoring performance - measures the quantity and sometimes quality of programme activities.
	Outcomes: indicators for evaluating results of the programme - specific, observable, and measurable characteristic or change that represent immediate achievement of the programme objectives.
	Impact: indicators for evaluating results - measure of characteristics that indicate the long-term goals of the programme are achieved. Impact indicators can be distally related to programme inputs and can be influenced by external factors independent of the programme. Successful execution of input, process, output, and outcome indicators provides evidence that the programme contributed to achievement of goals.
Isolation	The separation of a person or group of people infected with COVID-19 (based on the case definition) from people who are not infected to prevent spread of the virus.
Monitoring and Evaluation	A combination of in-going data collection and analysis **(monitoring)** and assessing to what extent a programme or intervention has, or has not, met its objectives **(evaluation)**, which aims to improve current and future intervention quality.
Quarantine	The separation from others of a person or group of people exposed to a probable or confirmed COVID-19 case. The aim is to separate and monitor contacts of probable or confirmed cases to prevent onward transmission if they are infected, and to ensure early detection of infection among contacts.
Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)	The two-way and multi-directional risk communication and engagement with affected people so that they can make informed decisions to protect themselves, their loved ones and their community.
Risk Communication	The exchange of real-time information, advice and opinions between experts and people facing threats to their health or economic or social well-being. The ultimate purpose of risk communication is to enable people at risk to take informed decisions to protect themselves and their loved ones (5).
Social Ecological Model	Theory-based framework for understanding the interactive effects of personal and environmental factors that determine behaviours.

Key messages
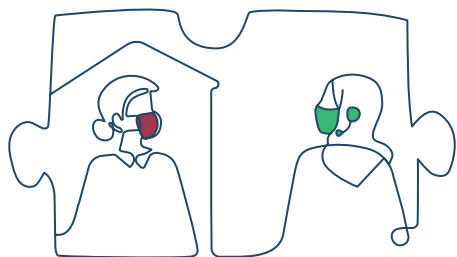
Contact tracing is a key component of a public health response to infectious disease outbreaks. Evidence from previous contact tracing efforts shows that across all contexts, community trust is critical to success.
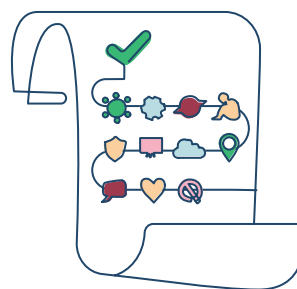
The document articulates best practice principles for community engagement and how they can be operationalized, monitored and measured as part of any community-centred contact tracing strategy.
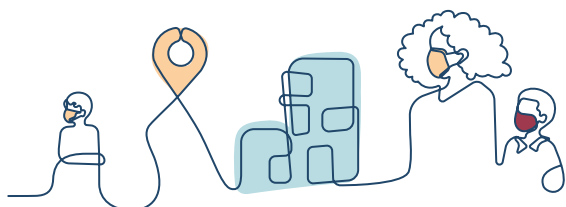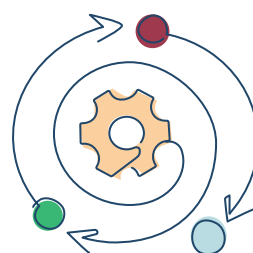
Implementing contact tracing successfully requires close and consistent engagement with local communities at all stages of the process, from planning through to monitoring and evaluation.
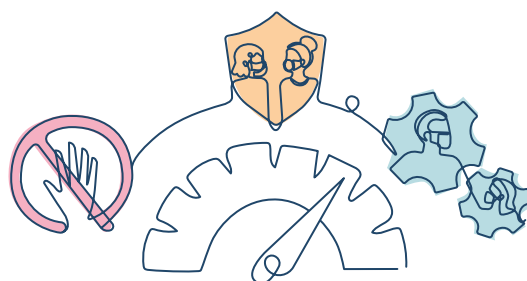
Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans can measure the effect of community engagement on contact tracing and should be integrated from the onset of the response. Suggested indicators are included in this operational guide, based on the best practice principles.
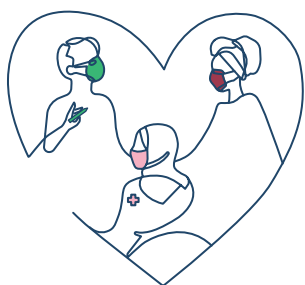
This document is designed to increase knowledge and understanding of outbreak response programme managers and implementers on the importance of putting communities at the heart of contact tracing, while also empowering community members to do so.

