



# MHERO MESSAGE AND FLOW DEVELOPMENT TIPS: SENDING GOOD SMS MESSAGES

Composing individual messages and developing flows (a series of messages that contacts will interact with) are a routine part of mHero. Designing the flow of content will improve both the quality and quantity of the responses you receive from health workers. The tips below are meant to help you develop thoughtful messages and flows. For more guidance on asking questions in flows, see [mHero Message and Flow Development Tips: Asking the Right Questions](#).

## GETTING STARTED

**Propose a name for each new message and flow** you create so that it's unique and easily identifiable among the other messages and flows.

- You may plan to send a message or flow more than once, such as monthly or on a regular interval, and may want to see data for each time it is sent (rather than cumulative data). In this case, be sure to note the month in the name of message/flow being sent.
- You may want to come up with a naming convention which can help you stay organized and that will easily identify messages/flows to send out when you are using the mHero interface and/or examining reports. For example, all messages/flows for community health workers could start with CHW (e.g., **CHW-Vaccine Campaign Dates-30 April 2021**) or all messages/flows about the COVID-19 vaccine could start with COVIDVAX (e.g., **COVIDVAX Staff Vaccination Status Survey\_30 April 2021**).

**Introduce mHero before you send any messages.** Use other communication channels (memos; announcements at meetings, trainings, or other events; trickle down communication; etc.) to inform health workers that they will be soon receiving messages through mHero. Make sure to explain that:

- mHero messages will be coming from the Ministry of Health (or implementing organization). This point is essential for building trust.
- mHero messages will come from a phone number or short code. You may also want to tell health workers to save the short code/phone number in their contacts so they can more easily identify mHero messages.
- mHero will be used for specific reasons, such as "all health sector communication" or "reinforcement of training knowledge and skills."
- Messages will be free to send and receive (if this is the case).
- They will be expected to respond to some messages.

## IN YOUR VERY FIRST MESSAGE OR FLOW

**Brand your first message as a message from the Ministry of Health (MOH)/implementing organization, mHero, or both.** If possible, include the name of the person or division/department who is sending the message.

State that it is free for them to send and receive all messages (if this is the case). This is an important reminder even if health workers have already been informed about this aspect of mHero.

You may need to provide an opt-out (STOP) keyword in your initial message to abide by regulatory requirements.

Hello this is the MOH, introducing our new service "mHero". We will use this channel for all health sector communication.

It is free for you to send & receive messages through mHero. If you do not wish to receive messages please reply with STOP.

## FOR NEW MESSAGES OR FLOWS

**Ensure you brand new messages and flows** as MOH/implementing organization or mHero (or both) messages and identify the sender.

- Explain how often the health worker can expect to receive the message or flow.  
*"You will receive this reminder every month."*
- State very clearly whether the health worker should respond to the message/flow.

For flows:

- You may want to inform the health worker of how long the flow is.  
*"This is the first of 5 messages."*  
*"This survey will take you less than 2 minutes to complete."*  
*You can also number each message at the start or end. For example, the first message includes "(1/3)", the second message includes "(2/3)," etc.*
- Consider briefly describing who will receive their responses and how that information will be used.  
*"Your responses will be anonymous and will only be reviewed by Human Resources officers to help them determine the package of support services to offer to health workers."*
- You may want to share information about how long health workers have to respond to the flow;  
*"Responses will not be accepted after 7 days."*  
*"Please respond before you leave work for the day."*
- Any incentives to encourage them to respond;  
*"All respondents will be entered into a drawing for a prize."*
- And/or what will happen if they do not respond.  
*"If you do not respond, you will need to submit your information via a paper form."*

(1/4) Hi CHWs, this is mHero from the MOH. We are happy to announce the dates of our yearly measles vaccination campaign: 11 to 18 April.

(2/4) It is your responsibility to pass the following info along to your community so that they are available and prepared to have their children vaccinated.

(3/4) The CHW with the highest vax rate will win a tablet device!

(4/4) Remember: it's free for you to receive messages through mHero. You do NOT need to reply. If you don't wish to receive messages please reply with STOP.

# GENERAL GUIDANCE

Be clear and concise:

- **Keep messages short.** When sending SMS messages you can only send a message with 160 characters or less. This limit pertains to the Latin alphabet with no accented letters. The maximum character limit is less with non-Latin alphabets and when using accented letters. (There is a character counter below the message input box when you are drafting or editing a message.) You can split up longer sections of text into more than one message but please do not send too many messages in quick succession (for more info, see the bullet point below)
- **Use language that is easy to understand. You may want to use local languages and terminology.** To keep messages brief you may choose to use language that is less formal than what is used for traditional communication channels. When making this decision you should always keep in mind the target audience and the nature of the message. In the interest of keeping the messages brief you may want to use abbreviations. Use abbreviations sparingly and make sure the ones you choose are widely understood.
- **Don't send out too many successive messages.** If you send out too many messages, the health workers may start to ignore them or find them bothersome. Avoid sending more than three to four successive messages.
- **Don't ask too many questions in the overall flow.** In flows, aim to include five (5) or less questions (with a maximum of 10) to keep respondents engaged. Remember to indicate the number of questions (or the estimated time) at the beginning of the flow to communicate the commitment required to complete the flow.

