

## Pre-testing of social and behaviour change (SBC) messages and materials in the COVID-19 context

V.1 (November 2020)

### Remember the COVID-19 infection prevention measures<sup>1</sup>

- Maintain physical distance of at least one metre from all others, except immediate members of the family or people with whom you share accommodation
- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based sanitizer or wash them with soap and water. WHO recommends washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap or hand sanitizer are not available, rub hands vigorously with wood ashes
- Avoid going to crowded places
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Practise respiratory hygiene by coughing or sneezing into a bent elbow or tissue and then immediately dispose of the tissue<sup>2</sup> and wash your hands
- If you have fever or respiratory symptoms, you should stay home and not go to work
- Wear a fabric mask if there is widespread community transmission, and especially where physical distancing cannot be maintained
- Correctly use and dispose of any COVID-19 infection prevention materials provided. Follow national government guidance for disposal
- Maintain all other measures described even when wearing protective equipment
- Keep up to date with the latest guidance and regulations put in place by WHO and the national government

**NOTE:** As the pandemic evolves, WHO updates the infection prevention measures based on new scientific findings. Check for any updates on <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>.

**Core AMP documents:** *Key guidance for distribution of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) during COVID-19 transmission*

*Planning for safe ITN distribution in the context of COVID-19 transmission* See:

<https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

### Understand the need for pre-testing SBC materials

Pre-testing remains an essential step in the process of developing high-quality and acceptable SBC messages and materials for a mass ITN distribution campaign. At all levels – national, regional, district and community – the campaign is targeting people from different socio-economic, cultural, religious, ethnic, etc. backgrounds. Pre-testing is necessary to ensure that the messages and materials developed will resonate with the populations targeted and generate engagement and action in terms of ITN access and use.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

<sup>2</sup> Follow WHO and national guidance on waste disposal. Waste should be disposed of appropriately where it will not be in the environment risking contaminating others. See also: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-the-covid-19-virus-interim-guidance>

Pre-testing is the process whereby SBC messages and materials, such as posters, banners, jingles, radio or television spots, videos, etc. are reviewed by a representative segment of the target audience. This is to check for audience reactions to the messages and materials in terms of credibility, comprehension, relevance, believability and call to action. It will also bring out any negative aspects, such as words or images that do not resonate with the target audiences. In many cases, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, pre-testing was insufficiently practised to ensure the effectiveness and acceptability of images and messages communicated. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the amount of misinformation and disinformation disseminated across different media channels means that pre-testing of all materials for the ITN mass campaign becomes even more important.

### **Understand standard pre-testing methods**

Prior to COVID-19, pre-testing usually took place in a face-to-face setting in several different ways:

- Focus group discussions which are small group gatherings (8–10 people per session) where the materials and messages are discussed
- Individual/one-on-one interviews where discussion between one interviewer and one participant takes place in a private, confidential setting
- Expert interviews where SBC experts are asked to review the draft materials and give comments and suggestions for improvements
- Intercept interviews, which are carried out randomly in places such as health facilities and schools where many members of a target audience congregate

Standard ways of pre-testing SBC materials, however, may not be the best option for the COVID-19 context as face-to-face gatherings pose the risk of transmission of the virus. Innovation is required, both to ensure the safety of respondents as well as to put in place the rigorous pre-testing that is critical to the success of SBC activities.

If opting for standard pre-testing, the sessions should be modified and conducted in strict adherence to the national COVID-19 infection prevention measures and WHO guidelines. If possible, face-to-face interviews/meetings should be held outdoors or in a well-ventilated venue with plenty of space to allow physical distancing. Facilities for handwashing or hand sanitization are required. All personnel and respondents should wear masks and maintain physical distancing.

### **Work closely with partners**

It is important for national malaria programmes to work closely with partners implementing SBC activities during ITN campaigns to define pre-testing objectives and methodology, analyse results and refine messages and materials. Partners implementing SBC activities outside the ITN campaign period may have important experiences to share about their material and message development during the COVID-19 pandemic, so they should be included in the discussions around the pre-testing methodology to be used. Partners should be reassured that there is sufficient rigour in the selected approach.

