



An Overview of Risk Communication

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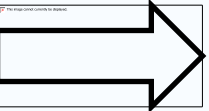


Public Health Emergencies





Public Health Emergencies

- High economic and social impact
- Alarm in the population  uncertainty, fear, anger, anxiety = demand for timely, clear, useful information
- Differing views and perceptions among officials and the public
- Rumors





Mixed messages from officials = alarm, lack of trust

Are we going to die?

Is the military going to help out?

Are they going to evacuate the village?

Do we need masks?
How do we get them?



Will the schools be closed?

Do we need vaccines?

Who's going to help us?
What do we do?



- Growing media interest = sensationalism
- International media
- Rapid transmission via internet and social networks
- Information gaps – filled by unofficial news sources
- Direct involvement of political actors





Role of Risk Communication During Public Health Emergencies

- Help at risk populations make informed decisions
- Encourage protective behaviors – public and health care workers
- Complement existing surveillance systems
- Coordinate health and non-health partners
- Minimize social and economic disruption
- Build the **trust** required to prepare for, respond to and recover from serious public health threats

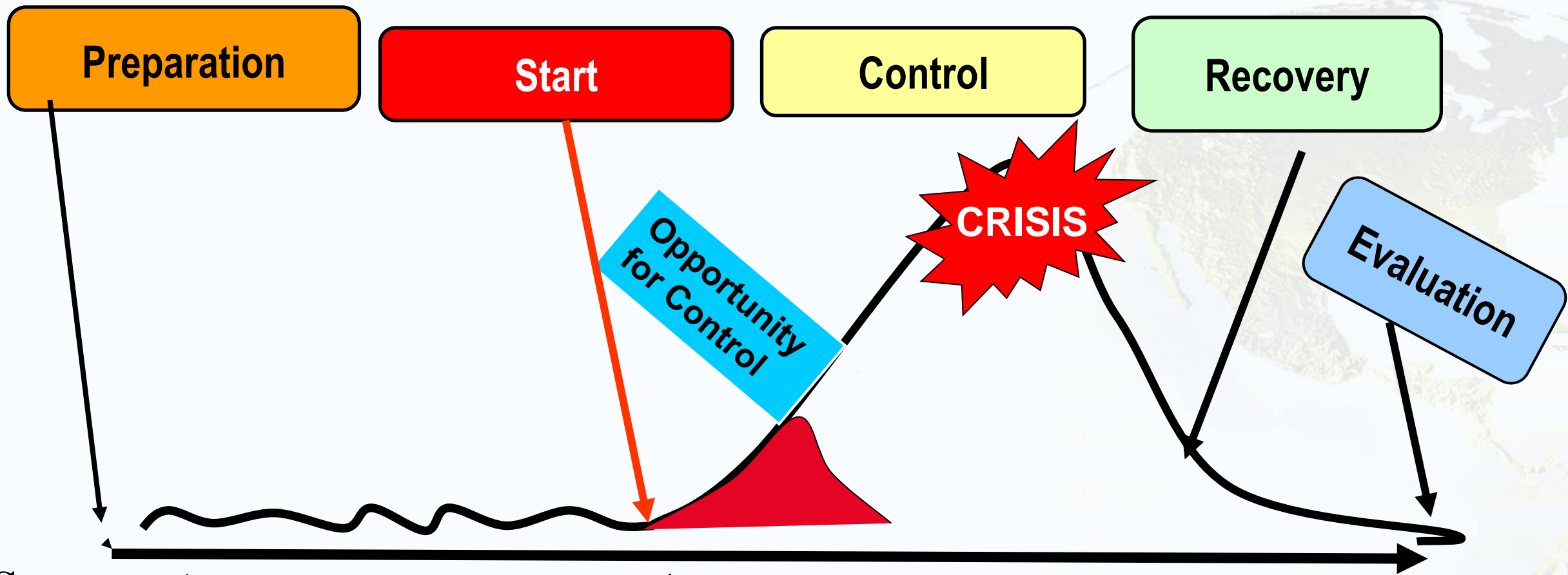


Risk Communication

Risk communication is an integral component of public health risk management. It is focused on dialogue with those affected and concerned and strives to ensure communication strategies are evidence based.

