

Crisis Communication Plan

Vanessa Hasbun, Hannah Battreall, Matt Thompson, & Kayla Walker

DePaul University

PRAD 540 Crisis Communication Management

March 18th, 2022

**Table of Contents**

 Organization Description 3

Possible Crises 4

Purpose and Objectives 5

Crisis Team, Responsibilities, & Contact Information 6

Notification Procedure 7

Key Publics 8

***Priority Crisis #1: Foodborne Illness***

Key Messages 9

Media Q & A 10

Key Media List 11

Related Information 12

Spokespeople from Related Organizations

Related Articles

Top Foodborne Illnesses

Items & Tools 14

Incident Information 15

***Priority Crisis #2: Supply Chain Shortage*** 17

Crisis Team

Key Messages

Media Questions

***Priority Crisis #3: Health/Sanitation Inspection Issue*** 19

Crisis Team

Key Messages

Media Questions

**Organization Description**

Chipotle Mexican Grill, simply referred to as ‘Chipotle,’ was founded on July 13, 1993, in Denver, Colorado. Chipotle is an American chain of fast casual restaurants with more than 2,700 locations in the United States and 40 international locations in the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and France; our headquarters are in Newport Beach, California. Chipotle’s mission is to provide ‘Food with Integrity,’ because we value being Real – “Real is better. Better for You, Better for People, Better for Our Planet.” Chipotle went public in 2006 and its market share is 10.65%.

With nearly 100,000 employees, Chipotle specializes in made-to-order tacos, burritos, and bowls, all in front of the customer. All 53 ingredients used by Chipotle are “easy to pronounce” and are sourced from local farmers and suppliers. Ingredients include: Avocado, Bay Leaf, Black Beans, Beef, Bell Pepper, Baby Kale, Black Pepper, Brown Rice, Baby Spinach, Canola Oil, Chipotle Chili, Corn Masa Flour, White Cheddar, Cheese Cultures, Chicken, Cilantro, Cloves, Cultured Cream, Cumin, Garlic, Gypsum, Honey, Jalapeno, Monterey Jack Cheese, Juniper Berries, Lemon Juice, Romaine Lettuce, Lime Juice, Lime, Milk, Onion, Oregano, Pinto Beans, Poblano Pepper, Pork, Red Chili, Red Wine Vinegar, Vegetable Rennet, Rice Bran Oil, Salt, Serrano Pepper, Sunflower Oil, Soy Beans, Cornstarch, Thyme, Tomato, Tomatillo, Tomato Paste, Distilled Vinegar, Water, White Sweet Corn, Wheat Flour, and White Rice. The only ingredient hard to pronounce at Chipotle is “Chipotle.”

**Possible Crises**

It is crucial for Chipotle to be prepared for any possible circumstances that may evolve into a crisis. Possible crises include:

1. Foodborne illness
2. Supply chain shortages
3. Sanitation/Health inspection issue
4. National employee strike
5. Arson, vandalism, or looting
6. Active shooter
7. Natural disaster
8. Power outage
9. Arrest at a location
10. Supply chain shortages

For this crisis communication plan, we’ve chosen to do analyze three of the listed ten crises in more depth. The three are: 1) foodborne illness, 2) supply chain shortages, and 3) sanitation/health inspection issue. There are many high-risk factors in the food industry, making it necessary for Chipotle to prepare for potential public crisis at any time. This plan will define each of these three crises and how we should handle each crisis should they arise.

1. *Foodborne illness*
	1. A foodborne illness breaks out in an urban area with multiple Chipotle locations
2. *Supply chain shortages*
	1. Due to supply chain delays, our restaurants are facing shortages of some ingredients
3. *Sanitation/health inspection issue*
	1. Proper sanitation procedures not followed that are laid out by the FDA causing multiple health inspection failures

**Purpose and Objectives**

*Purpose*

It is important to recognize and take action in the event of a crisis. As part of Chipotle's overall safety and emergency procedures, this plan sets forth steps to ensure that any crisis is handled with urgency and transparency. A priority should be made to uphold the integrity of the company by providing open and honest information to stakeholders, the media and public.

