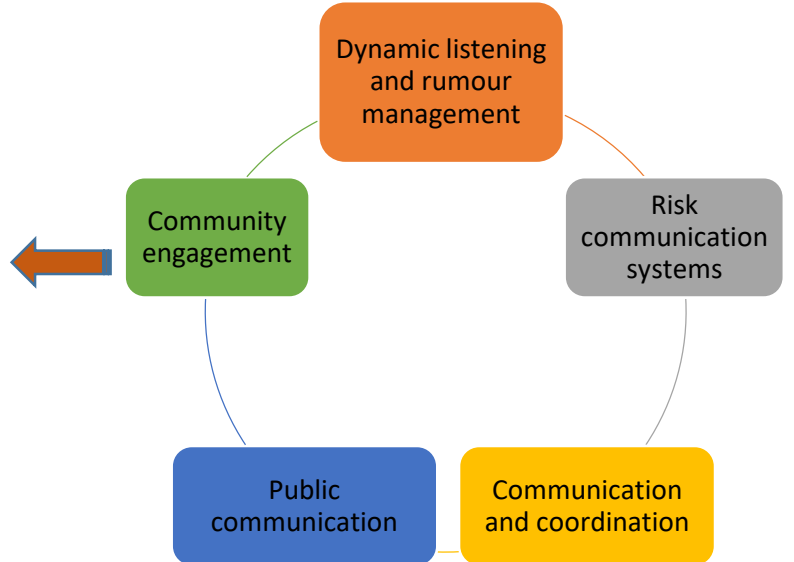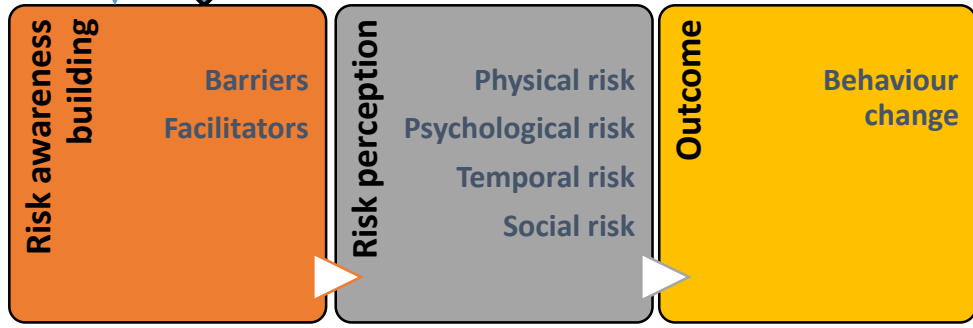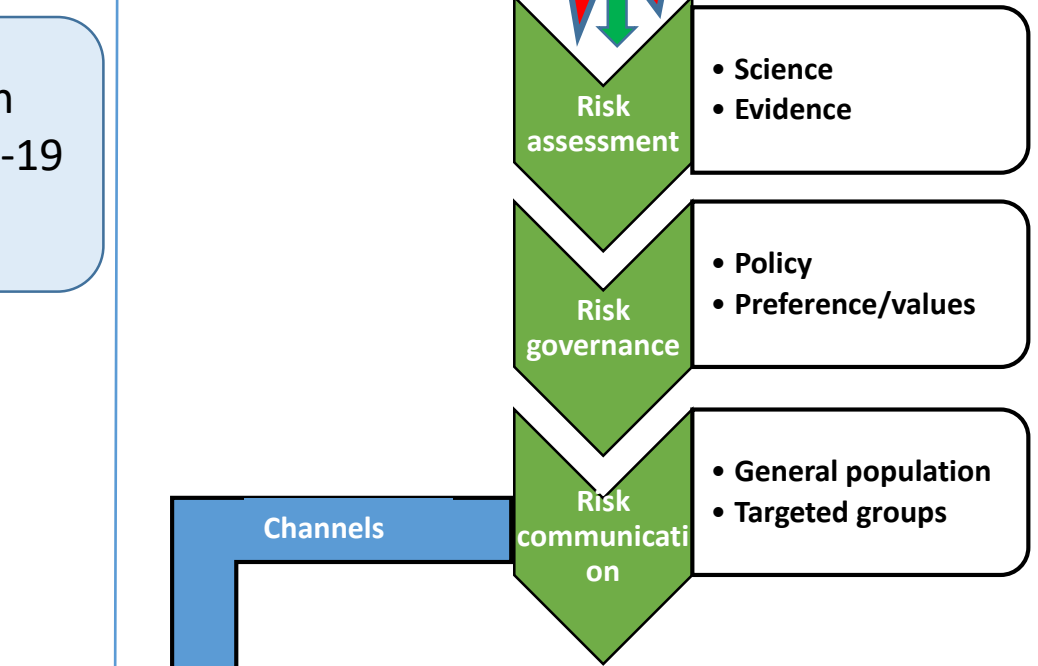# Risk communication strategies adopted by Govt. of Kerala during COVID 19 pandemic;

An exploratory analysis

School of Public Health team

Introduction

- Risk communication plays a crucial role during any acute public health events.