Under the IHR, risk communication for public health emergencies includes the range of communication capacities required through the preparedness, response and recovery phases of a serious public health event to encourage informed decision making, positive behavior change and the maintenance of trust.





Components

- Put together risk comm team
- Internal coordination
- Strategic alliances
- Risk communication plan
- Staff training
- Prepare messages
- Media Plan
- Communication surveillance
- Staffing plan

Activate crisis plan, etc.

- Evaluate work
- Document lessons learned
- Identify actions for improvement



Real Risk



Is it the same?

Perceived Risk



- The risks that kill people and the risks that scare them are two different things.
- People respond to perceived risk.



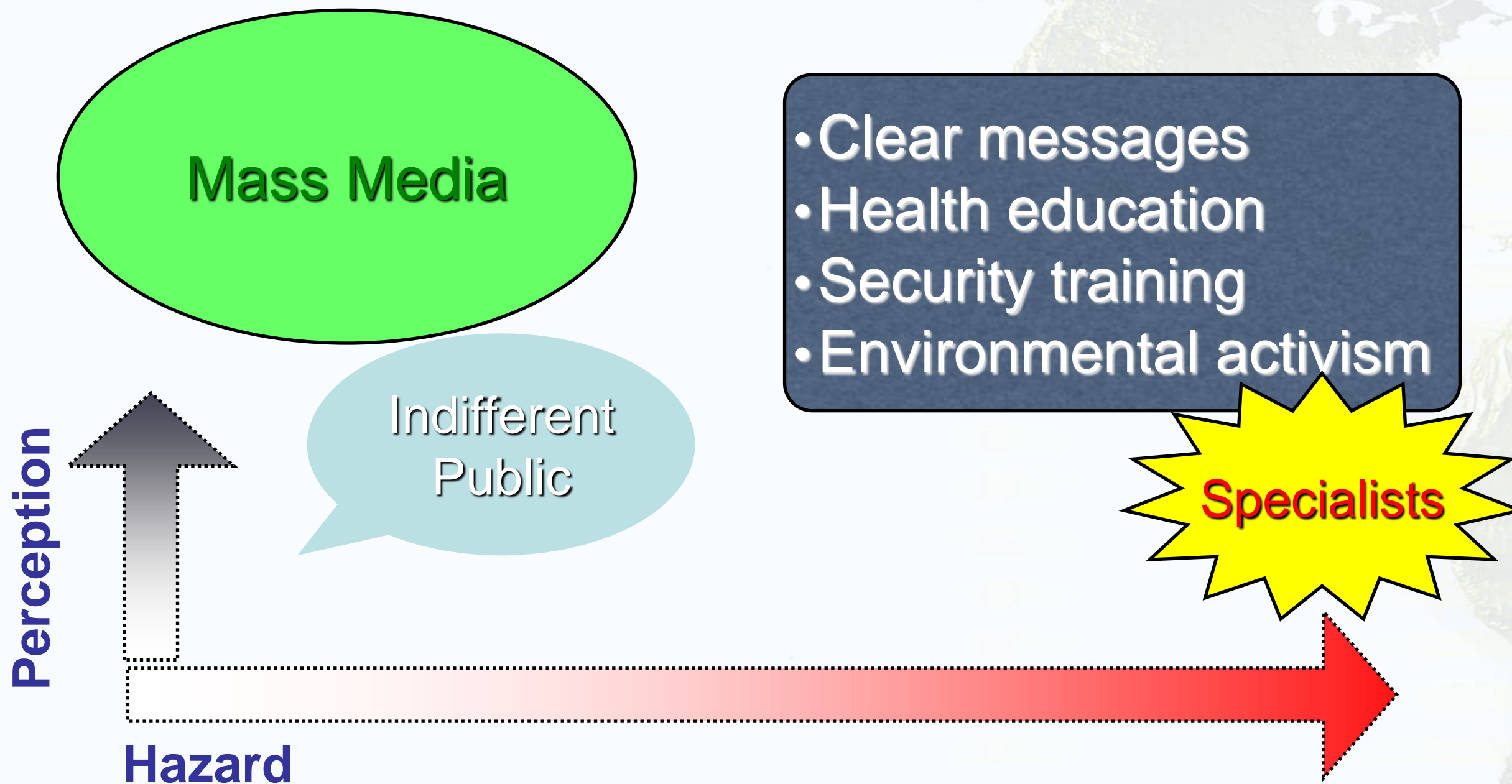
A new “definition” of risk:

