

Generic Protocol for Responding to Media Calls

Cambridge Public Health Department

If a reporter calls to interview a health department staff member, find out:

- **Reporter's first & last name**
- **Reporter's phone # & email**
- **Name of publication, website, or news/radio station**
- **Reporter's deadline!!**
- **What is the reporter's angle?** *Tip:* In a somewhat disinterested voice ask what the story is about and try not to react no matter what they say. *Note:* Some reporters are quite open about what they're writing about, others aren't. If the topic is a "hot potato," it's important to ask follow up questions, especially if you feel like the reporter isn't being forthcoming about his/her true angle on the story.
- **Ask how we can help the reporter with his/her story.** The reporter may want to interview a staff member or simply want background info. It's also possible the reporter won't know what he/she wants and will look to you for guidance. *Note:* This is a good opportunity to gauge how knowledgeable the reporter is about the subject.
- **Don't commit to helping the reporter during this initial phone call.** Gather all the info, and then say that you need to check in with the director of the health department. If you haven't asked already, find out the reporter's deadline.
- **Speak to relevant staff members** to find out if they would be comfortable speaking to a reporter on this topic.
- **Speak to the health director.** Email and page the health director. Relay information about reporter's request and share your opinion (based on discussion with reporter and staff member(s)) about whether you think we should go forward with the request.

Health Director's contact info:

(office)

(cell)

(pager)

(Email)

- **Apprise relevant staff of health director's decision.** Discuss "messaging" with staff member who will be interviewed (e.g., what is key point that we want to get across, what do we want to avoid saying). If appropriate, do a quick rehearsal interview.
- **Call back reporter.** Apprise reporter of our decision. If we're going ahead with interview, provide reporter with contact info for appropriate staff member(s).
- **Follow-up with staff member after interview.** Ask how it went! If appropriate, report back to the health director.