CDC has Issued a Revised Operational Policy
"CDC Media Relations Policy: Release of Information to News Media"

1. **Summary of Policy:**
   This policy provides direction for releasing information to the news media at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

2. **Reason for Revision:**
   This policy issuance clarifies the procedures for Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) coordination and clearance; updates information on the coordinated release of statistical press releases and CDC's emergency response coordination; and revises the policy format, organizational nomenclature, references, and uniform resource locators (URL).

3. **Related Issuances:**
   None

4. **Responsible Organization:**
   Office of the Associate Director for Communications (OADC)

5. **Material Superseded:**
   None

6. **Recertification:**
   This policy is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of September 2024.

7. **Points of Contact:**
   Kathy Harben, OADC, 404-639-7277, or Tonya R. Johnson, SBI, 770-488-4771

8. To go directly to the Policy, enter the following URL into the location line of your browser:
   https://sbi.cdc.gov/Policy/Doc/policy540.pdf

/s/ Sherri A. Berger, MSPH
Chief Operating Officer

**References to CDC also apply to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).

Category: Communications Management
Policy #: CDC-CM-2009-01
Date of Issue: 02/19/2009 Updated: 03/16/2009[1], Updated: 03/8/2011[2], Updated 09-03-19[3]
Proponent: CDC Office of the Associate Director for Communication
Application: All CDC Locations, Domestic and International
Applicable Staff: CDC Employees and Non-Employees

CDC MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY: RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO NEWS MEDIA

Sections:

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE
2. BACKGROUND
3. POLICY
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1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides direction for releasing information to the news media at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).[4]

This policy applies to all CDC employees[5] and non-employees[6] at all locations, domestic and international and to all Centers, Institute, and Offices (CIOs), Staff Offices, and Business Services Offices, which are hereafter called "CDC Components"[7] unless otherwise noted.

This policy does not cover employees and non-employees speaking as members of a labor union or other non-CDC organizations. In the event of any conflict between this policy and any other media-related CDC policy or directive, this policy takes precedence.

The Clearance of Information Products Disseminated for Public Use Policy provides direction on the requirements used to clear the release of scientific or technical reports and articles and technical information for professional journals. The CDC Enterprise Social Media Policy provides direction on clearing social media content and events.

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[1] Revised to provide supplemental guidance for NCHS statistical releases.
[2] Revised to conform to current organizational policy format.
[3] Revised to clarify procedures for FOIA coordination and clearance; update coordinated release of statistical press releases; update emergency response coordination; and update policy format, organizational nomenclature, references, and uniform resource locators (URL).
[4] References to CDC also apply to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).
[5] For the purposes of this policy, "employees" consists of members of the civil service, Commissioned Corps officers, and locally employed staff. For more information on this category, refer to "Employee Categories (Updated March 2017)," available at: http://intranet.cdc.gov/ocio/docs/systems-tools/Employee_Category_Definitions.pdf.
[6] For the purposes of this policy, "non-employees" are individuals who provide consistent services to CDC, maintain a regular presence on a CDC facility, or have been issued a physical or logical access credential and are funded by CDC-managed appropriations. As used in this policy, non-employees includes groups of individuals such as guest researchers, contractors, Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) personnel, or students. For more information on these categories, refer to "Non-Employee Categories (Updated March 2017)," available at: http://intranet.cdc.gov/ocio/docs/systems-tools/Non-Employee_Category_Definitions.pdf.
[7] More information on CDC organizational nomenclature is available at: https://sbi.cdc.gov/DOA/pdf/orgnom.pdf.

2. BACKGROUND

CDC and ATSDR are scientific, technical agencies committed to a culture of openness with the media and public that values the free exchange of ideas, data, and information as part of scientific and technical inquiry. CDC strives to provide accurate and timely scientific and technical information about CDC programs and activities.

3. POLICY

A. General Policy

CDC provides and disseminates information concerning its activities, science, programs, and recommendations to the news media who request public information regarding its programs and activities. CDC responds to these requests promptly and factually in accordance with applicable federal laws and regulations and directives and guidance from the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (OASPA).

The News Media Branch (NMB) within the Office of the Associate Director for Communication's (OADC) Division of Public Affairs (DPA) oversees and ensures the effective coordination between CDC's scientific, program, administrative, financial, and public affairs components to provide timely and accurate responses to media requests.