This guidance was developed through a collaborative process in partnership with the Risk Communication and Community Engagement Collective Service and will be updated as needed.

Introduction

Contact tracing is a strategy that has been used for decades to stop the spread of infectious diseases. Over time we have learned that implementing contact tracing successfully requires close and consistent engagement with local communities. This includes having community members as part of contact tracing teams and community involvement in the planning, selection and monitoring of contact tracing methodologies, broader sensitization strategies and communication channels.

Evidence from previous contact tracing efforts shows that across all contexts, community trust is critical for contact tracing to be successful. This trust is even more important for people who may be marginalized or underserved by government or other relevant stakeholder services, particularly in conflict or post-conflict settings or in settings with large refugee or migrant populations. Community ownership, buy-in and active participation are central to successfully implementing contact tracing, reducing transmission of COVID-19 and saving lives.

The purpose of this document is to reinforce the place of community engagement and participation in the contact tracing process. The document articulates best practice principles for community engagement and how they can be operationalized as part of any community-centred contact tracing strategy. The material provided below can stand on its own or be used to complement other documents that support strategies, implementation plans or training and capacity building modules

Audience

This document is intended for national and local-level planners and implementers, including government, nongovernmental organizations and other stakeholders involved in the coordination, implementation and monitoring of contact tracing for COVID-19.
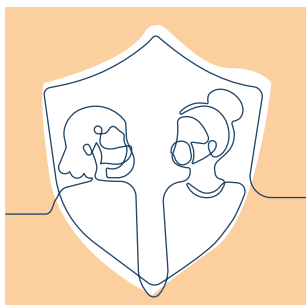
This document is designed to increase knowledge and understanding of programme managers and implementers on the importance of putting community at the heart of contact tracing while also empowering them to do so. Effectively integrating community engagement principles and processes into contact tracing strategies and implementation will build and promote trust for this critical operational approach ultimately reducing transmission of COVID-19 and saving lives.
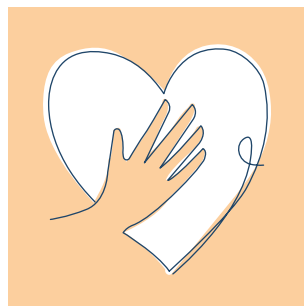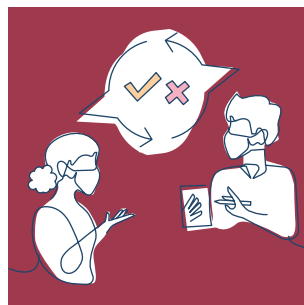
Key Principles