This plan should be presented to and reviewed with any employee hired in a management position or higher as part of the onboarding process. An annual review of this plan should be prioritized. Any changes, including but limited to crisis team members, responsibilities or contact information, should be updated immediately.

This crisis plan was developed and approved on March 18, 2022.

*Objectives*

In the event of a crisis, every effort will be made to:

1. Provide timely and accurate information to all internal and external stakeholders
2. Maintain communication with the media
3. Act in the best interest of the company and stakeholders
4. Ensure the reputation of Chipotle is upheld to the highest standard
5. Execute the procedures outlined in this crisis plan

**Crisis Team, Responsibilities, & Contact Information**

In the event of a crisis, the crisis team is responsible for ensuring the procedures outlined in this plan are as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Title** | **Contact** |
| Brian Niccol | Chairman & CEO | bniccol@chipotle.com(513) 617-4946 |
| Chris Brandt | Chief Marketing Officer | cbrandt@chipotle.com |
| Laurie Schalow :two: | Chief Corporate Affairs & Safety Officer | lschalow@chipotle.com |
| Scott Boatwright | Chief Restaurant Officer | sboatwright@chipotle.com |
| Roger Theodoredis | Chief Legal Officer | rtheodoredis@chipotle.com |
| Scott Maw | Chair of Audit and Risk Committee | smaw@chipotle.com |
| Tyler Benson :one: | Manager, External Communications | tbenson@chipotle.com  |

 Primary Spokesperson

 Back-up Spokesperson

**Notification Procedure**

An extremely important process in managing crises and providing an accurate message to all audiences is notification. To make the rest of the crisis communication job more effective and streamlined, a well thought out notification process is necessary.

Notification of crises and other incidents—both minor and major—have been examined by the Chipotle Crisis Committee. This committee has reviewed the entire notification process from the moment a crisis begins to the point that a crisis warrants notifying corporate executives—including the CEO.

*Notification Process*

In the event of an emergency/crisis, the following notification process should be employed as soon as a crisis has occurred or been identified:

1. The person who discovers the crisis or incident must call the site emergency number or notify a manager immediately
2. Depending on the crisis/incident, local authorities, a reporting manager, or another Chipotle personnel will evaluate the magnitude of the crisis and notify any additional emergency response organizations
3. From that point on, the notification process occurs according to the chain-of-command channels
4. If not previously notified, corporate communications personnel are now notified directly by local authorities or a reporting manager
5. Corporate communications personnel should, in turn, notify corporate executives, corporate PR personnel, and key stakeholders as soon as information is obtained about the crisis/incident

**Key Publics**

In the event of a crisis, the table below should be used as a guide when communicating with internal and external key publics.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Method of Contact** |
| **Key Publics** | Email | Phone | News Release | Newsletter |
| Internal | Corporate Employees | ✅ |  |  |  |
| Restaurant Employees | ✅ |  |  |  |
| Board of Directors | ✅ | ✅ |  |  |
| Executives | ✅ | ✅ |  |  |
| External | Suppliers | ✅ | ✅ |  |  |
| News Media | ✅ |  |  |  |
| Investors | ✅ |  |  |  |
| Consumers | ✅ |  | ✅ | ✅ |

***Priority Crisis #1: Foodborne Illness***

**Key Messages**

In the event of a foodborne illness outbreak, Chipotle’s first priority is the care of its customers. Without knowing the exact location where the illness originated, whether from our suppliers or inside our store, we promise the public that the source of the illness will be discovered as effectively and promptly as possible.

We want to make sure that the public is aware of the symptoms/effects that are associated with the foodborne illness that has broken out. Chipotle takes matters of food safety very seriously and is working around the clock to figure out exactly what occurred and how it happened. Chipotle’s employees are strictly trained on the FDA’s guidelines on how to prepare food to correct temperatures.