CDC employees must notify their immediate supervisor and coordinate with NMB personnel before speaking to the media or public about their work. CDC employees may speak to members of the media about their work as outlined in this policy, however, CDC employees are **not required** to speak to the media.

B. Code of Conduct for CDC Media Relations Employees

Federal employees must comply with the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch (5 C.F.R. §§ 2635.101- 902). Additionally, CDC's media relations employees must adhere to the following code of conduct:

- Be honest and accurate in all communications
- Honor embargoes
- Respond promptly to media requests and respect media deadlines
- Correct the record or any erroneous information promptly, when appropriate
- Promote the free flow of scientific and technical information
- Protect non-public information

C. Release of Information to the News Media

General

Major media-related activities and efforts are coordinated with the appropriate CDC component's Health Communications Science office and its Director or his or her designee, to ensure the scientific, technical, and programmatic accuracy of the information. The NMB conducts and coordinates the review and clearance required by the CDC Office of the Director (OD) or HHS OASPA, as necessary.

Press Releases and Media Material

The NMB media relations officers coordinate the review and clearance of media-related activities, such as advisories, statements, press releases, talking points, and questions and answers, with the appropriate OADC and OASPA officials. NMB media relations officers also provide advance notification of press and media releases and obtain OADC and OASPA approval for work performed by contractors or other agencies to promote media coverage for CDC events or topics.

National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Statistical Press Releases

NCHS generates purely statistical press releases in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive No. 4 Addendum: Release and Dissemination of Statistical Products Produced by Federal Statistical Agencies.

Statistical releases require clearance if they contain policy-related quotes or non-statistical programmatic content. When they contain policy-related quotes or non-statistical programmatic content, they are coordinated and cleared using standard NMB procedures. As outlined in Directive No. 4, the NCHS Public Affairs Office coordinates the release of statistical press releases through the NMB and keeps NMB, HHS, and the public informed of the schedule of upcoming NCHS data releases.

Interviews

The NMB serves as the clearance and coordination liaison between CDC's OD and the HHS OASPA to provide articulate, knowledgeable spokespersons who can best serve the needs of CDC and the public in response to media requests for interviews. The NMB recommends that a media relations officer be present during interviews to witness and document the content of the interview, support the interviewee, and provide post-interview follow-up, as necessary. CDC employees are **not required** to speak to the media. Journalists will only have access to CDC employees who agree to be interviewed.

The NMB Chief or his or her designee must approve CDC employees who serve as spokespersons addressing CDC policy and budget issues. Only full-time employees may speak to the media on behalf of CDC.

Media interviews conducted on behalf of CDC are on-the-record and attributed to the person speaking to the media representative. The CDC employee who provides material or information to the press must identify himself or herself as the source. Additionally, public information volunteered by a CDC official will not be considered exclusive to any one media source and will be made available to other sources, if requested.

Individuals speaking in an unofficial capacity are not required to clear interviews or written material with the NMB or other CDC entity. Section 3.D. of this policy outlines additional employee limitations.

The OADC, NMB, and the Office of Safety, Security, and Asset Management (OSSAM) must clear on-campus media interviews and visits as directed by the CDC-GA-2012-13 Photography, Videography, and Audio Recordings on CDC-Controlled Facilities policy.

Interview Considerations for Non-Employees

Non-employees are not authorized to speak for CDC. However, non-employees who serve as presenters at public events, such as conferences or meetings may participate in interviews with the media about their presentation while on-site. Non-employees who participate in interviews as presenters must:

- Notify the NMB after an interview to allow for monitoring and follow-up
- Refer requests for interviews or media questions beyond the scope of their presentation or specific work to the appropriate CDC media relations staff

Media Releases

The NMB, in coordination with CDC component Health Communication Science offices, must submit all print, electronic, public service announcements, and purchased media products intended for release to the media to HHS OASPA for approval.

Organized Media Events

The NMB submits all CDC-sponsored or CDC-organized media events to the HHS OASPA for approval. The NMB coordinates clearance of CDC's participation in organized media events sponsored by other government entities, the private sector, or non-profit organizations before a CDC representative accepts an invitation.

