

Developing public programs on emerging infectious diseases at the Smithsonian Institution: lessons for pandemic risk communication

BACKGROUND: The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) will deliver a major exhibition in May 2018 focused on a complex public health issue of global significance: emerging infectious diseases that spread to humans from other animals.

OBJECTIVES: The goal of the exhibition, *Outbreak: Epidemics in a Connected World*, is to raise public awareness about pandemic risks in the 21st century by increasing understanding about the inter-connectedness of human, animal, and environmental health.

METHODOLOGY: NMNH is amplifying the impact of the exhibit through a rich variety of free public programs and educational activities directed at specific audiences, including teens and young professionals. Assessment tools provide information on visitor experience, and a public survey provides information on existing knowledge about infectious diseases and facilitates volunteer training.

RESULTS:



After Hours Film/Panel series

These signature events are held in NMNH's largest theater, with a film and panel discussion by experts followed by Q&A. Hundreds of young adults attended events about Zika virus in 2016 and HIV in 2017.



The Expert Is In programs

These programs let museum visitors interact directly with experts during public hours. Since 2015, experts have helped visitors understand "One Health" connections with objects, images, and personal stories and career opportunities in the field.



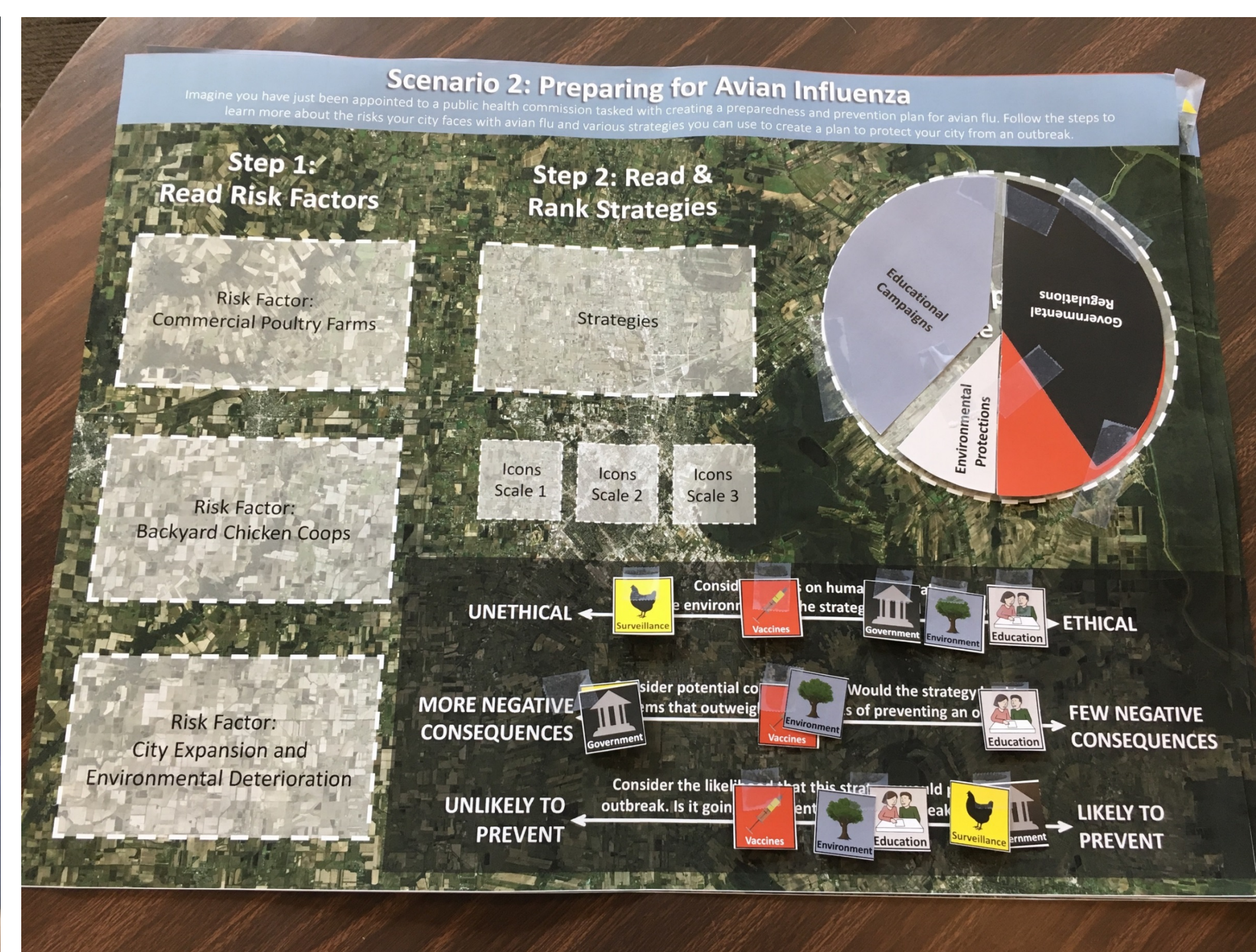
Nerd Nite takeovers

Nerd Nite is a gathering of young professionals with a passion for science. In 2016, about 200 people came to hear 3 scientists talk about infectious disease research.



Public forums

NMNH has collaborated with the Museum of Science, Boston (MOS) to design, test, develop, implement, analyze, and assess one or more forum programs that place the public in the position of making decisions on issues associated with outbreaks and public health. 29 adults participated in the first forum at MOS in 2017. The majority of participants valued discussing two different types of scenarios, which focused on responding to an Ebola outbreak (#1) and preparing for an avian influenza outbreak (#2). Although 73% had never attended a forum before, all reported that they enjoyed the event and felt more informed about infectious diseases after their experience.



CONCLUSIONS: These events and activities clearly indicate a strong public interest in a One Health approach to predicting and stopping infectious diseases, and provide effective means to communicate with many audiences.

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