Risk = Hazard + Outrage

(Peter Sandman’s formula)



High hazard/low outrage

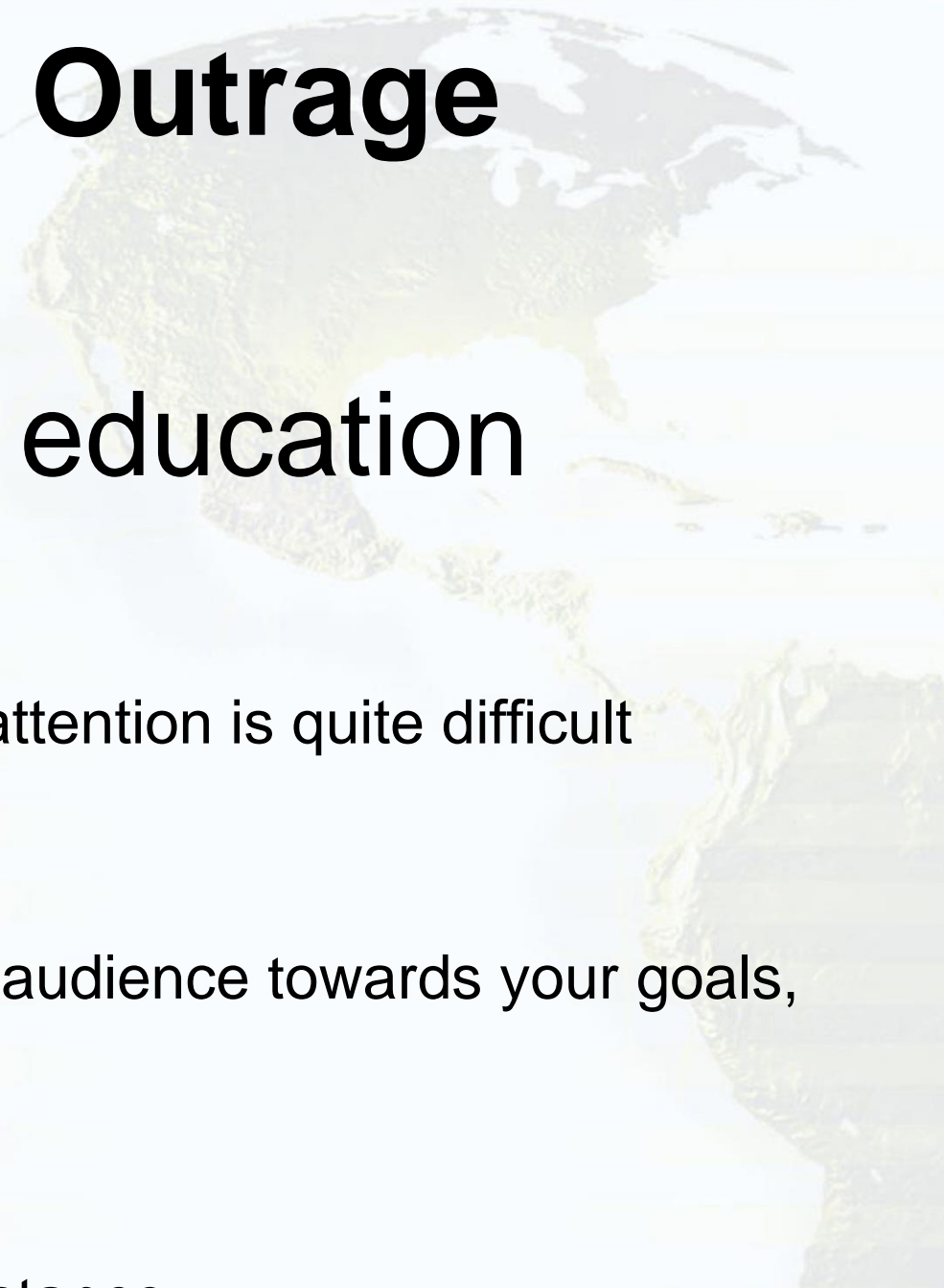




1. High Hazard, Low Outrage

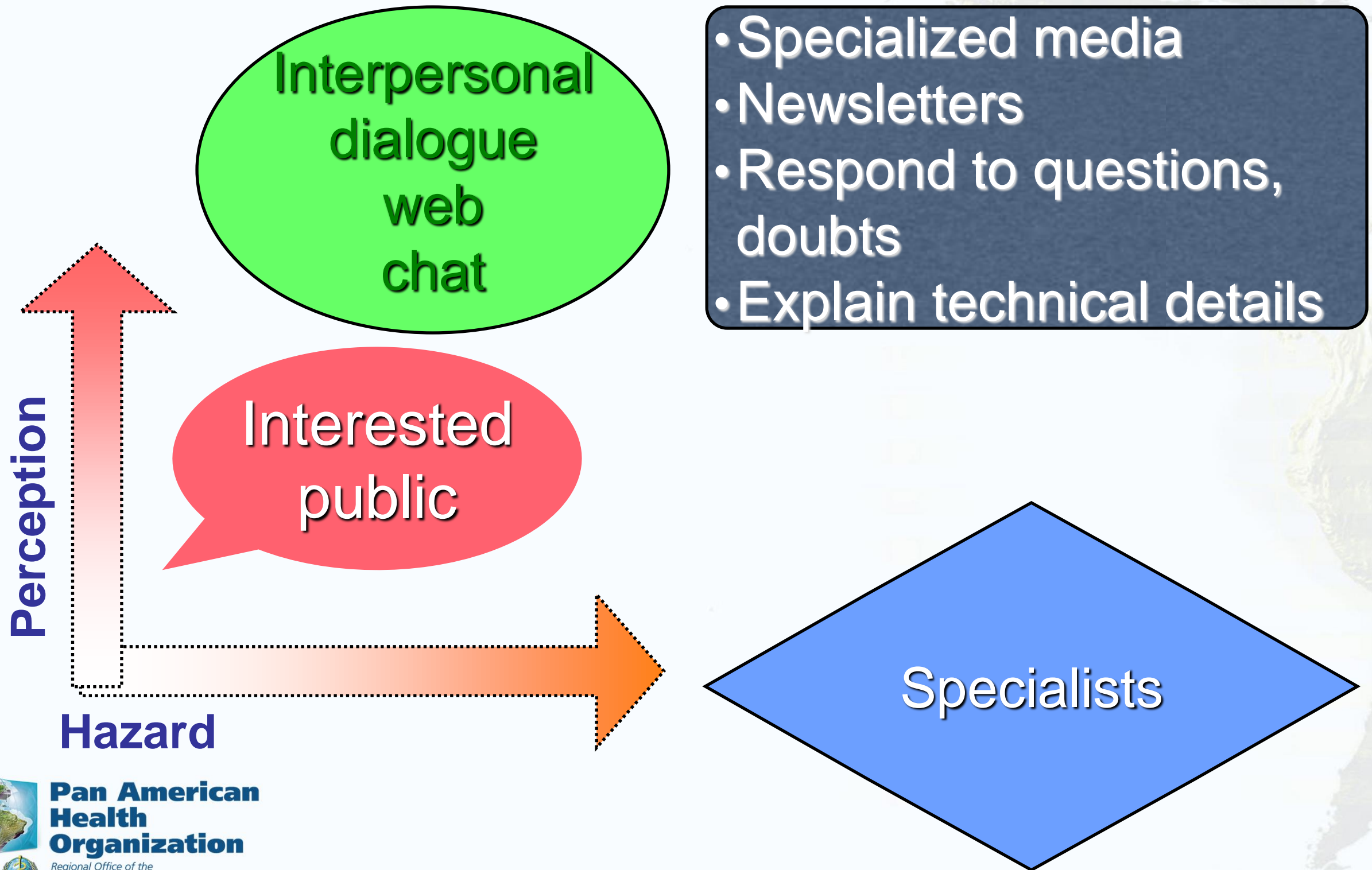
Public relations/ health education

- Audience: apathetic, aren't interested, getting their attention is quite difficult
- Need to increase outrage and concern
- Task: messages that reinforce appeals to move the audience towards your goals, provoke more outrage – action
- Medium: mass media to provoke action
- Barriers: audience inattention, size, media resistance