- During emergency, rumors create panic and distrust among public.

- Communication aimed to equip people with the information needed to make learnt, independent decisions about risks to their health, safety, and the environment which are meaningful, understandable and actionable.

✓ Timely

✓ Relevant to the context of information sharing

✓ Accurate and valid

✓ Direct to give reassurance and hope to people (easily comprehensible)

Risk communication framework for COVID -19 Pandemic

Covid19 pandemic

Risk assessment
- **Science**
- **Evidence**

Risk governance
- **Policy**
- **Preference/values**

Risk communication
- **General population**
- **Targeted groups**

Channels

Dynamic listening and rumour management

Risk communication systems

Community engagement

Public communication

Communication and coordination

Risk awareness building
Barriers
Facilitators

Risk perception
Physical risk
Psychological risk
Temporal risk
Social risk

Outcome
Behaviour change

Impact
- **Reduced mortality**
- **Reduced morbidity**
- **Reduced economic loss**

MONITORING & EVALUATION
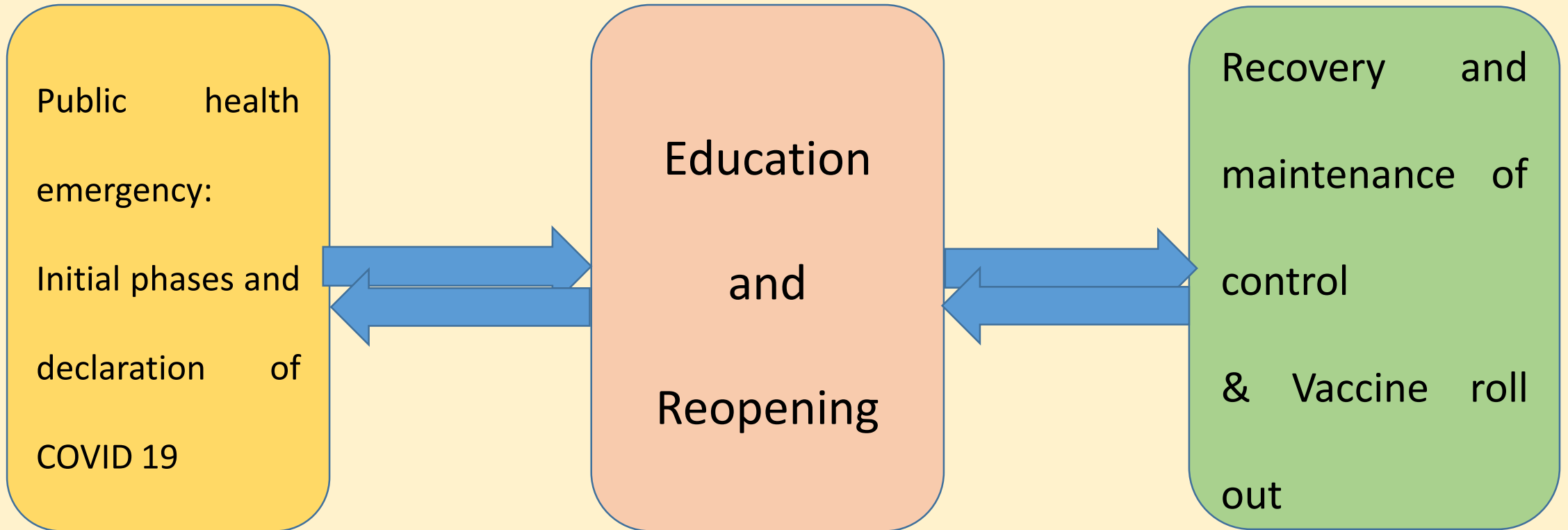
Risk Communication by Govt. of Kerala

- The methods adopted by Kerala for containing the COVID 19 pandemic was well appreciated globally

- Effective risk communication and good community engagement were instrumental in this

- Different types of digital and direct communication strategies were used

- Evaluated the risk communication strategies used by the Govt. of Kerala during the first three phases of Covid-19 pandemic using a scientifically sound research approach.