### **Review pre-testing objectives in the COVID-19 context**

It is important for national malaria programmes to review and adjust pre-testing objectives for SBC in the context of COVID-19. Virtual pre-testing, where opted for, calls for a trade-off between “need to know” and “nice to know” as it might not be possible to gather as in-depth information as through pre-COVID-19 standard pre-testing. It is essential to check the appropriateness of materials in terms of cultural sensitivity, language (e.g. different dialects or languages used in different parts of the target ITN distribution area) and relevance to specific target audiences, such as disabled, migrants or marginalized groups. Therefore, national malaria programmes should focus on the most critical objectives for SBC messages and materials and ensure that as much information as possible is

generated around these key objectives to enable decision-making. Examples of pre-testing objectives are:

- Does the radio advertisement or poster motivate the target audience to sleep under an ITN every night?
- Is the content of materials culturally appropriate, appealing and believable to the target audience?
- Is the level of language appropriate and understandable to the target audience?
- Do these materials have general appeal to all target audiences or just to a specific sector and/or segment?
- Can the target audiences access the materials easily (e.g. if advertising with a video on YouTube, how much of the target audience would have internet capability?)

### **Explore different ways of pre-testing**

Some of the options that national malaria programmes can explore include:

- Using an online platform, such as SurveyMonkey or others, where the images and messages could be reviewed and rated, and comments collected for updating materials
- Undertaking standard phone interviews to review key messages being considered and gathering feedback for improvement
- Video conference options, e.g. Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams etc.
- Using family, friends, colleagues from other departments and social media networks by sharing messages and images and requesting feedback
- Gathering a small group of people either virtually or face-to-face (while respecting COVID-19 infection prevention measures) to review and critique the materials developed

### **Include the cost of pre-testing in the budget**

There are costs involved in pre-testing of messages and materials that national malaria programmes should bear in mind. For standard pre-testing, there should be a budget developed for the venue, facilitator's and note taker's fee, printing of pre-test materials, stipend for the respondents, equipment hire, stakeholders' costs, accommodation and travel. Materials such as disinfectant and infrared thermometer for COVID-19 infection prevention measures should also be budgeted. If personal protective equipment (PPE) is to be provided for participants, ensure the budget reflects this, and that procurement of the necessary items takes place in time for the pre-testing, particularly given the potential bottlenecks in local procurement. For virtual pre-testing, consider the cost of incentives (data for respondents), facilitator's and note taker's fee and preparation of pre-test materials.

### **Plan early and prepare adequately**

Regardless of the pre-testing method that the national malaria programme chooses, it is important to plan early and prepare adequately. Standard pre-testing can take anywhere from two weeks to two months and even longer if a re-test is required. Virtual pre-testing can take two weeks to one month if well planned. Plan for four days for preparing the pre-test brief, one week for planning for the pre-test i.e. selection of facilitators, participants and locations, two days for training of facilitators, five days for conducting the sessions (concurrently), five days for analysing results and five days for refining messages. The success of pre-testing is dependent on good preparation. Planning early can ensure better outcomes. Some of the key steps in the planning for pre-testing include:

- **Prepare questions carefully.** Align the questions to be asked with the pre-testing objectives. Prepare a questionnaire that can be used with each pre-testing session, whether virtual or standard, to ensure standardization in feedback across different channels used. Ensure that only questions addressing the key objectives are prepared. For both methods, using open-ended questions, (e.g. "what did you think of the radio advertisement?" or "what do you like

best about the advertisement?”) is likely to provide better insights about the messages and materials being pre-tested. Closed questions such as “Do you like this poster?” will only elicit a yes or no response and do not give any reason for the response.

