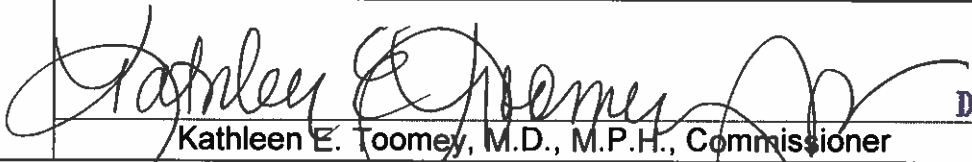




GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
POLICY # CM-11-7002
MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Approval:	 Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner	DEC 23 '19 16:01 * Date
-----------	--	----------------------------

1.0 PURPOSE

The intent of this policy is to establish guidelines for Media Relations for the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH).

2.0 AUTHORITY

The Georgia Department of Public Health Media Relations Policy is published under the authority of DPH.

3.0 DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 **DPH** – Georgia Department of Public Health.
- 3.2 **Employee** – Georgia Department of Public Health Employee.
- 3.3 **HIPAA** – Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 is a federal law that requires data privacy and security safeguards for medical information.
- 3.4 **Media** - Reporters/Producers/News Researchers/Assignment Desk Editors.
- 3.5 **ORR** – A request for documents or electronic data held by DPH that is governed by the Georgia Open Records Act, even if the request does not specifically cite the Act.
- 3.6 **PHIP** – Public Health Information Portal.
- 3.7 **SME** – Subject Matter Expert.

4.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to employees of the Georgia Department of Public Health.

5.0 POLICY

It is the policy of DPH to provide accurate, timely and relevant public health information with a legitimate public health purpose to media, the public, health care providers and others.

Legitimate public health purpose means a population-based activity or individual effort primarily aimed at the prevention of injury, disease or premature mortality, or the promotion of health in the community, including (a) assessing the health needs and status of the community through

Department of Public Health POLICY AND PROCEDURES	Policy No.	CM-11-7002		
	Effective Date:	07/01/11	Revision #:	5
Media Relations	Page No.	2 of 7		

public health surveillance and epidemiological research, (b) developing public health policy, and (c) responding to public health needs and emergencies.

5.1 ACCOUNTABILITY

- 5.1.1 This policy governs the release of information to the media. Information is defined as information in any form provided to media, including but not limited to, public health information, DPH statements, interviews, press releases, media advisories, news features, audio or video news releases. Not included under this definition are scientific and technical reports or articles and technical information in professional journals.
- 5.1.2 This policy establishes a uniform and effective method for interacting with media and governs how DPH employees handle all requests or calls from media.
- 5.1.3 The centralization of handling media inquiries ensures an effective and coordinated response that serves the best interest of public health and reinforces the vision and mission of DPH.
- 5.1.4 This policy covers the proper handling of information contained in news releases, interviews and organized media events involving DPH staff.

6.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1 The DPH Communications Director is the point of contact for all media relations for the agency including but not limited to, approval of talking points, DPH statements, interviews, news releases and media advisories.
- 6.2 DPH employees are responsible for compliance with the terms of this policy.
- 6.3 DPH managers and supervisors are responsible for monitoring employees' compliance with the terms of this policy.
- 6.4 The DPH Division of Communications is responsible for issuing and updating procedures to implement this policy.

7.0 PROCEDURES

7.1 GENERAL

- 7.1.1 The DPH Communications Director will provide appropriate and timely public health information to the news media.
- 7.1.2 The DPH Communications Director will assess each media inquiry or interview request on a case by case basis relative to the angle of the story and value to public health.