The following key messages should be emphasized in the indicated order:

* + - 1. Our top priority is the people that have been affected
			2. We apologize that this has occurred and take responsibility for it
			3. We are tracking down the origin of the breakout and are working hard to figure out how it happened
			4. We are doing an in-depth review of our employees and are looking into how our food is being prepared in restaurants

**Media Q & A**

1. How many people have been infected?
	1. As of right now, we don’t have a definitive answer, but we are doing an investigation to determine that.
2. Have there been any foodborne illness related deaths because of Chipotle?
	1. Again, we are currently doing everything we can to figure out exactly who has been affected and in what way.
3. Is this a local or national issue?
	1. From what we currently know, this is a local issue that is being dealt with.
4. Which specific ingredient is deemed “unsafe?”
	1. We are thoroughly looking into this right now to figure out exactly what is unsafe.
5. What symptoms should consumers be looking for?
	1. Once we identify exactly which foodborne illness is being dealt with, we will put out a symptom list to the public.
6. Are there any physical indications that the ingredient is contaminated?
	1. Again, once we figure out exactly what we are dealing with, we will give details to the public of what they should be looking out for in their food.
7. Will you be shutting down any locations because of this outbreak?
	1. Once we find out more details, we will take appropriate action with the locations involved.
8. Have you traced the origin of the outbreak? Where is it?
	1. We are still looking into the exact origin of the outbreak to make sure we know where it came from.
9. What actions has Chipotle taken so far?
	1. We have begun conducting an internal investigation in the suspected area to narrow down the causes and the affected.
10. What does Chipotle plan to do to stop this from happening again?
	1. We want to make sure this doesn’t happen again, so we will be putting in place more reviewing processes among all levels of our companies to make sure ingredients are safe.

**Key Media List**

In the event of a crisis, the tables below should be used as guides when contacting the media.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Traditional Media Outlets** | **Digital Media Outlets** |
| *News Stations:*ABC News, NBC News, CNN News*Newspapers:*New York Times, Huffington Post | *Websites:* Buzzfeed, Cosmopolitan, Business Insider*Social Media:*Facebook, Twitter |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Traditional Media Outlets** | **Contact** |
| ABC News | (212) 456-7777netaudr@abc.com  |
| CBS News | (212) 975-4321 |
| CNN | (212) 275-8030 |
| Fox News | (888) 369-4762yourcomments@foxnews.com  |
| MSNBC | (201) 583-5000msnbc.digital.editors@nbc.uni  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Digital Media Outlets** | **Contact** |
| BuzzFeed | (212) 431-7464 |
| Cosmopolitan | (876) 888-2665 |
| Business Insider | (646) 376-6050 |
| Facebook | Facebook.com (Help Center) |
| Twitter | Send message to @TwitterSupport |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Health Organizations** | **Contact** |
| CDC | (404) 639-3286 |
| FDA | (301) 796- 4540fdaoma@fda.hhs.gov  |

**Related Information**

*Spokespeople from Related Organizations*

* Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
* U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA)
* Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

*Related Articles*

* [Outbreaks of Foodborne Illnesses](https://www.fda.gov/food/recalls-outbreaks-emergencies/outbreaks-foodborne-illness)
* [About the CORE Network](https://www.fda.gov/food/outbreaks-foodborne-illness/about-core-network)
* [USDA Food Defense](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/food-defense-and-emergency-response/food-defense)
* [CDC & Food Safety](https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/cdc-and-food-safety.html#:~:text=CDC%20helps%20make%20food%20safer%20by%3A&text=Working%20with%20partners%20to%20determine,and%20detect%20and%20stop%20outbreaks)

*Top Foodborne Illnesses[[1]](#footnote-2)*

***Escherichia coli (E. coli)***

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) “Escherichia coli (abbreviated as E. coli) are bacteria found in the environment, foods, and intestines of people and animals” (2020). Most strains are harmless, while some can make individuals sick.

