



Pandemic risk communication from a public health perspective

PAN-FIGHT – September 12th 2022
Holmenkollen Park Hotell

Camilla Stoltenberg
Director-General



En million nordmenn i risikogruppen

Ida Hilde Mathisen / ABC Nyheter

28. okt. 2009 19:08 – Oppdatert 28. okt. 2009 19:37



Helsedirektør Bjørn-Inge Larsen (t.h.) og direktør i Folkehelseinstituttet Geir Stene Larsen orienterte om status for pandemien og svarer på spørsmål i Helsedirektoratet onsdag. (Foto: Scanpix)

Two challenges to established risk communication principles

Our experience from the pandemic in Norway does challenge some of the established principles for good risk communication

1. Presenting scientific evidence and letting people decide for themselves:
We saw a huge popular demand for detailed instructions from public authorities
2. Principle of uniform messaging:
Frequently changing advice, public disagreement among governmental advisers, and many spokesperson – has not seemed to erode trust or cause poor adherence

Roles and responsibilities

- NIPH is responsible for scientific advice
- Close collaboration with the Directorate of Health and the Ministry of Health
- Decisions were elevated to the Government from March 12th, 2020
- Between science, policy and politics
- A big responsibility
- Advice and risk assessments



Openness and scientific uncertainty

- We have actively disclosed our scientific advice, uncertainties, discussions and disagreements throughout the pandemic
- This includes situations in which the subsequent political decision differed from our recommendation
- The aim is to inspire trust in political and scientific authorities in the population
- A dilemma is that we may create confusion



-Dette baserer seg på en antakelse.
-Mye gjør det her.

When is openness difficult?

- When scientists disagree
- In the zone between evidence and advice
- The message can be unwelcome
- When researchers who are not involved, contribute
- When the advisors to the government disagree
- When advisors and decision-makers disagree

Tiltak for vaksinerte:

Uenige siden 4. mai

Helt siden 4. mai har Folkehelseinstituttet anbefalt regjeringen å fjerne kravet om karantenehotell for personer som regnes for å være beskyttet. Regjeringen har fremdeles ikke gjort det.



KARANTENEHOTELL: Skal vaksinerte personer slippe å oppholde seg på karantenehotell? Det har helsemyndighetene og regjeringen vært uenige om siden 4. mai. Foto: Gorm Kallestad / NTB

Frode Andresen

Publisert søndag 23. mai 2021 - 12:21
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Dagbladet.no, 23. mai 2021

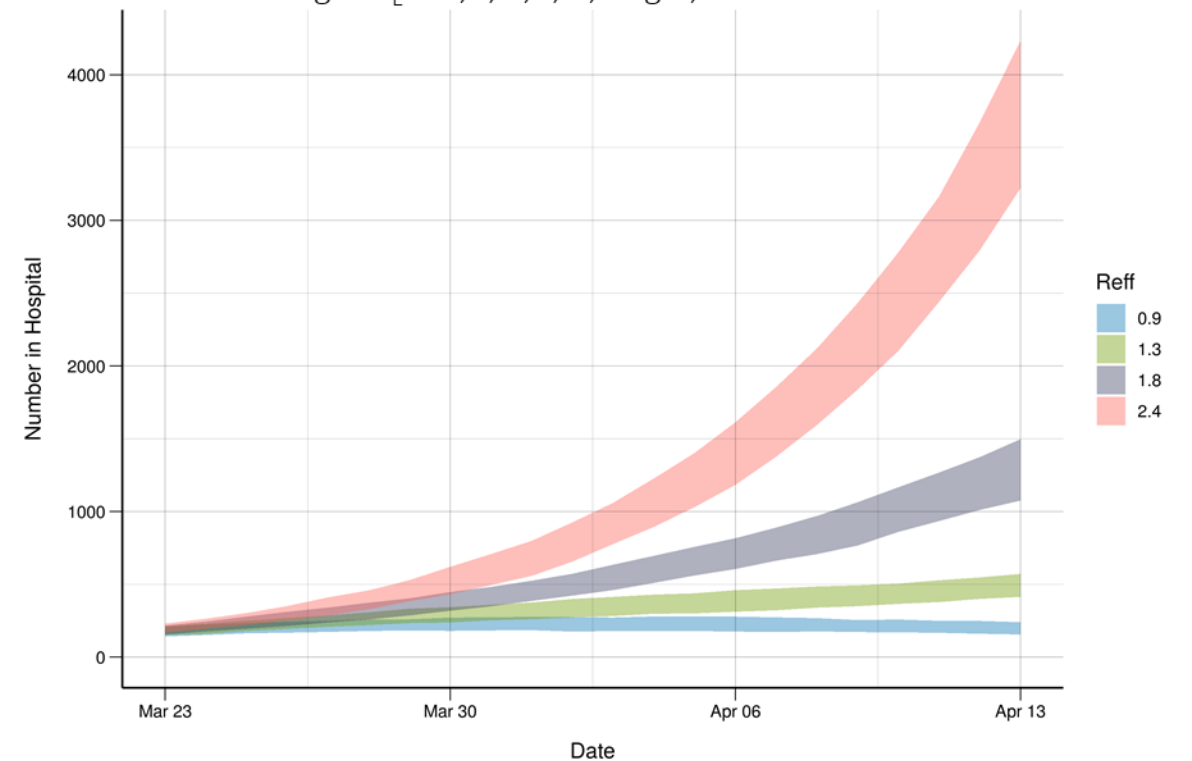
Advice under uncertainty

Example from mathematical modelling:

- The results are most often uncertain and must be interpreted with caution
- In some countries/situations, results have been used too soon and unbalanced by both scientists and politicians
- Important to use modelling to show how quickly infection rates can rise
- We must recognize that researchers can make mistakes and give wrong advice
- Still, it is important and helpful to use scientific evidence, but we need a system that provides balanced interpretation

Predicted number of hospitalized patients until April 13

gitt $R_E = 2,4; 1,8; 1,3$ og 0,9. 95% KI.