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Commit to honest and inclusive two-way communication
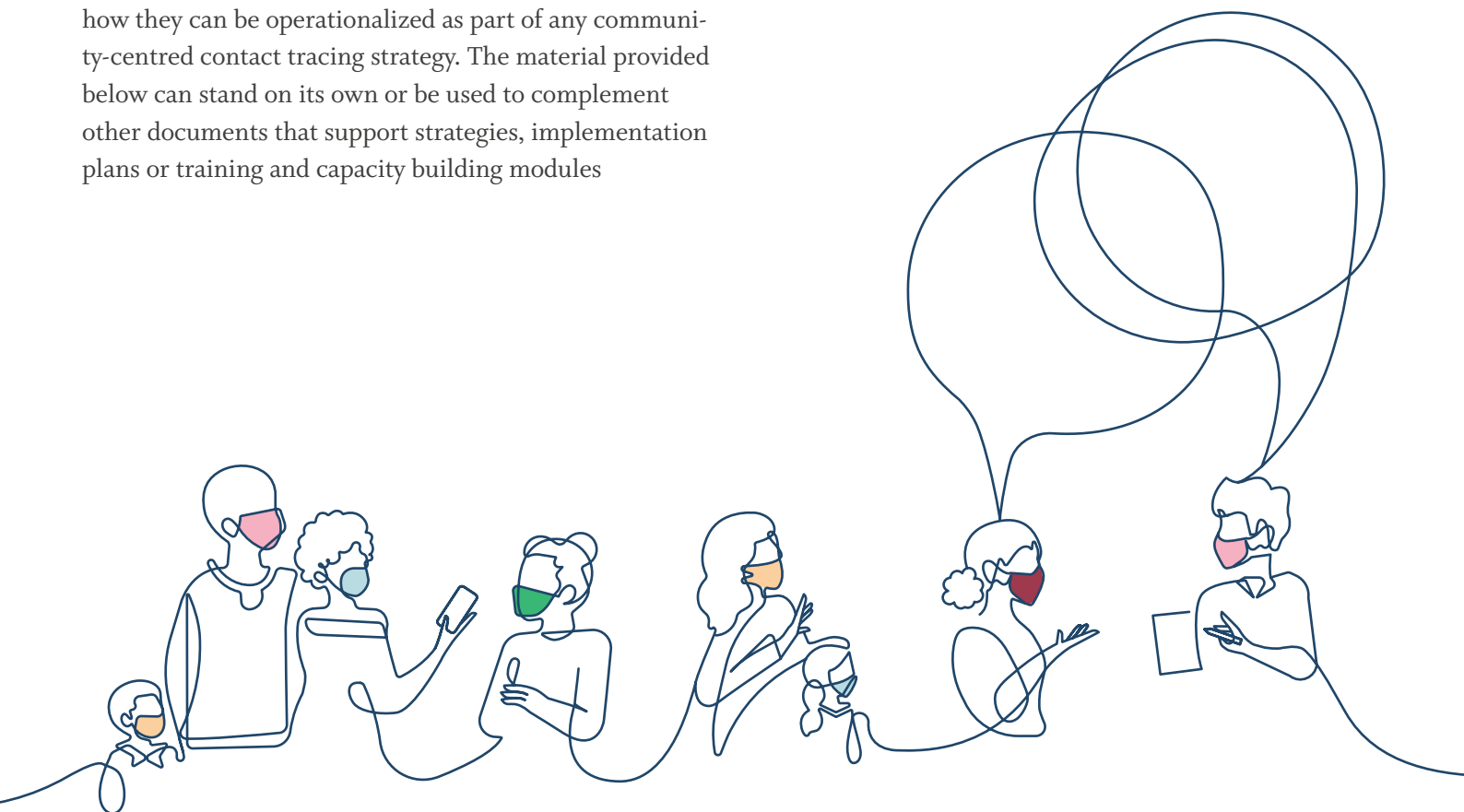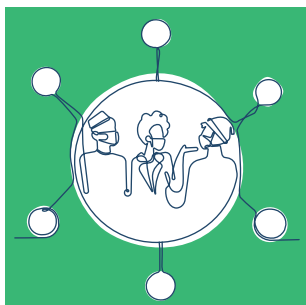
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Understand the community context

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Listen, analyse and respond to feedback

02
Build trust
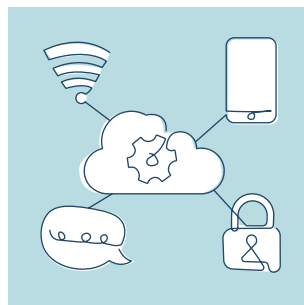
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Consider the use of contact tracing technology

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Ensure and maintain community buy-in
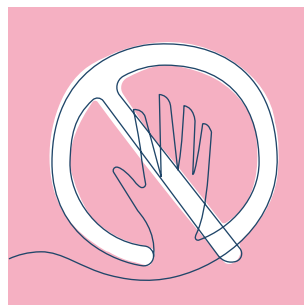
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Do not criminalise actions