

Minneapolis Health Department Media Policy

Purpose

To outline the procedures for all Health Department employees regarding media requests, interactions, data privacy, coordination of communications, and timeliness of response in partnership with the department's Communications Coordinator.

Scope

This policy applies to all Health Department employees. This policy guides the decision-making process involved in determining whether an individual is responding as a public employee versus private citizen. The policy is not intended to abridge the rights of any individual communicating with the media or public as a resident or a member of the public, who is not acting in his/her capacity as a representative of the City or the Health Department.

Media History

The traditional definition of media has significantly changed in recent years. With cell phones, drones, social media, and other recording devices and reporting platforms, anyone can report information that becomes part of the public record.

- Health Department employees should consider anyone asking for a public comment a member of the media.
- Employees representing the health department at a public or private event must recognize information and comments made could be publicized in the media.
 - **See below section on Media participation outside of Health Department role**
- Types of media include:
 - Traditional: Established broadcasting or publishing outlets.
 - Bloggers: A person who regularly writes articles for an online publication. This could be a mainstream outlet, a lesser-known site or on a personal platform.
 - New media: Includes people who produce content for social media or internet sites.
 - Whether the site has a big or small following, news on these sites can be picked up easily by the mass media.
 - Anyone with a recording device. While these individuals are not traditional reporters, we've seen a number of cases where a cell phone video has become the video of record for an important story.

Procedures

- When contacted by a member of the media, Health Department staff will refer all inquiries, including interview requests, to the Health Department Communications Coordinator.
 - **Contacted by phone:** Do not respond to questions. Politely provide the department's policy that all media requests must go through communications. Provide the Communications Coordinator's email:
 - **Contacted by email:** Forward the email to the Communications Coordinator. and copy your supervisor.
 - **Approached in public:** Politely tell the reporter that all media requests must go through the department's Communications Coordinator.
 - If the reporter starts asking questions, do not say "no comment."
 - Politely ask the reporter to contact the Communications Coordinator to schedule an interview.

- For each media request, the Communications Coordinator will notify the Health Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Division Director, manager and City Communications that a media inquiry has been received and the plan for response.
- The Communications Coordinator will be the point of contact with the reporter.
 - All written responses will be reviewed by the Communications Coordinator and approved by the director and/or manager of the team.
 - The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner will be copied on all written responses and have an opportunity to provide feedback, if necessary.
 - The Communications Coordinator will provide final responses to the reporter, including statements and quotes.
- For interviews, the Communications Coordinator will work with subject matter experts to develop key messages, prepare for interviews, and plan other strategic communications around the topic.
 - The Communications Coordinator will arrange all interviews and staff the interview (if possible).
- Health Department staff will work with the Communications Coordinator on proactive media activities, including pitches for news coverage, newsletter stories, social media posts, videos and other potential media outreach. Health Department staff are reminded that we serve to educate the public regarding Health Department goals, initiatives, programs, and activities. Consult with your supervisor and the Communications Coordinator about issues under active consideration by City and elected officials.
- For proactive media pitches, the initial contact with media will be made by the Communications Coordinator. In cases where a contractor or public relations agency has been hired for specific communications-related activities, the contractor and Health Department Communications Coordinator will ensure City protocols are followed, including laws that govern the release of data.
- The Communications Coordinator will work with managers, subject matter experts, and the City Attorney to ensure data requests from the media follow data privacy rules. A variety of federal and state laws govern the release of public, confidential, and private data. Employees should always work with the Communications Coordinator to determine what information can be provided and what information is protected by the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act or any federal, state, or local laws.
- In a Public Health Emergency, the department's Communications Coordinator or City Communications Department personnel will serve as the Public Information Officer (PIO).
 - All information provided to the media must go through the PIO.

