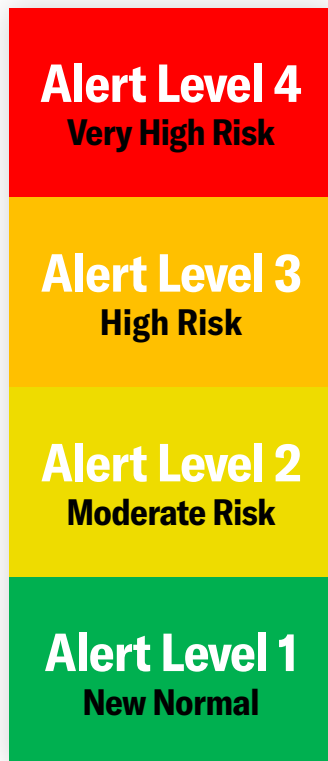


STAYING ALERT: Navigating COVID-19 Risk Toward a New Normal



Alert-level systems allow governments to manage interventions through data, more clearly communicate changing risk and required public behaviors, and avoid damaging "open vs. closed" narratives.

COVID-19 has changed the way we live. Until an effective treatment or vaccine is found, societies will have to adjust to a "new normal" that sometimes includes disruptive measures like stay-at-home orders or limiting large public gatherings. Alert-level systems clearly communicate changing levels of risk, the best protective behaviors at each level, and that data is driving decision making. This builds public trust and improves community support of public health and social measures.

Alert-level systems also help countries avoid "open" versus "closed" thinking around social and economic activity. They allow governments to more clearly quantify that COVID-19 risks are increasing or decreasing and that different measures are necessary at different moments to control the spread of coronavirus.

The public elements of an alert-level systems are supported by a robust data-driven framework built with community stakeholders, with metrics that often go beyond health to include economic activity and public perceptions. This supports clear decision-making, improved accountability, and effective communication with people to encourage and empower them to adjust their behaviors.

What is an alert-level system?

Color- and numerically coded alert-level systems have been used effectively to communicate risk levels and associated response measures for a variety of threats, including poor air quality, terrorism, internet security, travel security, weather events, and other hazards, such as volcanoes. Though no single alert-level system is appropriate for every setting, if designed and implemented well, alert-level systems can be an effective public communication tool throughout all the phases of COVID-19 response.

About Us

Vital Strategies is a global public health organization working in 70+ countries to strengthen public health systems. Resolve to Save Lives, an initiative of Vital Strategies, aims to prevent at least 100 million deaths from cardiovascular disease and epidemics. Through its Prevent Epidemics program, Resolve to Save Lives has rapidly leveraged existing networks to establish a multi-disciplinary, multi-pronged effort to support countries throughout Africa and beyond. This work is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Gates Philanthropy Partners, which is funded with support from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.

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Why use an alert-level system?

Risk alert-level systems communicate the level of health risk and indicate what measures should be taken at each level to maximize safety. They are widely used and easily understood. In the highest alert stage, there may be lockdowns that require people to stay home and closures of schools, places of worship and nonessential businesses. As the level of alert is reduced, a stepwise lessening of these restrictions is possible.

When executed well, risk alert-level systems promote transparency, accountability and clear communication with the public.

Transparency

Data supporting each level of the risk alert system should be publicly available.

Accountability

Evidence-based guidance for each level allows governments, communities and individuals to assume responsibility for their actions.

Clear communication with the public

Outlining behaviors for each level, and giving the public advance notice of a change in level, can improve protective actions.



An example of a COVID-19 Alert-level system summary graphic for social media usage.

The importance of risk communication

Risk communication can help achieve widespread behavior change necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19, but it must be done well to be effective. If the public perceives a lack of consistency or transparency the result can be distrust and fear.

Risk level alert systems make information about risk and behaviors easier to understand, which allows people to make informed choices and protect themselves and their communities. Risk level alert systems should answer the following questions for people and communities:

1. What is my level of risk?
2. How can I act to protect myself and my loved ones?
3. Is the situation being well controlled or addressed by the government?

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Eight key principles for developing an effective alert-level system

An effective alert-level system incorporates several best practices.