Methodology adopted

- We identified behavioral content of the 922 IEC BCC (Information-Education-Communication, Behavioral Change Communication) materials published by Govt. of Kerala

- A sample of 15 posters, one each from 15 COVID -19 appropriate behaviors recommended by Govt. of India (SBCC Criteria) adopted by Govt. of Kerala were evaluated.

Type of material	f
IEC BCC videos and images	303
IEC materials	496
Infographics and posters	123
Total	922

Phases of Risk Communication in Kerala

| Public health emergency: Initial phases and declaration of COVID 19 | ⟷ | Education and Reopening | ⟷ | Recovery and maintenance of control & Vaccine roll out |

The system used for Risk Communication by Govt. of Kerala (Websites)

The Govt. of Kerala official website (www.kerala.gov.in)

The official website of Directorate of Health Services (www.dhs.kerala.gov.in)

Arogyakeralam (www.arogyakeralam.gov.in) is the official website of National Health Mission

Official websites of Police Department LSGD and other Govt. departments

COVID-19 dashboard
- Disease statistics (total confirmed cases, active cases, recovered, death, TPR),
- Vaccination status
- Cumulative summary and summary of quarantine and isolation

- Information on COVID-19 awareness and information on COVID-19 vaccination.
- Daily bulletins starting from 31/01/2020.
- Links to related websites.

COVID JAGRATHA portal
- Awareness and it contains various IEC materials.
- Comprehensive information on daily reporting and monitoring of people on quarantine and their health status by field workers.

Other important systems used

➤ **Chief Minister's daily press conferences:** details of the disease statistics, COVID-19 appropriate behaviour, vaccine acceptance, health maintenance etc.

➤ Disha helpline is a toll-free telephone number 1056 provided 24X7 services including COVID-19 related awareness, physical and mental health support and counselling.

➤ GoK direct app is an official mobile application to increase awareness about COVID-19 and to communicate the suggestions and notifications.

Dept. of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of Kerala- Major Campaigns