Make it captivating, relevant, and beneficial:

- **Capture attention in the first message(s).** Lead with information that establishes the importance and usefulness of the message or flow, but don't forget to include the key pieces of information described above (identify the sender, frequency, length, expectations to respond, etc.). Doing this immediately will make it more likely that health workers will pay attention to the message/flow because it will provide some added value to them.
  - Personalize the message using "variables". For instance, @contact.name will insert the health worker's name when the message is delivered.

Hello Bob! The MNH Division wants you to know that there are new guidelines around community-based care.

Your supervisor will explain the changes and we will send you key messages from those guidelines over the next week.

Happy new year from the National Nurses & Midwives Board! Make your resolution to finish your annual CPD requirement early!

Through mHero you can learn about upcoming opportunities. It is always free for you to send & receive messages through mHero.

Each month you can send the month name to receive a list of activities during that month. For ex. reply w/ "January" now to see opportunities this month.

- **Give your message some context.** Let your health worker recipients know the purpose of the message or the reason you are sending it. For example:
  - Instead of sending a reminder that says: *“COVID-19 spreads when a person with COVID-19 releases small droplets by coughing or sneezing without covering their nose and mouth.”*
  - It is better to send a message that says:

This is mHero. We have been hearing from health workers that patients don't always know how COVID-19 spreads.

Explain to your patients that COVID-19 spreads when a person w/ COVID releases small droplets by coughing or sneezing w/o covering their nose & mouth.

While this message is longer, it helps the health worker understand why this information is relevant and how it can benefit them.

- Where relevant, include a clear call to action and explain why that action is important.

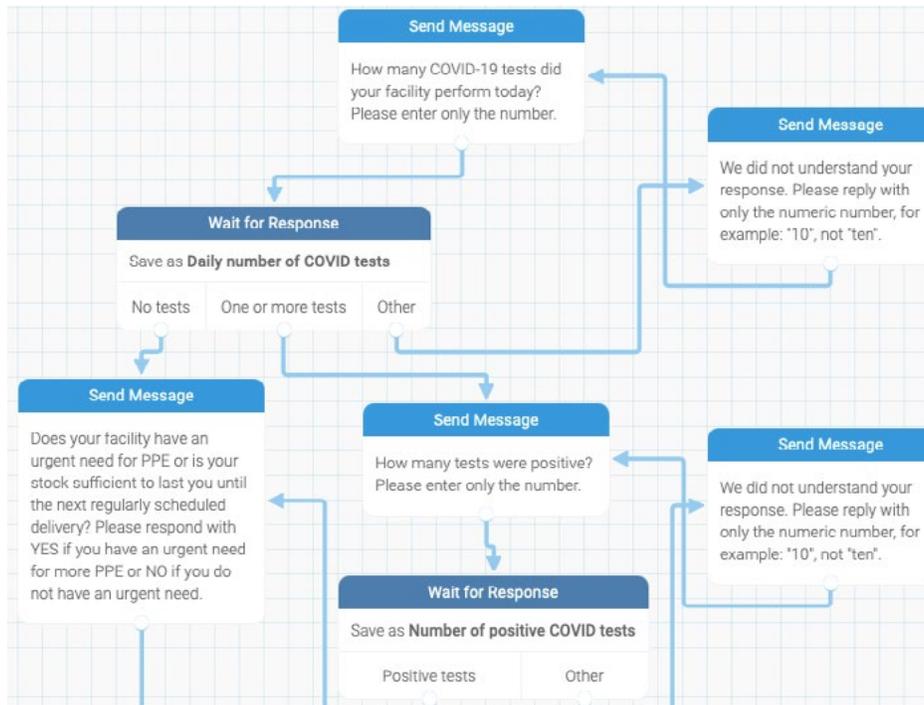
We recognize and appreciate the risks you are taking everyday on the front lines of COVID-19, engaging directly with sick people.

Responding to this survey will help us keep you protected with materials like PPE and important info.

