Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

1. Don't overreassure.
A high estimate of harm modified downward is more acceptable than a low estimate of harm modified upward.

"It's possible that tens of thousands could be afflicted before this is over, but right now only 100 are sick."

2. State continued concern before stating reassuring updates.

"Although we're not out of the woods yet, we have seen a declining number of cases each day this week."

3. Confidence vs. uncertainty.
Express the uncertainty of the situation and confident belief in the "process" to fix it, and address public safety concerns.

"It must be awful to hear we can't answer that question right now, but here's what we are doing to find out . . ."

4. Give people things to do. Anxiety is reduced by action and a restored sense of control.
❖Symbolic behaviors
❖Preparatory behaviors
❖Contingent "if, then" behaviors
❖Three-part action plan:
▪ Must do X
▪ Should do Y
▪ Can do Z

5. **Allow people the right to feel fear.**
Don't pretend that they're not afraid, and don't tell them that they shouldn't be. Acknowledge the fear, and give contextual information.

"We're all frightened by this, but here's what we know . . ."

6. Ask more of people.
Ask people to bear the risk and work towards solutions with you.

"We don't know if this is the last case, but right now it's important for all of us to continue on with our lives . . ."