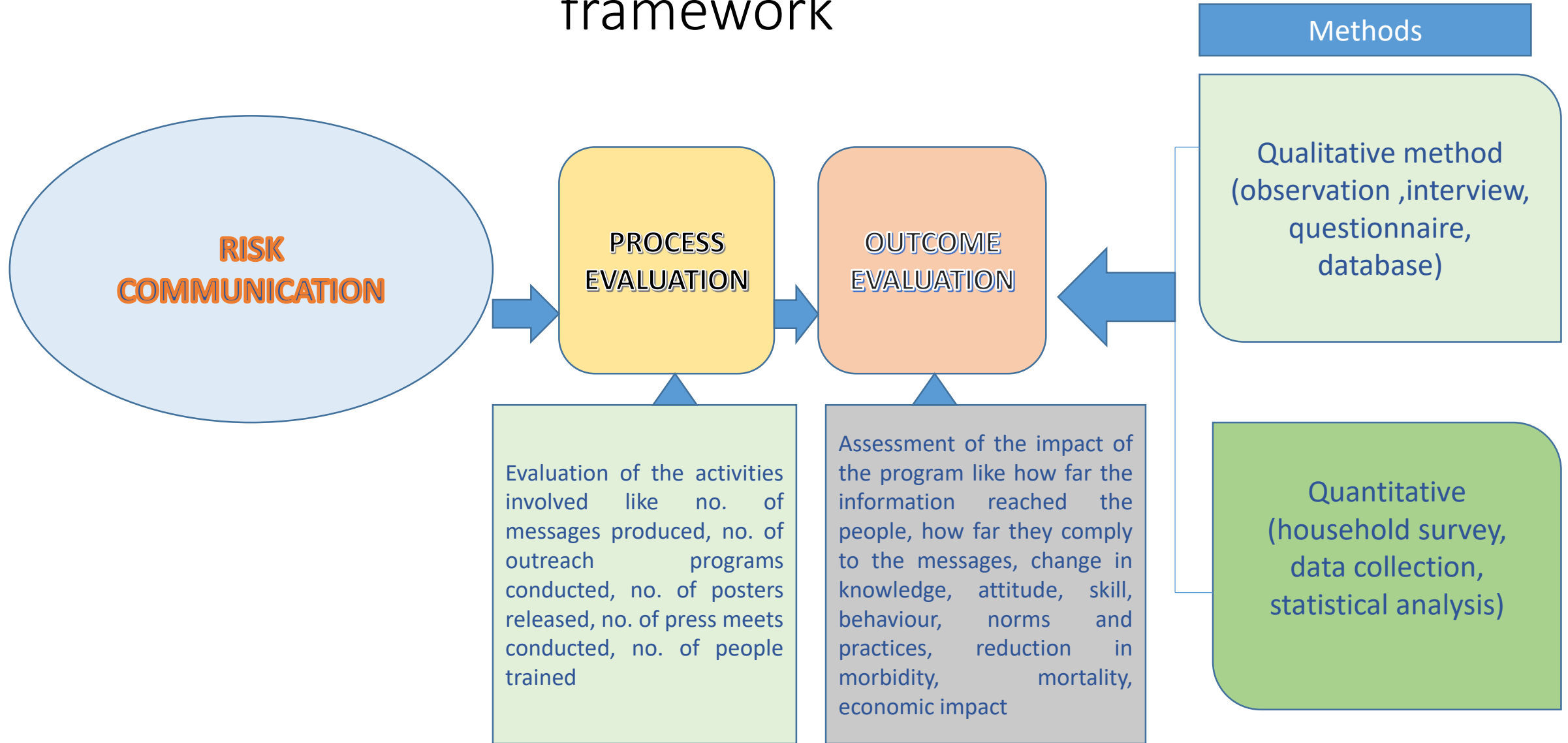|			
January to 15th November, 2020	4 campaigns (4 phases)	- Addressing to the returnees from Wuhan in order to generate awareness on Corona Virus, its spread, preventive measures - Break the chain campaign - Addressing to the returnees from foreign countries and other states emphasising reverse quarantine - To generate awareness on Community Spread	Break the Chain campaign: to spread the information on COVID-19 appropriate behaviour (Public and personal hygiene)
January 2021	1 Campaign	- 'Back to Basics' campaign	To educate people on the importance of COVID-19 related protocols and reduction of transmission
September 2021 (3rd wave)	1 Campaign	- 'Be the Warrior' campaign	Ensure COVID-19 appropriate behaviour and to speed up vaccination.

Other Campaigns

- **KITE-VICTERS** (Kerala Infrastructure and Technology for Education-Versatile Information and Communication Technology-Enabled Resources for Students) channel for online classes

- **Online campaigns** for media handlers

- **Special campaigns** addressing precautions during Onam, Attukal Ponkala, Legislative Assembly elections, Sabarimala Pilgrimage

- **'Karuthal'** the special booklet was issued to give awareness of COVID-19 and non-COVID diseases.

Other Campaigns

- The **WhatsApp Chatbot**, an automated software powered by artificial intelligence, aided people to get important messages

- A **special post-cover** by postal department to spread the information of COVID-19.

- **Masks** printed with IEC messages

- **Hoardings** placed in various parts of the state

- **Vehicle branding** with awareness materials on the Jan Shatabdi train and vehicles used by the dept. of Health and Family Welfare.

Monitoring and evaluation of Risk communication framework

Methods

RISK COMMUNICATION

PROCESS EVALUATION

OUTCOME EVALUATION

Qualitative method (observation ,interview, questionnaire, database)

Evaluation of the activities involved like no. of messages produced, no. of outreach programs conducted, no. of posters released, no. of press meets conducted, no. of people trained

Assessment of the impact of the program like how far the information reached the people, how far they comply to the messages, change in knowledge, attitude, skill, behaviour, norms and practices, reduction in morbidity, mortality, economic impact

Quantitative (household survey, data collection, statistical analysis)