- **Ensure accessibility** for respondents. For virtual pre-testing ensure that the respondents are able to access the digital platform through which the session will be conducted and opt for a platform that is easily accessible to the respondents. For standard pre-testing ensure that respondents can easily access the meeting venue and are reimbursed for any travel costs.
- **Determine the geographical coverage.** It is advised for the pre-test to be done in regions where the campaign will be implemented but it is normally not necessary to pre-test in all implementation regions (depending on how ethnically variable they are). The idea is to gather enough responses to logically assume the information is representative of the populations in the areas targeted by the campaign. In deciding on geographical coverage, national malaria programmes should consider factors like high malaria burden, key target populations, ethnic variations and rural vs. urban settings. These factors can inform the number of regions to be targeted and sessions to be conducted in each region. A decision might be made to have four to six sessions per region (four in rural and two in urban settings). An urban session could target, for example, a migrant community or working mothers, while women, men and youth could be targeted separately in rural sessions.
- **Determine timing for undertaking pre-testing.** When considering the right time to conduct pre-testing, it may be necessary to consider different factors, such as procurement (e.g. PPE or materials production timelines), since one activity might be dependent on the other. However, sufficient time must be allowed before the campaign implementation and pre-campaign SBC activities to analyse responses, refine the materials as necessary and ensure that they are reproduced and delivered to the implementation levels according to the SBC campaign timeline.
- **Identify a facilitator.** The facilitator should be a person knowledgeable about SBC and malaria, with experience in moderating group sessions, and possessing skills such as ability to word questions carefully and create a relaxed and comfortable environment for participants unfamiliar with each other. The facilitator should also be familiar with using participatory tools and methodology for the pre-testing activities and questions. This calls for careful selection of facilitators as well as quality training. The facilitators may be recruited from the national level or from the region where the pre-testing will be conducted as long as they meet the selection criteria. In the COVID-19 context, it is advisable to work with facilitators who have experience working in previous ITN campaigns to minimize the time required for training and induction. Consideration should be given to hiring an assistant whose role is to support the facilitator during the session in note-taking and recording.
- **Train facilitators.** It is important to give training to facilitators to ensure that they are aware of the objectives of the pre-testing sessions and that the pre-testing is standardized across all sessions. The SBC materials that they will be using should be available for the training. Training may be virtual but should give the facilitators an opportunity to view/watch/listen to the materials and practise asking the questions.
- **Identify respondents.** See section below: *Ensure inclusivity in selection of respondents.*
- **Determine the duration of the session and plan to keep to time.** In the COVID-19 context, both virtual and standard pre-testing should be limited to an hour or less and this should be communicated to the respondents in advance. Facilitators for standard pre-testing should always seek to limit the amount of time the respondents spend together to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission. As far as possible, sessions should be held outdoors, or in a large well-ventilated venue with space for physical distancing and with adherence to the COVID-19 infection prevention measures and should be held at a time that is convenient for participants.

- **Determine the number and size of the sessions.** Determine the number of sessions that will be conducted for both standard and virtual pre-testing. Determine whether they will be conducted simultaneously or consecutively as this may have cost implications, e.g. the need for more facilitators or venues. National malaria programmes should also consider the size for each session. Standard pre-testing requires 8—10 participants per session while virtual pre-testing requires a smaller number of 5—8 participants per session.
- **Plan for respondents' incentives.** In virtual pre-testing, since respondents will be using internet data during the session, national malaria programmes should consider providing data to the respondents. The data bundles can be sent directly to the respondents' phones, tablets or other devices. The internet data can be provided before or immediately after the session. This incentive should be communicated to the respondents in advance so that data charges do not become a barrier to participating in the session.
- **Share the materials in advance.** For virtual pre-testing, it is important to give respondents ample time to review the messages and materials being pre-tested. Sharing the materials in advance of the pre-test will enrich the quality of feedback provided by respondents. Additionally, before sending out the materials ensure that they are small in size for easy downloading and do not take up much storage space in the respondents' phones, tablets or other devices.

### **Ensure inclusivity in selection of respondents**

Ensure that selected respondents are representative of the intended target audience (e.g. heads of households, women, youth, etc.). Considering that the target audience come from different socio-economic, cultural, religious, ethnic, etc. backgrounds, the selection of respondents for both standard and virtual pre-testing should, as far as possible, include representation from all. This includes vulnerable and marginalized populations within the target populations. To encourage members of the group to speak freely, separate sessions for respondents who share common characteristics (age, gender etc.) are advisable. Specific sessions could be aimed at women, men, youth, migrants, ethnic minority groups, etc. This is called “purposive sampling”. It relies on the judgement of the national malaria programme when it comes to selecting the population to participate in the study. Usually, the sample being investigated is quite small, especially when compared with probability sampling techniques (i.e. everyone in the population having an equal chance of being selected). The main goal of purposive sampling for the pre-testing is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, and that will best enable the programme to answer the pre-testing questions. For virtual pre-testing, it is crucial to select those with ability to access the internet and use the technology selected (e.g. WhatsApp, Zoom), which may limit the possibility of total inclusivity.

### **Consider the advantages and limitations of using technology for pretesting**

Virtual pre-testing can either be self or interviewer administered and can take the form of either online surveys (e.g. SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, SurveyGismo, etc.), standard telephone pre-testing or video conferencing platforms (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom). While virtual pre-testing provides an alternative option given the importance of limiting contacts during the COVID-19 pandemic, the trade-off is that it might not be possible to achieve the needed rigour of standard pre-testing. It is important, however, that whatever channel is used to generate feedback, comments and suggestions, a sufficiently standardized approach to gathering the needed information is adopted for reviewing, updating and improving the messages and materials that will be used.