Source: Appendix to NIPH's risk assessment for covid-19; March 24, 2020

The message may be unwelcome

The coronavirus epidemic will affect Norway
(Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association –
29th Jan 2020)



Koronavirusepidemien vil ramme Norge

LEDER

PREBEN AAVITSLAND

E-post: preben@epidemi.no

Preben Aavitsland er overlege ved Folkehelseinstituttet og kommuneoverlege i Arendal og Froland. Forfatteren har fylt ut ICMJE-skjemaet og oppgir ingen interessekonflikter.

Legene har en nøkkelrolle i å begrense skadevirkningene av det nyoppdagede viruset med utspring i Kina.

Rett før det nye året oppdaget helsemyndighetene i Wuhan i Kina en klynge av pasienter med pneumoni og forbindelse til et marked der det ble solgt og slaktet levende dyr. 7. januar meldte myndighetene at et nyoppdaget koronavirus var årsaken til utbruddet. Virusets genom ble raskt sekvensert (1), og en polymerasekjedereaksjonstest (PCR-test) ble utviklet. Det nyoppdagede koronaviruset, foreløpig kalt 2019-nCoV, er beslektet med SARS-CoV som i 2002/03 forårsaket en epidemi som spredte seg fra Kina til flere land og forårsaket rundt 8 000 sykdomstilfeller og 800 dødsfall.

Tidsskrift for norsk legeforening, 29. januar 2020

When researchers not involved in the pandemic response, contribute

Debate in Aftenposten (newspaper)

- Above: **Mass testing in schools does not reduce transmission** (Senior researcher at NIPH)
- Below: **Regular testing is better than closed schools** – Outbreak group at NIPH

Debatt | Koronaviruset

Massetesting i skolen reduserer ikke smitten



Per Henrik Zahl
Seniorforsker, Folkehelseinstituttet

28. apr. 2021 20:00 | Sist oppdatert 3. mai 2021

Kronikk | Koronaviruset

Jevnlig testing er bedre enn stengte skoler

Line Vold Avdelingsdirektør, leder for utbruddsgruppen, FHI
Joakim Øverbø Lege, utbruddsgruppen FHI
Siri L. Feruglio Overlege, utbruddsgruppen FHI
Trude M. Arnesen Overlege, utbruddsgruppen FHI

9. mai 2021

When the main advisors disagree

*Above: **Directorate of Health** has repeatedly questioned **NIPH's knowledge about transmission among children and adolescents**. NIPH is concerned that tendentious and alternative information about transmission among children has been circulating among the management group at the Directorate of Health.*

*Bottom: **NIPH and Directorate of Health disagree whether ban on serving alcohol should continue**. The NIPH is advising the Government to repeal the national ban on serving alcohol. The Directorate believes the ban should continue for another 14 days.*

Norge | Koronaviruset

Helsedirektoratet har flere ganger stilt spørsmål ved FHIs kunnskap om smitte blant barn og unge

FHI har vært bekymret for at «tendensiøs» og «alternativ» informasjon om smitte blant barn har sirkulert blant toppene i Helsedirektoratet.

NYHETER

FHI og Helsedirektoratet uenige om skjenkestoppen bør videreføres

Folkehelseinstituttet anbefaler regjeringen om å oppheve det nasjonale skjenkeforbudet. Helsedirektoratet mener at forbudet bør videreføres i 14 dager til.

When advisors and decision-makers disagree

Measures for vaccinated people:

Disagreement since 4th May

Back on 4th May, the NIPH advised the Government to remove the requirement for quarantine hotels for people who are considered to be protected. The Government has still not acted. (Dagbladet, 23rd May 2021)

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Dagbladet.no, 23. mai

Science and politics

- Scientific advice
 - is not always good
 - may be uncertain
 - may differ
 - is not always that scientific, but rather more political
 - is usually limited to the relevant field



”

It is very important to pursue a knowledge-based policy, but it is not sufficient *only* to pursue a knowledge-based policy.

*About science and politics in the coronacrisis – and a small missing link
Kristin Clemet, April 13 2020 (our translation)*



”

The Covid year has exposed an even more important limitation of our scientific and technological power. Science cannot replace politics. When we come to decide on policy, we have to take into account many interests and values, and since there is no scientific way to determine which interests and values are more important, there is no scientific way to decide what we should do’.

Lessons from a year of Covid
Yuval Noah Harari, Financial Times, 26 February 2021

Close collaboration

- Better understanding of the need for advice based on science
- Science, policy and politics are most often intertwined
- Science does usually not provide a clear way forward, but can eliminate options and narrow down the field of possible decisions
- In practice: A scientific advisor needs to collaborate closely with decisionmakers in national crises in which there is great uncertainty



Key issues – from my experience

- Transparency and openness
- Scientific evidence
 - Knowns and unknowns
 - Uncertainty
 - Scenarios and predictions
- Advice
 - Experience and experts
 - Roles; decisionmakers and advisors
- Disagreement
- Respect for others
- Ability to change
- Independence



Norwegian Institute of Public Health

Risk communication

- The real-time exchange of information, advice and opinions between experts or officials and people who face a threat (hazard) to their survival, health or economic or social well-being.
- Its ultimate purpose is that everyone at risk is able to take informed decisions to mitigate the effects of the threat (hazard) such as a disease outbreak, and take protective and preventive action.