Stakeholder Relations





2. Moderate Hazard, Moderate Outrage

Stakeholder relations

- Audience: stakeholders – interested and attentive audience, neither too apathetic or too upset to listen
- Task: to discuss, explain, respond to the audience/ stakeholder
- Medium: dialogue, supplemented by specialized media
- Barriers: inefficiency of one on one dialogue



Low Hazard and High Perception of Risk and Outrage





High Outrage/Low Hazard

outrage management

- Audience: ‘outraged – anger , largely at you, ‘fanatics’, (justified or not) you have their attention
- Task: reduce audience outrage – listen, recognize errors, apologize, share control and credit
- Medium: in person dialogue, audience does most of the talking
- Barriers: outrage



Crisis Communication

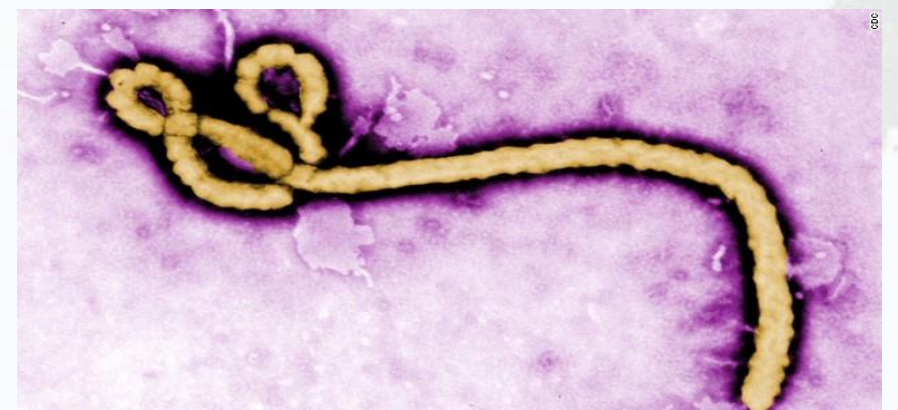




4. High Hazard, High Outrage

crisis communication – in a crisis there is no ‘PUBLIC,’ everyone is a stakeholder

- Audience: very upset, outraged – more fear and misery than anger
- Task: to help the audience bear its fear, concern and suffering. Recognize uncertainty. Avoid excess confidence. Demonstrate your humanity, show empathy. Seek public participation.
- Medium: monologue via the mass media, dialogue – one on one where possible
- Barriers: stress of the crisis, missing the difference between crisis communication and routine