Department of Public Health POLICY AND PROCEDURES	Policy No.	CM-11-7002		
	Effective Date:	07/01/11	Revision #:	5
Media Relations	Page No.	3 of 7		

- 7.1.3 The DPH Commissioner, Communications Director or their designees are the **ONLY** individuals authorized to directly respond to media inquiries or requests for interviews on behalf of the Department.
- 7.1.4 Responses to media inquiries should be brief, factual, sourced where applicable, and as complete as possible in accordance with HIPAA and all applicable federal and state privacy laws and regulations.
- 7.1.5 Responses to media inquiries will be made via email whenever possible.
- 7.1.6 The DPH Communications Director may agree to phone or face-to-face interviews on a select, case-by-case basis after determining merit and availability of the appropriate spokesperson.
- 7.1.7 In some instances, the DPH Communications Director may deem it appropriate to issue a statement on behalf of the agency to address all media inquiries about the same topic.
- 7.1.8 Responses to media inquiries deemed by the DPH Communications Director as sensitive or potentially volatile will require approval by the Commissioner, and possibly other Executive Leadership, **before** release to the media.
- 7.1.9 DPH does not comment or report on work done by private entities or other federal or state programs or their public documents; if appropriate, media should be referred to that entity's website for more information.
- 7.1.10 DPH does not comment on pending investigations, litigation, open procurements, audits, or matters under review by law enforcement or other federal state, district or local entities.
- 7.1.11 Media inquiries specific to a District or county will be sent to the District PIO for response, along with notification to media making the request.

7.2 Employee Contact with the Media

- 7.2.1 All media inquiries must be referred to the DPH Communications Director as soon as they are received via email (preferred) or phone.
- 7.2.2 DPH employees should not respond to requests from media, except to direct them to the DPH Communications Director. No additional comment or information should be provided.
- 7.2.3 **The DPH Commissioner, Communications Director or their designees are the ONLY official spokespersons for DPH.**
- 7.2.4 This policy is not intended to curtail the ability of DPH employees to exercise their First Amendment rights to freedom of speech. A DPH employee is not prohibited from speaking to media about non-DPH matters, so long as the employee does

Department of Public Health POLICY AND PROCEDURES	Policy No.	CM-11-7002		
	Effective Date:	07/01/11	Revision #:	5
Media Relations	Page No.	4 of 7		

not expressly or impliedly purport to represent DPH (for example, by wearing a DPH badge or an article of clothing with the DPH logo during a television interview).

7.3 **Open Records Requests** – ORRs should be sent immediately to the DPH Privacy Officer. Please see DPH's *Public Open Records Policy GC-09002*.

7.4 **PHIP Requests** – Please see DPH's *Data Request Policy CO-12007*.

7.5 PROCEDURES REGARDING RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO NEWS MEDIA

7.5.1 Media Requests for Information:

7.5.1.1 All media requests should be referred to the DPH Communications Director as soon as they are received.

7.5.1.2 The DPH Communications Director will acknowledge receipt of the media request within one hour to the media contact via phone or email during normal business hours. Requests received after 5 p.m. will be addressed the following business day, except in the case of emergencies or imminent public health threats.

7.5.1.3 The DPH Communications Director will request detailed information about the media request including the focus of the story, deadlines, planned run/air date and an advance copy or link of the article or story if possible.

7.5.1.4 The DPH Communications Director will review the media outlet, reporter bio and audience/market reach when assessing whether to respond or decline the media request.

7.5.1.5 The DPH Communications Director will review previous inquiries of a similar nature and any relevant subject matter background before contacting the SME for response or guidance.

7.5.1.6 The DPH Communications Director will contact the appropriate internal SME and their Program Director about the inquiry, noting the request is for media and the deadline for receiving the information.

7.5.1.7 Within one hour of receiving a request from the DPH Communications Director, the SME and Program Director, or their designee, must acknowledge the request and apprise the DPH Communications Director of when a substantive response to the inquiry will be provided.

7.5.1.8 Upon receipt of the response from the SME, the DPH Communications Director will review the response for accuracy and clarity. The DPH Communications Director will incorporate appropriate feedback to prepare a final response before sending it to the media.