* Symptoms: stomach cramps, diarrhea, vomiting
	+ - Will likely occur 3-4 days after ingesting the bacteria
		- Last between 5-7 days
		- Contact health provider if symptoms are persistent

***Salmonella***

According to the CDC, “*Salmonella* bacteria cause about 1.35 million infections, 26,500 hospitalizations, and 420 deaths in the United States every year” (2020). Food is the common source of Salmonella.

* + Symptoms: stomach cramps, diarrhea, fever
		- Begin 6 hours to 6 days after infection
		- Last between 4-7 days
		- Contact health provider if symptoms worsen

***Norovirus***

According to the CDC, Norovirus is a very contagious virus that can be spread through:

* + Direct contact with an infected person
	+ Consuming food or water that is contaminated
	+ Putting unwashed hands in mouth after touching a contaminated surface
		- Symptoms: diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, stomach pain
			* Will likely occur 12 to 48 hours after exposure
			* Last between 1-3 days

**Items & Tools**

*Press Release Template\**

|  |
| --- |
| FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Headline** (one sentence, that describes the major point of release)***City, Date –*** (Include message of empathy/caring, if appropriate)**Main Paragraph**Answers the Who, What, Where, When and Why of the story: Who is affected: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_What is going on: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Where is this taking place: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_When did this occur: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Why is this important: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**(NOTE: Be sure to include “quote” from relevant executive about the crisis/incident)****About Chipotle**Chipotle Mexican Grill, Inc. (NYSE: CMG) is cultivating a better world by serving responsibly sourced, classically-cooked, real food with wholesome ingredients without artificial colors, flavors or preservatives. Chipotle had over 2,950 restaurants as of December 31, 2021, in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France and Germany and is the only restaurant company of its size that owns and operates all its restaurants. Chipotle is ranked on the Fortune 500 and is recognized on the 2021 lists for Forbes' America's Best Employers and Fortune's Most Admired Companies. With nearly 100,000 employees passionate about providing a great guest experience, Chipotle is a longtime leader and innovator in the food industry. Chipotle is committed to making its food more accessible to everyone while continuing to be a brand with a demonstrated purpose as it leads the way in digital, technology and sustainable business practices. For more information or to place an order online, visit [www.chipotle.com](http://www.chipotle.com). For further information, please contact Erin Wolford, (949) 524-4035, mediarelations@chipotle.com. **###** |

*\*Any external communications to be approved by Tyler Benson, Manager of External Communications*

**Incident Information**

The following questions will aid in providing a better perception of the crisis at hand. By answering and assessing the questions, the designated spokesperson(s) will have a clear understanding of the crisis, thus able to give more adequate responses to the media.

1. What information is known about the infected person(s)?
	1. Current diagnosis?
	2. Prognosis?
	3. Timeline of symptoms
2. Why is it believed the incident is connected to Chipotle?
3. Is Chipotle responsible?
	1. What is being done to show empathy for the situation?
4. When and at what location did the individual purchase/consume Chipotle?
5. Have stakeholders been notified? If not, what information can it be assumed they know?
6. What steps have been taken to address the issue at the affected location(s)?
	1. Status of suspected location (temporarily closed/remained open)
	2. Has current inventory been checked?
	3. Notify employees
	4. Has site management been able to pinpoint the possible point(s) of contamination?
7. What does the media currently know?
	1. How did the story break?
	2. Best media channels to address the incident
	3. What is being said on social media?
	4. What is the current narrative about the incident?
8. What is the worst-case scenario based on the information currently known?
	1. What are the biggest concerns at the current time?
	2. What is the best-case scenario?
9. Is there an internal investigation being conducted?
	1. Why or why not?
10. Have the affected consumers been contacted?
11. What is the known timeline of the incident?
12. Has there been a similar incident?
	1. What happened?
	2. Where did the incident happen?
	3. What actions were taken?
	4. What was the seriousness of the incident?
		1. How many illnesses?
		2. How many deaths?
		3. Diagnosis of affected individuals
			1. What symptoms did they experience?
	5. What actions were taken by Chipotle?
		1. What messaging was used from Chipotle?
			1. Was it effective messaging?
			2. What was the social media response?
			3. What was the media response?
	6. What was the overall outcome?
		1. Was there a lawsuit? What was the outcome?
		2. What was the monetary loss?
		3. Was there reputation loss?