Virtual pre-testing has some advantages and limitations that implementers should consider if choosing this option. Advantages include:

- Little risk of COVID-19 transmission
- Provides a way to assess target audiences that are spread far and wide geographically

- Likely to cost less than standard pretesting
- Can be self or interviewer administered

Limitations include:

- May not provide as much in depth information as is possible using standard pre-testing
- Does not provide an opportunity to observe verbal and nonverbal cues of the respondents
- May only work well for urban populations who are likely to be more digitally knowledgeable and have good internet connectivity as opposed to rural populations, which is a clear disadvantage in terms of malaria burden and the need for appropriate materials that lead to high participation in the ITN campaign
- Unlikely to be able to reach people that are representative of all target audiences, especially a rural target audience
- It might be difficult to download more complex SBC materials which contain more data as they will require large storage space on respondents' phones, tablets or other devices

## Conduct the pre-testing session

### *Virtual pre-testing*

- **Prior to the session**
  - The day before the session, send out a reminder e-mail to the respondents with the link to join the call. The e-mail should confirm the date, time, purpose of the pre-test and platform that will be used. Ask them to confirm that they are able to access the platform. The pre-test materials can also be sent as attachments, with a reminder to review prior to the session but not share more widely as they are still in draft form.
  - Send out a reminder an hour or 30 minutes before the session (include the link to join)
- **During the session**
  - Begin by greeting the respondents and introducing yourself and the team
  - Go through the rules that will guide the session (e.g. muting microphones when not speaking)
  - Obtain either verbal or written consent from the respondents and permission to record the session
  - Give respondents time to read/watch the messages and materials and ask them to inform you when they have finished
  - Begin asking the questions in the prepared questionnaire<sup>3</sup>
  - Go through all the questions and ensure they are all answered and all materials to be pre-tested have been covered
  - Use probing techniques to gain more insight and information
  - Allow each respondent to give feedback to each question and ensure all their responses are well captured; ask questions to clarify responses as needed
  - At the end of the session, thank the respondents, explain the next steps (i.e. analysing the information and refining messages and materials) and end the session

### *Standard pre-testing*

- **Prior to the session** (if held indoors, plan for at least 45 minutes for COVID-19 infection prevention measures before the start of the session)
  - Ensure that the tables and seats are well sanitized
  - Ensure that there is a distance of at least one metre between each respondent (align this with the country's COVID-19 prevention measures)

---

<sup>3</sup> See an example of a questionnaire here: <https://devcompage.files.wordpress.com/2007/11/pdfonline3.pdf>

- Ensure hand sanitizers/handwashing stations are available at the entrance/exit to the room and ensure that each participant sanitizes or washes their hands with soap before entering the venue
- Use infrared thermometers to check each participant's temperature as they enter the room where the session will be conducted and ask the questions on the health check list regarding fever, cough or other signs of illness
- Ensure that each participant wears a face mask
- **During the session**
  - Greet participants and provide them with nametags
  - Explain the goal of the session and how the information will be used
  - Set the ground rules for the session
  - Obtain written or verbal consent from the respondents and permission to record the session
  - Give respondents time to read/watch the messages and materials and ask them to inform you when they have finished
  - Begin asking the questions from the pre-prepared questionnaire
  - Go through all the questions and ensure they are all answered and all materials to be pre-tested have been covered
  - Use probing techniques to gain more insight and information
  - Allow each respondent to give feedback to each question and ensure all the responses are well captured
  - At the end of the session, thank the respondents, reiterate the next steps (i.e. analysing the information and refining messages) and end the session
  - Ensure that each participant sanitizes or washes their hands with soap when leaving the venue
  - Disinfect the venue at the end of the session

### **Using the results of pre-testing, refine your messages**

The recorded information should be transcribed and added to any written information, then cleaned, with only the essential information that responds directly to the pre-testing objectives remaining. This information needs to be analysed by categories e.g. comprehension, call to action, acceptance, relevance, cultural appropriateness, etc. and a report prepared highlighting the findings, conclusions and subsequent recommendations. The findings and recommendations should be presented to partners implementing SBC. Messages and materials should then be refined and finalized according to the recommendations. Re-test, budget and time permitting, is recommended in extreme cases where there are significant changes to the messages and materials.