Letters-to-the-Editor and Opinion-Editorial Columns

The appropriate CDC component's Health Communication Science office clears, with the Component Director's approval, any letters-to-the-editor, opinion and editorial columns that represent an official CDC response, point of view, or an author's writing created as part of his or her official responsibilities. All of these materials must be cleared by CDC's OD and the HHS OASPA through the NMB.

Broadcast Interviews

The appropriate CIO Health Communication Science Office coordinates and clears (ensuring the CIO director's approval) television, radio, and online interviews through NMB. NMB serves as the clearance and coordination liaison with CDC's OD and the HHS OASPA.

Classified National Security Information[8]

The release of classified information in any form (e.g., documents, through interviews, audio, visual) to unauthorized individuals, including the news media, is prohibited and may be cause for prosecution or disciplinary action.

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[8]**Classified National Security Information –** Established by Executive Order 13526, the Classified National Security Information program prescribes a uniform system for classifying, safeguarding, and declassifying national security information, including information relating to defense against transnational terrorism.

Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI)[9]

CDC OD must approve the release of any controlled unclassified information formerly known as "sensitive but unclassified" (SBU) material before NMB submits the CUI to HHS OASPA for approval and release to the media. The release of CUI released to unauthorized individuals, including the media, is prohibited and may be cause for prosecution or disciplinary action.

Rollout Plans and Emergency Responses

Rollout plans are brief, time-oriented communication plans used to coordinate CDC component messaging and notifications for a significant change in CDC guidance; a new CDC-authored publication that presents new science expected to get media attention; or another activity in which CDC has a stake.

All CDC press officers, CDC component Health Communication Science offices, and the CDC Joint Information Center (JIC) liaison officer (LNO) share responsibility in an emergency response scenario for rollout plans including media statements, press releases, talking points, and questions and answers. The NMB, with support from the JIC LNO, during an EOC activation, coordinates the clearance of rollout plans through the CDC OD and the HHS OASPA.

The NMB supports media relations for emergency responses in coordination with the media function of the JIC in the CDC Incident Management Structure.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

When the NMB receives questions or requests for information or records that are not suitable for public disclosure, the NMB refers requestors to the CDC FOIA website for instructions on how to submit requests. Material that is exempt (i.e., may be withheld from release under FOIA) includes classified information, commercial or financial information, and personally identifiable information. Refer to CDC-GA-2002-02, "Freedom of Information Act Policy" for more information.

D. Employees Who Participate in Media Interviews as Private Citizens

CDC employees who provide their views as private citizens during media interviews must clearly state that the views they are expressing are their personal views and are not the views of CDC or HHS. They must ensure that media outlets do not identify them as a CDC or HHS representative. This also applies to employees who write letters-to-the-editor. Employees who author letters-to-the-editor must not use HHS or CDC letterhead or email addresses to express their personal views.

CDC employees who express their personal views are not subject to media relations clearance requirements. Expressions of personal or individual views to the media related to substance or outside activities are subject to the requirements set forth by the Office of Government Ethics' Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch. For example, CDC

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[9]**Controlled Unclassified Information** – Established by Executive Order 13556, the Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) program standardizes the way the Executive branch handles unclassified information that requires safeguarding or dissemination controls pursuant to and consistent with law, regulations, and Government-wide policies.

employees who present personal or individual views cannot make references to their official title or position in connection with outside activities (5 C.F.R. § 2635.807). Employees also cannot use or disclose certain types of non-public information, as defined in 5 C.F.R. § 2635.703(b), which may include, but is not limited to trade secrets (18 U.S.C. § 1905) or records on individuals (5 U.S.C. § 552a). Violations of these provisions may result in disciplinary action.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. CDC Component Directors

- Ensure the technical, scientific, and programmatic accuracy of all information related to their respective programs that is released by CDC

B. CDC Components

- Comply with HHS, OASPA, and CDC media relations directives, procedures, and guidance
- Ensure employees and non-employees refer all media requests to the NMB in a timely manner
- Coordinate with OADC/DPA/NMB in a timely manner regarding news media activities, requests, and materials that could generate media or public interest or inquiry