***Priority Crisis #2: Supply Chain Shortage***

In the event of a crisis involving supply chain shortages, the following should be considered when addressing the situation:

* Notify appropriate entities
* Gather as much information about the situation as possible
* Draft Key messages (see below)
* Prepare for media questions

Possible Incidents:

* Shortage of several different ingredients
* Current suppliers are experiencing shortages due to natural causes
* Supply chain blockades/obstacles interfering with production

**Crisis Team**

Due to the specific nature of the crisis, the Chief Restaurant Officer of the company, as well as the Chair of Audit and Risk Committee will serve as the crisis team.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scott BoatwrightChief Restaurant Officersboatwright@chipotle.com  | Scott MawChair of Audit and Risk Committeesmaw@chipotle.com |

**Key Messages**

In the event of the food supply shortage we are currently facing, we are working around the clock to find solutions to correct this problem. Our number one priority is making sure that our customers are happy and can enjoy all the menu items that they love.

* Key Messages that should be stressed:
	+ Our biggest focus is figuring out what we can do to make our customers satisfied
	+ Although the events occurred from natural causes, we apologize for the inconvenience to our customers
	+ We want to make sure our suppliers have the necessary resources to come back from this shortage, so we will do what we can to help them do this

**Media Questions**

* What ingredients are you experiencing a shortage of?
* What are the causes of the shortage of these ingredients?
* Do you know when the shortage is going to end?
* How is the shortage affecting your organization and its operations?
* Are there any ingredients you can replace the items in shortage with?
* Has this shortage caused a lot of negativity from your consumers?

***Priority Crisis #3: Health/Sanitation Inspection Issue***

In the event of a crisis involving sanitation and/or health inspection violations, the following should be considered when addressing the situation:

* Notify appropriate entities
* Gather as much information about the situation as possible
* Draft Key messages (see below)
* Prepare for media questions

Possible incidents:

* Improperly stored ingredients
* Inadequate practices while handling food
* Poor personal hygiene practices
* Infestation - insects, rodents, etc.
* Inadequate supply of hot running water

Chipotle’s Food Safety Information: <https://www.chipotle.com/foodsafety>

**Crisis Team**

Due to the specific nature of the crisis, and Chipotle’s history with such incidents, the Chairman & CEO of the company, as well as the Chief Corporate Affairs & Food Safety Officer will serve as the crisis team.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Brian NiccolChairman & CEObniccol@chipotle.com513-617-4946 | Laurie SchalowChief Corporate Affairs & Food Safety Officerlschalow@chipotle.com  |

**Key Messages**

Food and restaurant safety is the top priority at Chipotle to ensure the safety of our customers and employees. In light of recent violations, we are taking action to determine exactly what happened and how to prevent a similar event from happening again.

* Key Messages that should be stressed:
	+ Cooperating with FDA and other entities to determine what happened
	+ Chipotle's biggest concern is the health and safety of its customers and employees
	+ Putting together an internal team to review and make any appropriate changes to current policies and procedures
	+ Employee training/retraining will be enforced, if necessary

**Media Questions**

* Who are the specifics of the violation/incident?
* What is Chipotle doing about this situation?
* Who is at fault?
* What does Chipotle have to say about causing customer illness/deaths due to inadequate food and safety procedure?
* Similar violations have happened in the past at Chipotle, why has the company let such incidents happen again?
1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, March 3). *Foodborne Germs and Illnesses.* Center for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/foodborne-germs.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)