WHO Outbreak Communication Guidelines





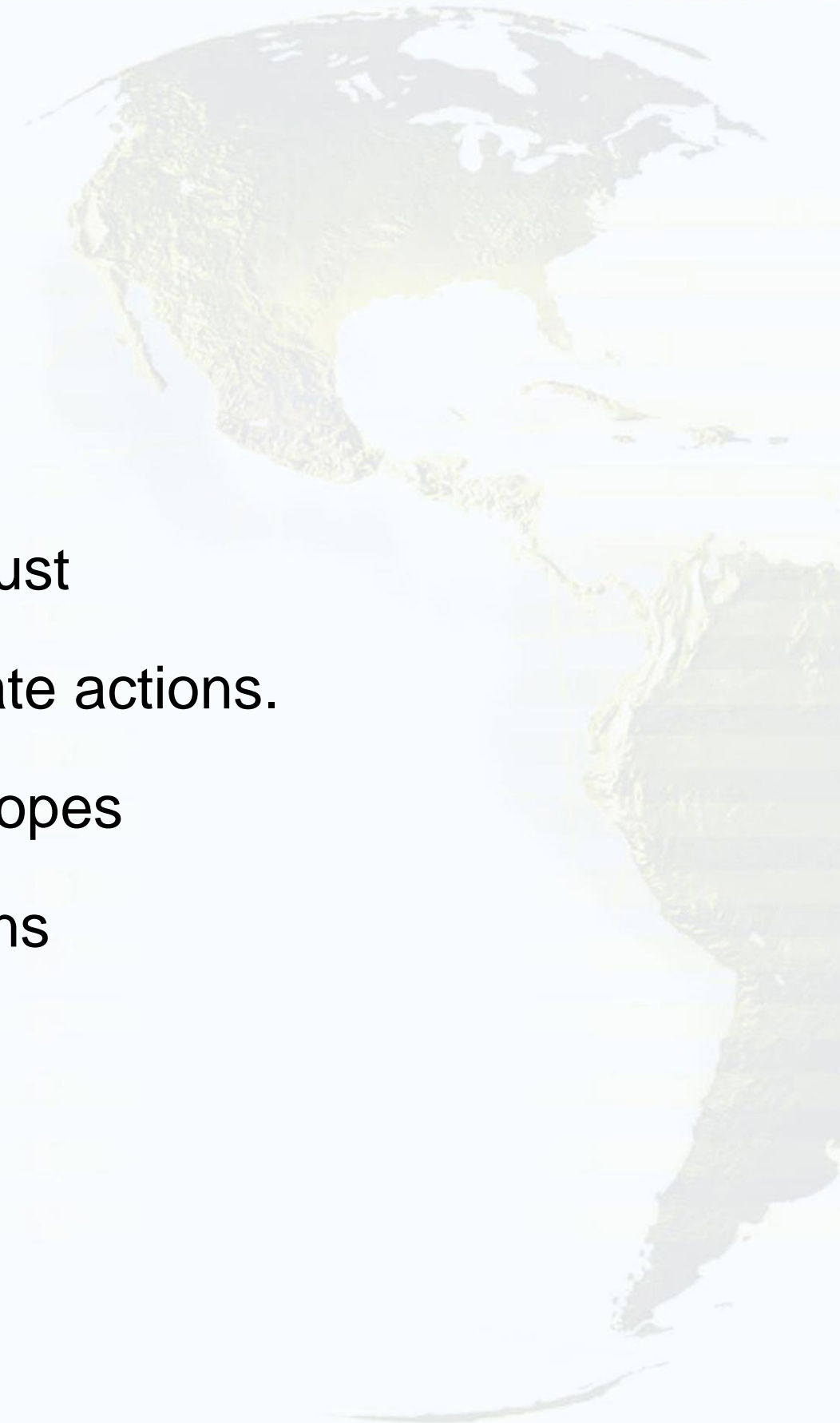
For Public Health Authorities: WHO Risk Communication Principles

- Trust
- Transparency
- Early announcement
- Listening, communication surveillance
- Planning = Risk Comm. Strategy