C. CDC Office of the Associate Director for Communication (OADC), Division of Public Affairs (DPA)

- Establishes news media relations policies and priorities
- Oversees the review and performance of all news media relations activities at CDC
- Coordinates media-related activities with the HHS OASPA and works with OASPA to approve media releases, media activities, events, and materials, as needed
- Advises CIO Health Communication Science Offices, OD staff, and other CDC Components including other parts of OADC, as needed

D. OADC, DPA, News Media Branch (NMB)

- Conducts news media relations activities for CDC, in conjunction with CDC Component press officers
- Coordinates the timely and efficient release of information to the news media
- Edits media material to ensure that it is well written and follows news media principles, practices, and expectations, without changing scientific or technical data or the meaning of programmatic content
- Submits materials to the HHS OASPA for approval within established time frame

E. All CDC Component Public Affairs Specialists, Health Communication Specialists, and Associate Directors for Communication Science (Employees Who are Not Assigned to OADC/DPA/NMB)

- Comply with HHS, OASPA, and CDC media relations directives, procedures, and guidance

- Coordinate with OADC, DPA, or NMB in a timely manner regarding news media relations activities, requests, and materials that could generate media or public interest or inquiry

F. All CDC Employees and Non-Employees

- Comply with HHS, OASPA and CDC media relations directives, procedures, and guidance
- Refer all media requests to the NMB
- Coordinate with OADC/DPA/NMB in a timely manner regarding news media activities, requests, and materials that could generate media or public interest or inquiry

5. REFERENCES

A. 5 C.F.R. §§ 2635.101-902 (2018) – Standards of Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch.

B. CDC. CDC-GA-2011-01: *CDC Enterprise Social Media*, dated January 8, 2015, https://sbi.cdc.gov/Policy/Doc/policy566.pdf.

C. CDC. CDC-GA-2002-02: *Freedom of Information Act,* dated April 4, 2014, https://sbi.cdc.gov/Policy/Doc/policy18.pdf.

D. CDC. CDC-GA-2013-13: *Photography, Videography, and Audio Recordings on CDC-Controlled Facilities*, dated October 4, 2012, https://sbi.cdc.gov/Policy/Doc/policy466.pdf.

E. HHS. "Guidelines on the Provision of Information to the News Media", Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs," dated January 2017, https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/media_policy.pdf.

F. U.S. Office of Management and Budget. Statistical Policy Directive No. 4 Addendum: "*Release and Dissemination of Statistical Products Produced by Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units*," dated October 17, 2016. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/10/17/2016-25049/statistical-policy-directive-no-4-addendum-release-and-dissemination-of-statistical-products.

6. ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADCS – Associate Director for Communication Science
C.F.R. – Code of Federal Regulations
CIO – Centers/Institute/Offices
CUI – Controlled Unclassified Information
DPA – Division of Public Affairs
FOIA – Freedom of Information Act
HHS – Department of Health and Human Services
JIC – Joint Information Center
LNO – Liaison Officer
NMB – News Media Branch
NCHS – National Center for Health Statistics
OADC – Office of the Associate Director for Communication
JIC LNO – Joint Information Center Liaison Officer
OASPA – Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs
OD – Office of the Director
OMB – Office of Management and Budget

SBU – Sensitive but Unclassified
U.S.C. – United States Code

7. DEFINITIONS

CDC Components – Organizational entities of CDC that are comprised of CIOs, Staff Offices, and Business Services Offices, as outlined in Organizational Nomenclature Used in Delegations of Authority

Clearance – The process of obtaining approvals through CDC organizations by the appropriate CDC staff members, including the HHS, OASPA, if necessary, before information is released or provided to the media

Embargo – A request or requirement by a source that the information or news provided by that source is not published until a certain date or certain conditions have been met

Exclusive – Information or material provided solely to a particular media outlet, journalist, or publication

Off-the-Record – Information given to reporters for use with the understanding that the information will not be made public in any way, and will not to be taken to another source for confirmation

On-the-Record – The source or interviewee provides information to a reporter or member of the news media formally or publicly, with the knowledge that it may be recorded or disseminated and that the media can identify him or her

News Media – Organizations that present or provide news, information, and analysis to the public such as print media (e.g., newspapers and magazines); broadcast media (e.g., radio stations, television stations, television networks); and digital news media (e.g., news coverage on web sites and digital video broadcast channels)

Public Information – Information in any form provided to news and information media