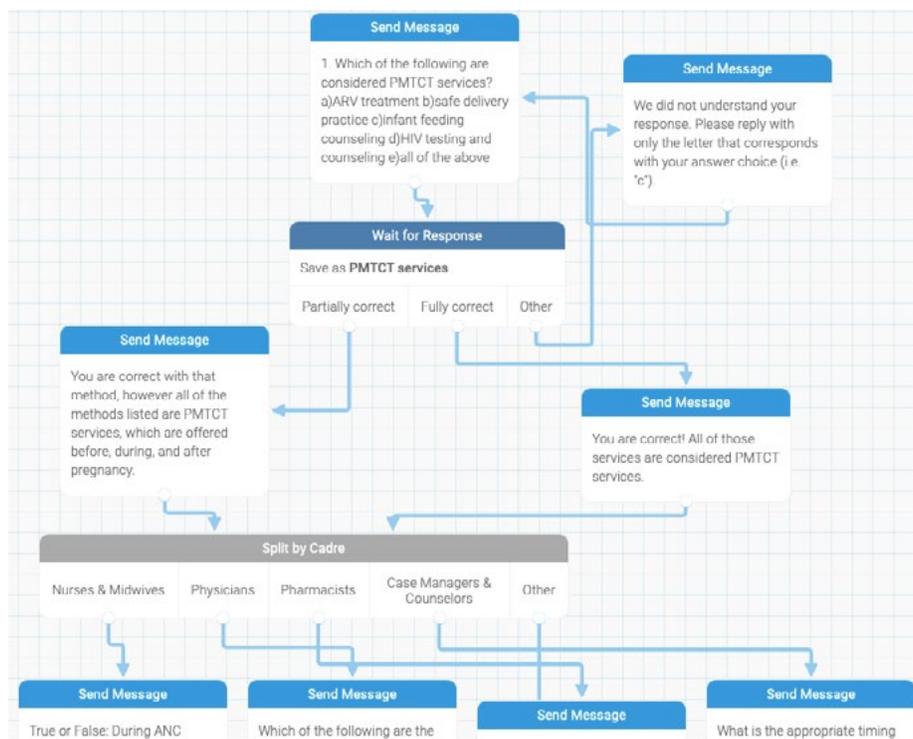
- **Target your messages and flows.** Remember that you can target messages to very specific audiences – think about the health workers you most want to get information to/from and explain why the message or flow is targeted at them.
  - Remember that with RapidPro you can easily add logic to determine the direction of the flow based on the respondent's responses, contact fields, groups, etc.

We want to hear from vaccinators like yourself about the challenges you face so we can improve the info and support we provide to you.

- To illustrate:
  - If a respondent says any number over zero after the question "How many COVID-19 tests did your facility perform today?" you may want to ask a follow up question such as "How many tests were positive?"



- Since you don't need to ask this follow up question for facilities that didn't perform any tests, you can add logic (called skip logic, in this case) that will only send the follow up question to health workers who respond to the first question with a number greater than zero.
- As another example, if you are sending a knowledge check survey to participants of a recent training, you can send some questions to everyone as well as a few questions to the participants' specific cadres (i.e. nurses and midwives, physicians, pharmacists, etc.).



- You can combine different types of logic and levels of branching to create complex and targeted flows.
- **Consider the timing of your messages.** You may get a better response rate if you send messages at a specific time or on a specific day/date. For example, if you want health workers to complete a survey at the end of the work day, send the reminder at 4:30 pm, or send a reminder two days before a reporting deadline.
- **Add variety to be engaging.** Unless you are using mHero for a specific purpose (such as case reporting), you should mix up the content you send out. You can have a blend of questions, reminders, new information, challenges, suggested actions, and more.
  - If you use a channel that permits different types of content (specifically, not SMS or IVR), you can have a mixture of text, images, videos, audio clips, links, and more.
  - Avoid always starting messages with the same words (such as “Did you know...?” or “You need to...”).
  - Sending a variety of content via mHero (and ensuring it is relevant and useful) makes the messages more engaging and less likely to be regarded as spam.
- **Provide immediate encouragement, feedback, or further explanation.** For example, if someone completes their reporting on time, you can send a message thanking them for promptly sharing information that will help ensure they receive the stock that they need.

Thanks for taking the time to submit your monthly numbers on time – you rock!

Even though you don't need an additional delivery this month, the info you shared will help us plan for the future.

- As another example, if someone incorrectly answers a knowledge check question then you can send them a message that shares the correct answer and explains why it is correct (using logic when building the flow, this explanation doesn't need to be sent to those who correctly answer the question; rather you can congratulate them on their correct response). See the PMTCT flow screenshot above.
- **Explain what will be done with the information in the responses to the flow.**
  - This can be broad:

We will use the feedback you submitted to improve the training curriculum.

- Or specific:

We have noted your need for more antimalarials, and someone will contact you to schedule a delivery.

- Providing this information will make health workers feel that their contributions are valuable and following through with the actions pledged will encourage health workers to continue responding to message flows.

Were these tips helpful? Do you have any additional tips to share with mHero users? We'd love to hear from you. Please share feedback to [digitalhealth@intrahealth.org](mailto:digitalhealth@intrahealth.org).

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