EASY TO UNDERSTAND

Systems should reflect a clear rationale behind each risk level, indicate what people should and should not do, and outline additional safeguards for vulnerable populations.

TRANSPARENT

Transparency of information in times of crisis can improve public trust in government action and strengthen accountability.

DATA DRIVEN

Clear indicators with thresholds and triggers for action are needed for each level to guiding the decision to shift from one level to another in an objective way.

PRACTICAL

An alert-level system should be detailed enough to be relevant, as simple as possible, and should convey the necessary information clearly.

CUSTOMIZED TO THE SMALLEST GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

COVID-19 does not respect borders. Localities should respond based on local context but must coordinate with other jurisdictions in the area to avoid promoting movement of people between places with different restrictions.

COLLABORATIVE

Officials should engage a range of stakeholders, including community organizations, and establish a core working group and governance structure, encouraging public discussion and oversight.

LEGAL, WITH PROPER OVERSIGHT

Systems should be no more restrictive than necessary to achieve public health goals, and subject to independent oversight.

WIDELY DISSEMINATED AND AVAILABLE IN APPROPRIATE LANGUAGES

Changes in the risk alert level, whether up or down, must be communicated widely and reach the whole community, including vulnerable and minority groups.

Alert-level systems can be a core component of effective COVID-19 preparedness and response, and are currently in use in several places around the world. Systems that are developed with consideration for key principles and best practices are more likely to be useful. Every community needs to find a balance, and this may mean allowing economically important activities to begin even before all of the ideal disease control systems are in place—but only if measures are in place to better protect and support health care workers and the most vulnerable people among us. If implemented successfully, these systems can help officials lead and communicate effectively with people, guiding and engaging them through a cohesive response strategy. This will facilitate the resumption of social and economic activities as soon and as safely as possible, limiting both the economic and health damage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information on how to create and implement an alert-level system for COVID 19, see <https://preventepidemics.org/covid19/resources/levels/>.

Examples of community communication

EXAMPLE
social media posts

[Community]
Increasing to
Alert Level 3
on June 21

Alert Level 3
HIGH RISK
for COVID-19
Limit everyday activities to increase safety.

What does it mean for me?
General public should reduce non-essential travel and attend only small gatherings
Businesses and schools can safely open with precautions
High-risk individuals should stay at home or shelter whenever possible

EXAMPLE
Posters detailing change in level to red

COVID-19 ALERT: VERY HIGH RISK

DUE TO WIDER SPREAD OF COVID-19 [COMMUNITY] IS MOVING UP TO LEVEL 4 ON JUNE 21.

INCREASING TO ALERT LEVEL 4 ON JUNE 21

NEW LEVEL	Alert Level 4 VERY HIGH RISK
Widespread outbreak that is growing with many undetected cases. Take strong measures to limit all contact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">All people should stay at home when possibleOnly essential services should be openTravel should be severely limited
CURRENT	Alert Level 3 Many cases including community spread, with undetected cases likely.
	Alert Level 2 Moderate number of cases with most cases from a known source.
	Alert Level 1 Cases are rare and contact tracing can be used to control the virus.

Why are we INCREASING the COVID-19 alert to LEVEL 4 - VERY HIGH RISK:
[Community] has seen cases increase to xx,xxx on June 18, including spread within the community. Without additional protective action, the explosive spread could occur.

What new protections should you take?
We are asking everyone to stay at home. Only businesses providing essential services may remain open. School buildings are closed. No gatherings are permitted. Health care services are only available for essential procedures. Local recreation, such as walking and bike riding, is permitted with safety measures. Everyone should wear masks in public, isolate if sick, wash hands, cover coughs and clean surfaces.

How long will this last?
We will continue to monitor COVID-19 cases in the community. If cases and hospitalizations decrease after TIME, the risk level will be lowered. the risk alert level.

FROM JUNE 18

ACTIVE COVID CASES	00,000 UP 14%
HOSPITALIZED COVID CASES	00,000 UP 6%
ICU COVID CASES	00,000 UP 9%

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Visit CovidAlert.Government.Gov for the most up to date information on how to protect yourself and your family.

LOGOS AND CONTACT INFORMATION FROM THE TABLE