Message delivery process used by Govt. of Kerala

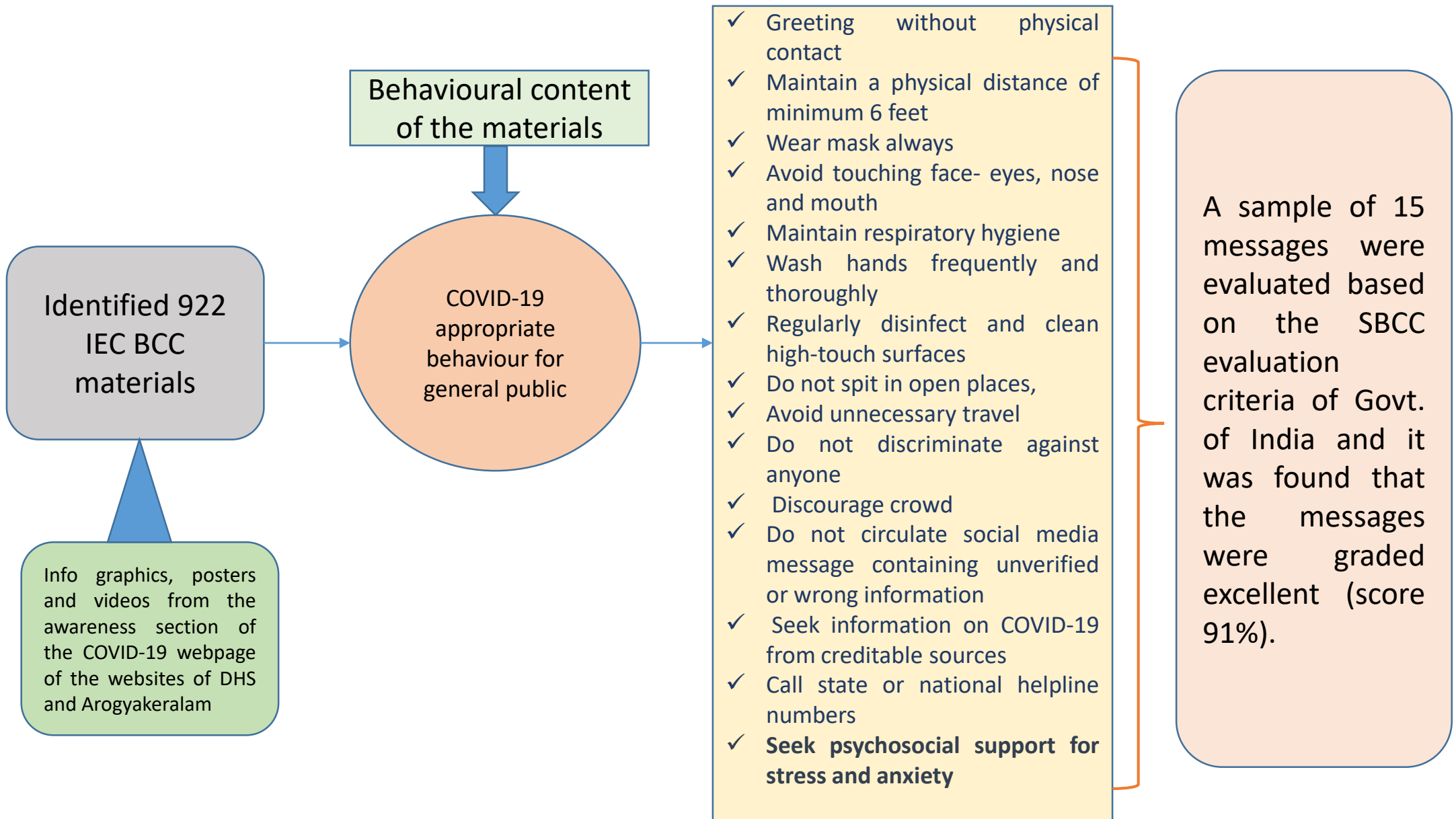| The targeted audience	Nature of the messages	Behaviour content and actionability of the message	Time of delivery
• General population • Returnees from Wuhan and other affected countries and states, migrant workers • High-risk population like elderly, children and adolescents, pregnant women, people with comorbidities, taxi-drivers, shop owners, police, teachers etc. • Health workers	• Simple, clear and understandable, considering the health literacy ✓ Route maps ✓ Audio messages addressing targeted audience ✓ Posters containing cartoons with instructions ✓ Written messages ✓ Video bytes on focussed contents by Hon. Chief Minister, Hon. Health Minister, celebrity film actors and dancers ✓ Awareness jingles for radio, you tube videos	✓ Greeting without physical contact ✓ Maintain a physical distance of minimum 6 feet ✓ Wear mask always ✓ Avoid touching face- eyes, nose and mouth ✓ Maintain respiratory hygiene ✓ Wash hands frequently and thoroughly ✓ Regularly disinfect and clean high-touch surfaces ✓ Do not spit in open places, ✓ Avoid unnecessary travel ✓ Do not discriminate against anyone a ✓ Discourage crowd ✓ Do not circulate social media message containing unverified or wrong information ✓ Seek information on COVID-19 from creditable sources ✓ Call state or national helpline numbers ✓ **Seek psychosocial support for stress and anxiety**	• Appropriate times during different phases Early phase- to people from Wuhan First wave- "Break the Chain' campaign, Information on quarantine, community spread Special campaign during occasions Second wave- 'Back to Basics' campaign, 'Be the Warrior' campaign Vaccine drive