Department of Public Health POLICY AND PROCEDURES	Policy No.	CM-11-7002		
	Effective Date:	07/01/11	Revision #:	5
Media Relations	Page No.	5 of 7		

7.5.2 Media Interviews

- 7.5.2.1 **The DPH Commissioner, Communications Director or their designees are the ONLY official spokespersons for the Department.** SMEs who are approved by the Commissioner and Communications Division Director may serve as spokespersons when appropriate.
- 7.5.2.2 Program Directors or managers may not designate SMEs as spokespersons without express, prior permission of the DPH Communications Director.
- 7.5.2.3 When an interview, either by phone or in person, has been approved, the appropriate SME should prepare a draft of potential talking points to be used in the interview by the designated spokesperson.
- 7.5.2.4 A pre-interview "interview" may be conducted by the DPH Communications Director and the spokesperson to refine and rehearse the key talking points. At that time, potential issues or problems and how best to respond if they arise should be discussed.
- 7.5.2.5 The DPH Communications Director will facilitate the interview, including introductions of all personnel and closure of interview segment. Only the spokesperson and the Communications Division Director, or their designee, will be present during the interview.
- 7.5.2.6 In extenuating circumstances other staff may be allowed to be present during an interview, but only with prior approval by the DPH Communications Director.

7.5.3 Media Escorts

- 7.5.3.1 When media arrive at 2 Peachtree, they must check-in at the Visitor/Security Desk on the first floor and wait until a member of the communications team arrives to escort them to the proper interview location.
- 7.5.3.2 Upon completion of the interview, media will be escorted to the Visitor/Security Desk on the first floor.
- 7.5.3.3 The only exception to escorting the media in and out of 2 Peachtree is for DPH Board of Public Health meetings generally held on a monthly basis. No door-to-door media escorts are required for DPH Board of Public Health meeting attendance.

Department of Public Health POLICY AND PROCEDURES	Policy No.	CM-11-7002		
	Effective Date:	07/01/11	Revision #:	5
Media Relations	Page No.	6 of 7		

7.5.4 Media Response Record Keeping

- 7.5.4.1 All emails and notes pertinent to a media inquiry should be filed and saved by the DPH Communications Director.
- 7.5.4.2 The media inquiry and response should be included in the Daily Media Summary for use by Districts, as needed.

7.5.5 News Release Distribution

- 7.5.5.1 A news release may be issued by DPH to convey important public health information or guidance, provide meeting notices or to promote the work of a specific program or event.
- 7.5.5.2 Requests for news releases must be made to the DPH Communications Director for approval. The decision to issue a news release will be based on its value to public health and the likelihood of media to share the information on the topic.
- 7.5.5.3 Programs requesting a news release should be prepared to provide a draft or content for a news release.
- 7.5.5.4 Final content for a news release will be the responsibility of the DPH Communications Director.
 - 7.5.5.4.1 External distribution of news releases falls into two main categories:
 - a. All media included on the DPH Media List, and
 - b. Select media that reaches a specific geographic, editorial or target demographic (e.g., All metro Atlanta media; all District 9-2 media, etc.)
 - 7.5.5.4.2 Internal distribution of news releases before external release will be determined by the DPH Communications Director, as needed.
 - 7.5.5.4.3 The DPH Communications Director may choose to provide alerts at least 30-minutes in advance of sending news releases to PIOs, Risk Communicators, designated PH staff and others as needed.
 - 7.5.5.4.4 Requests for joint news releases with other agencies must be approved by the DPH Commissioner and Communications Director before advanced discussions with other agencies. If approved, the DPH Communications Director will work with the Communications Director of the

Department of Public Health POLICY AND PROCEDURES	Policy No.	CM-11-7002		
	Effective Date:	07/01/11	Revision #:	5
Media Relations	Page No.	7 of 7		

collaborating agency on content and distribution of the news release.

7.5.6 News Conferences

- 7.5.6.1 All news conferences must be approved by the DPH Commissioner and the Communications Director, and other Executive Leaders as needed.
- 7.5.6.2 News conferences may be deemed appropriate to address media inquiries or make announcements on behalf of DPH alone or in collaboration with another agency or partner.
- 7.5.6.3 All logistics, including scheduling time and notice to reporters, will be facilitated by the DPH Communications Director.

8.0 Social Media

Please see DPH's *Social Media Policy* CM-07003.

9.0 REVISION HISTORY

REVISION #	REVISION DATE	REVISION COMMENTS
0	July 1, 2011	Initial Issue
1	July 16, 2012	Annual review and update. Reformat to new template
2	June 12, 2014	Clarified language
3	Aug. 27, 2014	Clarified language and omitted redundant information
4	May 24, 2017	Annual Review and updates
5	October 23, 2019	Annual Review and updates

10.0 RELATED FORMS

None