Trust

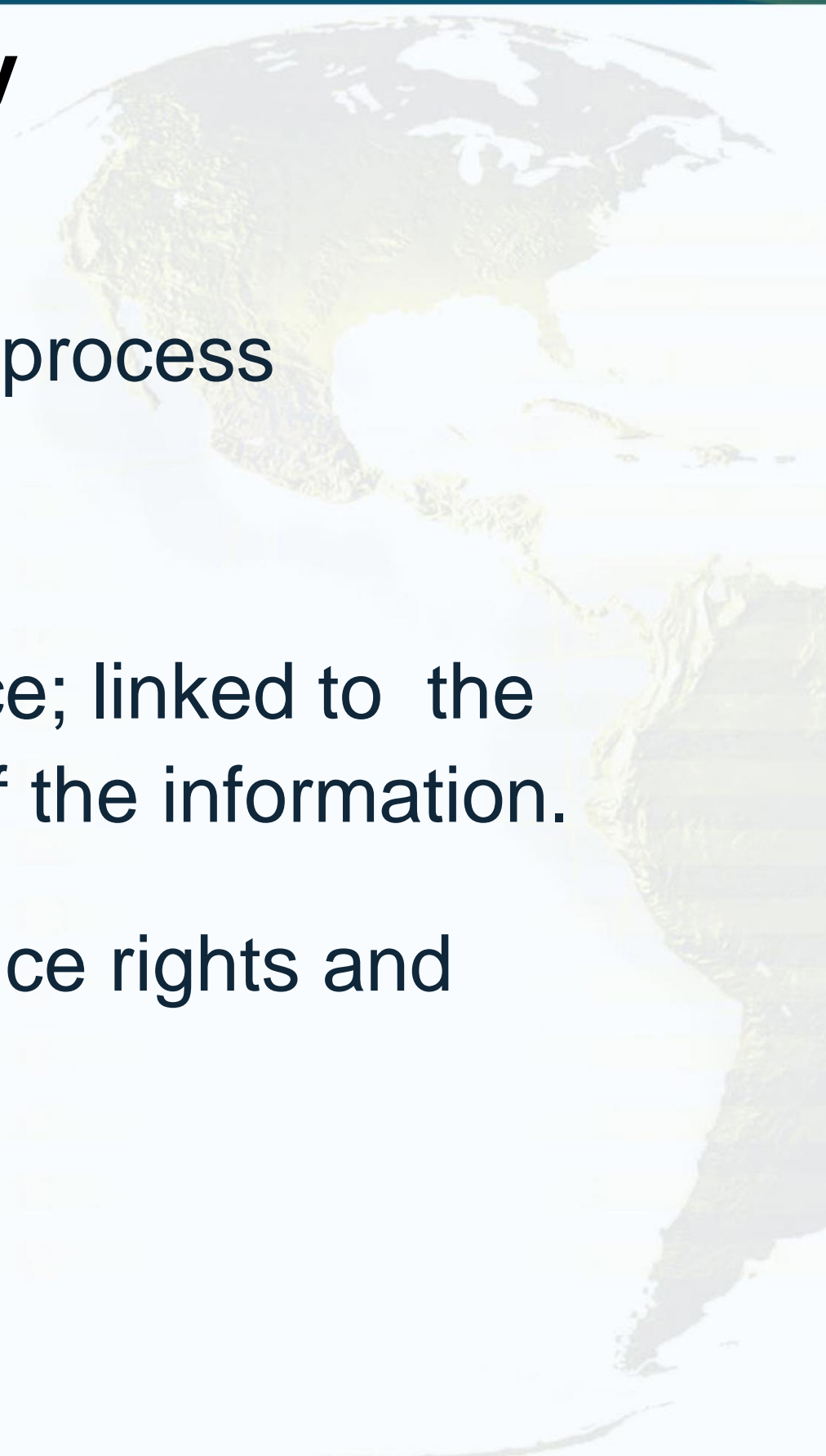
- Trust is earned before a crisis
- Need to take actions that maintain trust
- Enables population to take appropriate actions.
- Recognize uncertainty, avoid false hopes
- Include the public in decisions, actions