Effectiveness of the message delivery process

Behavioural content of the materials

Identified 922 IEC BCC materials

Info graphics, posters and videos from the awareness section of the COVID-19 webpage of the websites of DHS and Arogyakeralam

COVID-19 appropriate behaviour for general public

- ✓ Greeting without physical contact
- ✓ Maintain a physical distance of minimum 6 feet
- ✓ Wear mask always
- ✓ Avoid touching face- eyes, nose and mouth
- ✓ Maintain respiratory hygiene
- ✓ Wash hands frequently and thoroughly
- ✓ Regularly disinfect and clean high-touch surfaces
- ✓ Do not spit in open places,
- ✓ Avoid unnecessary travel
- ✓ Do not discriminate against anyone
- ✓ Discourage crowd
- ✓ Do not circulate social media message containing unverified or wrong information
- ✓ Seek information on COVID-19 from creditable sources
- ✓ Call state or national helpline numbers
- ✓ **Seek psychosocial support for stress and anxiety**

A sample of 15 messages were evaluated based on the SBCC evaluation criteria of Govt. of India and it was found that the messages were graded excellent (score 91%).

Sl No	SBCC/BCC material based on expected behavioral changes identified by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India	Clarity of message: Intended audience (1)	Communication objectives (3)	Message brief -clarity -benefit -source -call to action (4)	Key content and tone (1)	Other creative considerations (1)	Total score (10)
1	**Greeting without physical contact**						
2	**Maintain a physical distance of minimum 6 feet**						

3. Wear mask always
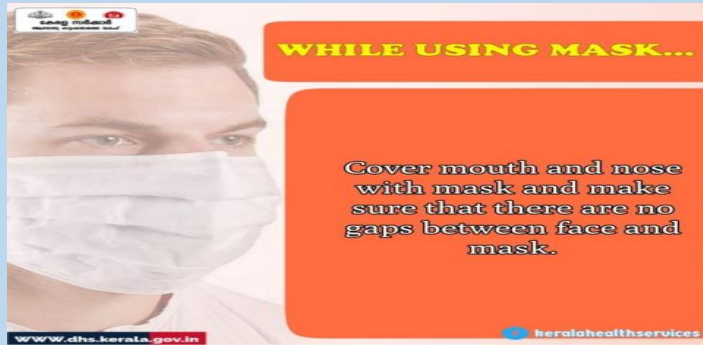
4. Avoid touching face- eyes, nose and mouth

5. Maintain respiratory hygiene

6. Maintain respiratory hygiene

7. Regularly disinfect and clean high-touch surfaces

8. Do not spit in open places

9. Avoid unnecessary travel

12. Do not circulate social media messages containing unverified or wrong information

10. Do not discriminate against anyone

13. Seek information on COVID-19 from creditable sources

11. Discourage crowd

14. Call state or national helpline numbers for clarifying doubts

# 15. Seek psychosocial support for stress and anxiety

Grading: >80 %- Excellent, 60-80%- Good, 40-60%- Average, 20-40%- Poor, <20- Very poor

Total score: 136.5 (91%)

Lessons learned..

- The strategies delivered by the dept. of health and family welfare of Govt. of Kerala in collaboration with other departments like LSGD and Police department were more beneficial in risk communication and containment. Eg. Trans media story telling by Kerala Police.

- The risk communication strategies used were timely, effectively planned and delivered by multiple channels so people have taken them to their hearts.

- The success stories partly owe to the risk communication which is evident from the local innovations.

What we observed...
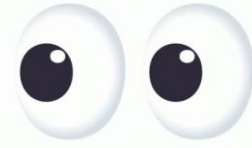
NDTV June2, 2020, tweeted @hvgoenka

The new Indian Express: Published: 21st May 2020 07:12 AM

Conclusion

- The Kerala's success in handling the COVID-19 crisis lies in the lessons learnt from the efforts to contain the Nipah outbreak and the natural disasters like the floods and landslides along with its strong public health system.

- Further structural and systematic, research based approaches to monitor and evaluate strategies for impact assessment will be useful for future pandemic preparedness in terms of risk communication.

Thank You...