Rumors Guidance Document

Instructions for Document:

Who: This toolkit is for project teams to use, particularly HP teams, FieldCo and rumor assigned focal point related to COVID-19.

What: This toolkit includes four resources to support rumors identification, management and response.

1. A guidance note with a framework of how to identify and respond to rumors.
2. A PowerPoint presentation for Field Coordinators and Health Promotion Managers to use to engage other MSF team members in the identification and response of rumors.
3. An Excel Rumor Logbook that can be used by focal point, FieldCo and HP manager to collect all rumors in the same space, analyze trends and follow up on their response in a fast way.
4. A Word data collection sheet that can be used collect information on rumors during community and/or health facility activities by HP/CHW (p. 1), and a community engagement activity monitoring sheet (for HP manager/supervisors and rumor focal point to fill).

Why: Often rumors/misinformation spread faster than pandemics. It can be a challenge to develop a strategy when rumors/misinformation are already spreading, so this toolkit aims to help teams find ways of actively managing them.

How: Read the guidance note and consider if it is relevant to focus on rumors. Think about who would be useful to work with as a team on this issue and what their roles would be. Use the presentation to inform team members on the topic and get a first idea of some rumors. The Excel database supports the gathering of information and its analysis. The Word data collection sheet can help collect information on rumors and monitor Community Engagement activities aimed at tackling rumors.

WHAT TO KNOW

In situations marked by public fear and uncertainty, such as the COVID-19 outbreak, we are **especially prone to sharing and believing rumours and unproven information**.

This is because any information—about the disease, where it is spreading, what kinds of protection or treatments are available, and what the consequences will be on our loved ones—is naturally wanted.

Unfortunately, **rumours often are untrue and lead to misconceptions about important aspects** of COVID-19 and its consequences. Rumours can give us wrong advice that puts us at more harm. They can cause mistrust, lead people not seek medical help or even spur threats or violence.

RUMORS BASICS

What	How	Remember
• A rumor is **unverified information passed from one person to others.** • Rumors can be true, false, or a mixture of both. • **Rumors can have negative or violent consequences** but some are harmless or have positive outcomes. • Rumors can be a sign that other channels of communication have broken down or are not trusted.	• Talking, word of mouth • Local, national and international media • WhatsApp and other chat applications (e.g. Telegram) • Internet, blogs, social media • SMS text messages • **Other ways:** check locally for relevant channels	• We are more likely to believe information that **confirms our previous ideas** of how the world works. • People are also more likely to believe **sources we have already used and trusted.** • Rumors are more likely to be trusted when they resonate with the **emotional needs** of the community.

ADDRESSING RUMORS

1. Listen and capture

- Establish a **way to listen and capture rumors**. To effectively listen to rumors, build on existing and trusted relationships as ways to listen and find ways of listening to the language the community is most comfortable using.

- **Create a rumor logbook**. When collecting rumors from a variety of sources, it can be useful to have a common place to store and analyze rumors.

- **Assess the potential risk and likelihood** that a rumor could have. This will help us set priorities and avoid becoming overwhelmed filtering information.

1. Listen, capture and understand
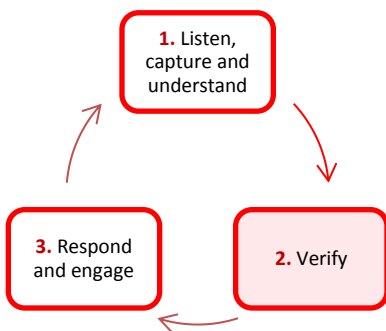
2. Verify

3. Respond and engage
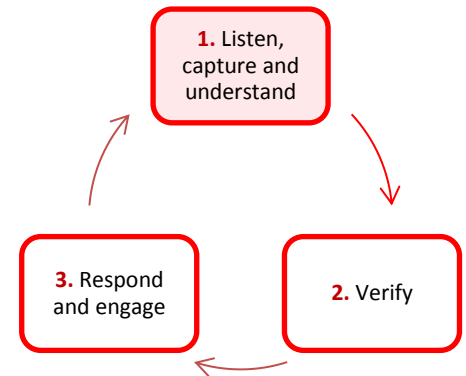
Risk
- Could this rumor cause harm?
- Could it result in risky behaviour?
- Could it stop people accessing services?
- Could it cause conflict or stigmatization?
- Could it put certain groups at risk?
- Could it put our staff, our collaborators or the community at risk?
- Could it pose a significant reputational risk to MSF?

Likelihood
- Have there already been any examples of the potential consequences listed occurring as a result of the rumor?
- How have people reacted to this kind of rumor in the past?
- How fast is the rumour travelling? How widespread is it?
- Who is the reported source of the rumour? Is it a source that people tend to believe?
- How are people reacting to the rumor? Do many people believe the rumour? Who is questioning it, if so? What are the pro and cons argument (if any) in the community about the rumor?

1. Listen, capture and understand

2. Verify

3. Respond and engage

2. Verify

Find out if the rumor is **true, false, or both**	Check with reliable sources who should know. This may include written sources, (e.g. laws, rules, policies, factsheets), or it could be people with first-hand experience and/ or an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter.
If possible, **triangulate the information**	Triangulating means checking with a minimum of three different sources. If each of them provides the same information, then it is more likely to be correct.
Understand what might have triggered the rumor	Try to identify if there was any event that may have caused misunderstanding. For example, was there a government announcement? Did we recently change how we conducted our activities? Answering these questions will help broaden your understanding of the context and the possible issues and concerns people might have.

3. Respond and engage, according to context

1. Listen, capture and understand
2. Verify
3. Respond and engage
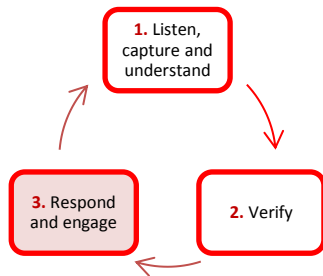
Share **accurate information** with people in a way that **makes sense to their previous beliefs, comes from trusted channels and recognizes their emotional needs**.

This may be in a one-time activity or a series of activities depending on the complexity of the rumor and context.

Examples of **questions to help make context-specific** responses:

Making sense to people
- What kind of explanations usually make sense to people? What explanations don't really make sense to people in our communities? Why?
- How do people understand illness and disease? Do medical explanations give them comfort?
- Are there other explanations and metaphors we can use that communities are already familiar with?

Trusted sources
- Who do people already trust? Are we working with them already or can we ask for their help?
- Do people trust different sources for different information (e.g. religious leaders for spiritual problems, doctors for physical problems)?
- Who is not trusted in the community for information? Why?

Addressing emotional needs
- When we share messages, how does it making people feel?
- How can we find ways of empathizing with people when they say they feel scared or worried?
- Are there others who we can engage who address bigger fears and worries than MSF can address?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Many organizations are familiar with management and response to rumors. For more information:

- [WHO Module on Dynamic Listening and Rumor Management](#)
- [WHO-Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public: Myth busters](#)
- [Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network-Rumour Has It: A Practice Guide to Working with Rumours](#)