

SUCCESS STORY

Pandemic Preparedness Bolsters H1N1 Response in Egypt

Project in Egypt disseminates information to the public about H1N1.



Travelers view a poster with flu prevention advice at the Hurgada Airport in July 2009. The Egypt Ministry of Health doctor pictured at right installed the posters in collaboration with USAID's Communication for Healthy Living (CHL) project. USAID funded CHL's rapid distribution of posters and brochures in public transportation sites and health facilities throughout Egypt as well as universities, private pharmacies, and rural villages.

On April 27, 2009, as novel influenza A (H1N1) began to spread rapidly across the globe, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised its pandemic alert level, and the world braced itself for the first influenza pandemic in 40 years. The U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Communication for Healthy Living (CHL) project in Egypt, which had expanded its partnership with the Egyptian government in 2006 to raise awareness about pandemic preparedness, immediately mobilized to disseminate information to the public about H1N1.

A public service announcement (PSA) on influenza prevention and pandemic readiness that Egypt's Ministry of Health and CHL originally broadcast well ahead of H1N1 outbreaks was quickly adapted to address H1N1 and was used to develop a full-spectrum media campaign. Within three days of the WHO's heightened pandemic alert, CHL had delivered nearly 3 million copies of posters and brochures about H1N1 through public and private sector and civil society partners, with an additional 2 million copies distributed in the following three months. Materials featuring the familiar characters and messages contained in the PSA were posted on buses and subways, handed out at international airports and ports, hung in aisles in supermarkets, and placed on pharmacy counters. The PSA, which also aired on satellite channels broadcast across the Middle East, had reached two-thirds of all television viewers in Egypt by June. As the WHO announced the start of the H1N1 pandemic in June, CHL worked with one of Egypt's largest mobile phone companies to send text messages with H1N1 prevention tips to 4 million subscribers.

Messages were also disseminated during events held in villages, summer camps, university campuses, and private sector workplaces. CHL and its partners delivered messages in training events as well, including during trainings for more than 1,000 community health workers, pharmacists, physicians, and nurses, and during 300 meetings for public and local leaders in May. Additional outreach continued throughout the summer, including to 300 employees in participating workplace wellness programs and more than 6,000 youths at summer camps. At the end of the summer, CHL and the Government of Egypt produced 53,000 education kits about H1N1 for delivery to grade schools throughout the country and 7,000 for universities.



A commuter views a poster with flu prevention tips in Cairo's subway system in June 2009. After WHO increased its pandemic alert as H1N1 spread in April 2009, USAID helped the Government of Egypt roll out a full-spectrum media campaign to help generate awareness about H1N1 influenza.

“Communication is a major component of responding to pandemics, and CHL, with the sponsorship of USAID, played a major role in working with the Government of Egypt to respond [quickly] and effectively [to] H1N1,” said Dr. Amr Kandeel, Egypt’s Undersecretary of Health for Preventative Affairs. “CHL had the materials ready even before H1N1 was announced. [They] targeted all different sectors, developing all types of materials – printed materials, TV spots and radio spots, and [materials for placement in] airports targeting people going on umra and hajj. I see CHL’s contributions as a pillar for the success of the H1N1 communication program.”

Implemented by Johns Hopkins University’s Center for Communication Programs, CHL is a USAID-funded health communication project geared toward enabling families and communities in Egypt to protect and maintain their health. CHL has worked in partnership with the Egyptian government since 2003 to develop and build an integrated, strategic approach to communication across health issues.

CHL emphasizes planning and development of distribution systems to enable ready response to emerging health threats such as H1N1. After USAID expanded CHL’s scope in 2005 to address avian influenza and added pandemic preparedness in 2006, key Egyptian officials joined CHL in drafting a pandemic preparedness strategy. Drawing on this experience and utilizing networks established over the course of the CHL project prepared them to launch an immediate communication response and maximize outreach when H1N1 emerged.

“CHL has been doing incredible work on H1N1. The Ministry of Health is very grateful for the speed and quality of the materials,” said Dr. Samir A. Refaey, Executive Director of the Ministry of Health’s Epidemiology and Disease Surveillance Unit. “Communication has been the best part of Egypt’s response.”

The H1N1 and pandemic preparedness communication messages developed with CHL support are now being shared internationally through online media. They are available at <http://www.saidr.org>.

Since 2005, USAID has provided \$28,951,000 to support avian influenza and pandemic preparedness efforts in Egypt. For more information on USAID’s avian and pandemic influenza preparedness and response program, please see http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/home/News/news_items/avian_influenza.html.