Transparency

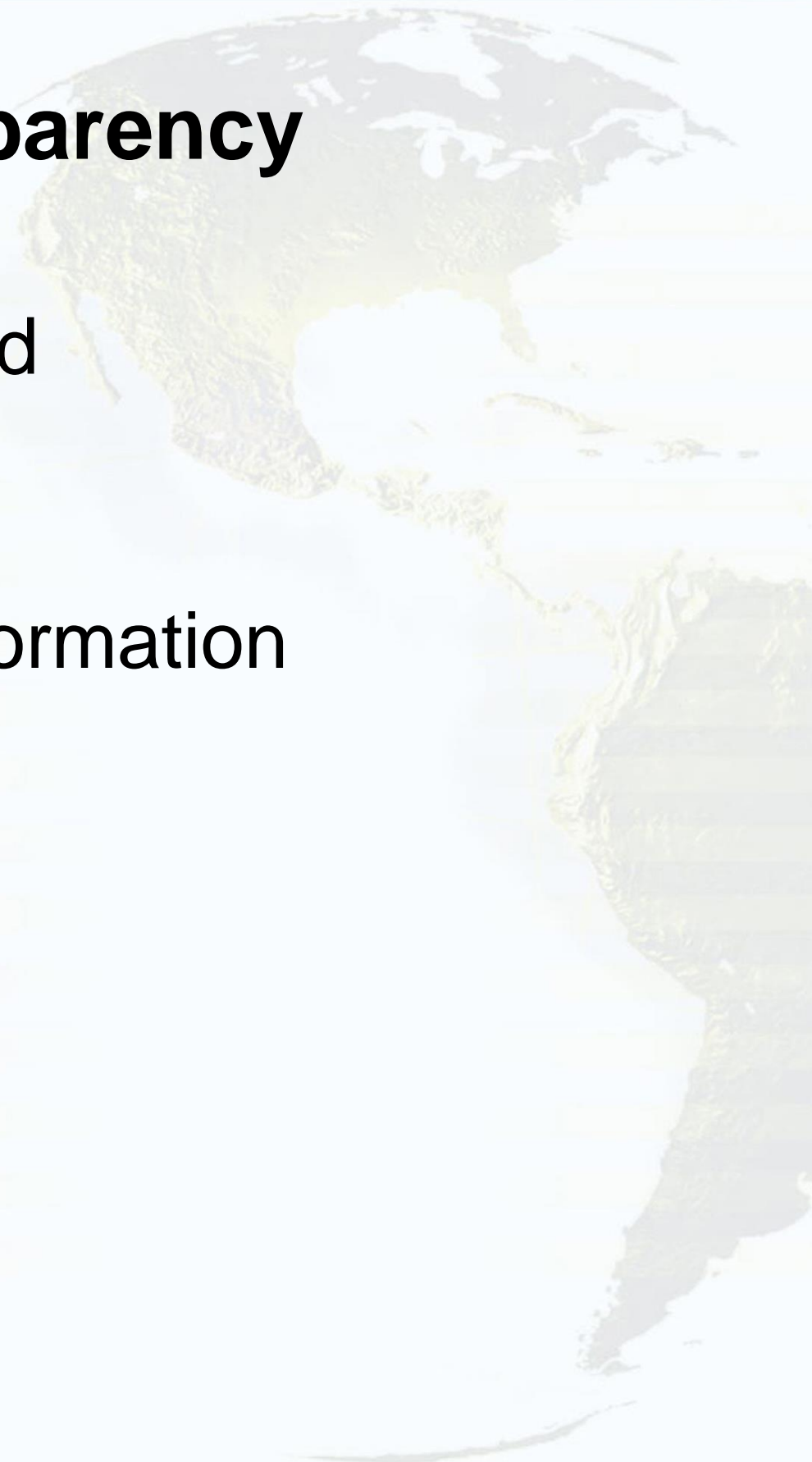
- Explain the decision-making process
- Aim for total candor
- Key to maintaining confidence; linked to the quality, veracity and clarity of the information.
- Limits to transparency, balance rights and information





Arguments For Transparency

- Rumors fill the information void
- Promotes protective behavior
- Keeps you out front as the information provider
- You can't hide outbreaks
- Social media take control





Early Announcement

- The opportunity to make the “first announcement” leads to trust, reduces rumors and can save lives.
- Acknowledge that the situation will change when there is more information.
- Shows leadership
- The lack of information is NOT a reason to put off the first announcement of a real or suspected outbreak.
- Inform of what you know, what you are doing, and what you want the public to do.





Communication Surveillance and Listening

- Is the public worried and in need of reassurance?
- Is the public too calm and in need of warning?
- Are they angry and in need of calming?
- Crisis + heightened public emotions + limited access to facts + rumor, gossip, speculation, assumption, and inference = an unstable information environment, panic, bad decisions, danger, credibility



Planning

- Risk communication part of the preparation for all public health emergencies.
- Eliminates the crisis decisions
- A National Risk Communication Strategy includes a crisis plan





Conclusions

- Risk communication is **not** a news release, poster or public relations
- Understanding and analyzing real and perceived risk is fundamental for the development of a risk communication strategy.
- If the public doesn't perceive a risk, they won't respond adequately to prevent it. The perception also can impede the response.
- Risk communication must include the public, the community, in their own languages and cultural norms.
- Need to avoid stigmatization

