



Strategies for Continuing Healthy Homes Activities While Social Distancing

Within the healthy housing field, there is an intense interest in learning about innovative adaptations and new ways to continue healthy homes activities during this time of social distancing (also called “physical distancing”). In response to this interest, requests for information and tools, and ongoing conversations between the National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) and multiple stakeholders across several of our key initiatives, we’ve published this peer-sharing series entitled Strategies for Continuing Healthy Homes Activities While Social Distancing. The examples highlighted in this series provide not only a firsthand perspective of the exciting work undertaken by this and other change leaders around the country to develop new strategies or layer additional components into larger systems but also a way to contact them for additional information. Use these real-world strategies as a resource to maintain, improve, and expand healthy housing activities or when considering your own local possibilities during this difficult time.

Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan: Community Education and Communication

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Strategy Goal

At the start of the pandemic, Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan launched a “Staying Safe at Home” campaign. Much of the focus was on indoor air quality and the needs of our asthma population because of concerns with asthma folks being more high-risk for COVID-19. The messaging also includes linking lead and other healthy homes issues to how people think about COVID-19, such as the importance of washing your hands and cleaning and disinfecting safely.

Staying Safe at Home.

Description

Most of the messaging and communication was performed virtually. Messages were shared on Facebook, backed up by our blog at <http://www.healthyhomescoalition.org/news-feed/page/1>, and on YouTube. We used the MailChimp email service heavily for directly contacting people. We also sent some direct physical mailers. We saw cooperation from media early on, but that has dropped off; video and direct email has gotten the best response by far.

Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan also works with a group of core parent activists, Parents for Healthy Homes. During the pandemic, this group has had to shift to virtual communications as well. In the community organizing space, Zoom-type engagements are helpful, and one-on-one phone calls are critical. When shifting to this type of communication strategy and away from in-person conversations with our group, we needed to have a

candid conversation about how that can also go wrong if we get into too much “he said, she said.” We needed overt discussions about being team players, leaders, inclusive in our strategies, and how to set egos aside. In terms of organizing and policy activities during the pandemic, instead of moving on issues that will only frustrate, our parents have been talking about how they can focus on affirmative relationship building. As an example, here’s a video our parents put together to thank our local public health officer for being a great voice of calm and a great leader: <https://youtu.be/pyuYqSoOTNA>

Key Tips

We found that the following approaches and needs were critical to keep in mind when talking with people and communicating about COVID-19:

- Always lead with “How are you?” Acknowledge the present moment. Always reinforce CDC messages on COVID-19.
- While it’s hard to be positive for some of us, keeping messages positive is CRITICAL right now. Instead of “Don’t do this...,” it’s better to say things like, “Did you know ____ can help?”
- Like our local schools and others, we will have to also lean into connecting people with resources to help cross the digital divide, such as low-cost or free internet. For example, our public-school students can get \$10 broadband, which is better than typical market rate of \$50-plus.

Outcome

During the pandemic, core members of Parents for Healthy Homes have stayed engaged throughout the past couple months, now talking to each other every week. We had some policy movement at the city in late May, which we credit to the continued close relationship between these parents and city commissioners, built before the pandemic and maintained even as communications shifted online.

Resources

- Simple COVID-19 page: <http://www.healthyhomescoalition.org/covid-19>.
- Staying Safe at Home: How to test Your Garden Soil for Lead (campaign example):
 - Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=928345724271344>.
 - YouTube: https://youtu.be/Mq6S_8YD8oY.

For additional examples and resources related to the COVID-19 pandemic, visit ...

https://bit.ly/NCHH_Pandemics

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