



Disaster Planning Guide for Home Health Care Providers



Homeland
Security



Preparedness Planning for Home Health Care Providers

How to prepare for the emergency that could turn a home into a makeshift hospital

During a disaster, home health care professionals care for patients who do not require hospitalization or cannot be admitted into overwhelmed health care facilities. Depleted supplies, personnel shortages, and other challenges during times of crisis may strain the ability of these care providers to address their patients' needs. Good preparedness planning is essential for ensuring that the needs of both patients, their service animals, and their caregivers are met in the most effective and professional manner possible.

When planning for contingencies, home health care providers must consider a variety of hazards and events that could impact their patients. Hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, wildfires, radiation releases, chemical exposures, seasonal and pandemic influenza, and acts of terrorism are just a few examples.

Assess Needs, Prepare Supplies, Make a Plan. These are simple measures that home health care providers can implement to increase the personal readiness of their patients and themselves. Additionally, becoming familiar with existing emergency response plans, processes, and procedures in both the workplace and community is a critical component of preparedness. Once you are armed with the necessary resources, help your patients, their family members, and other caregivers to get a kit, make a plan and be informed.

Home health care professionals play a vital role in disaster preparedness because their patients depend on them for continuity of care during a catastrophic event. Discuss resource requirements with your patients, their family members, and your organization's staff. The following questions will help guide your planning:

Assess Needs

- Does your organization have a plan for emergencies or disasters?
- If your organization is severely impacted by an emergency or disaster, how will your patients' health care needs be met?
- Will you be expected to stay with your patients during an emergency or disaster in either their residence or in an emergency shelter?
- Do your patients have an alternate support system (e.g., family, friends, volunteers) in the event that essential home health care services are compromised?

Prepare Supplies

- Gather enough food, water, medication, and other life-sustaining necessities for a minimum of three (3) days and up to two (2) weeks.
- If a back-up generator is available, ensure your patients are familiar with how to safely operate it and have sufficient fuel.
- Provide patients or their family members with the required knowledge, tools, and supplies to maintain, replace, or repair essential medical devices, such as wheelchairs, ventilators, oxygen tanks, etc.
- Confirm your patients have a disaster supply kit. More information on creating disaster supply kits can be obtained at www.ready.gov or through the American Red Cross chapter at www.redcross.org.

Note: An easy way to maintain an updated list of medications is to place a copy of the information that comes with each prescription in a plastic bag. Store the plastic bag in a location that is easy to access in an emergency. Replace copies each year or when there are prescription changes. Also include regularly taken over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, antacids, etc.

Make a Plan

- If your organization is unable to ensure continuity of care, your patients should have a backup roster of home health care providers or an identified alternate means of care to ensure support during and after an emergency or disaster.
- To facilitate efficient and effective response, work with local emergency services providers (e.g., EMS, hospitals and other health care facilities, fire, law enforcement, volunteer groups, etc.) to inform them about the services your organization provides and educate them about the particular needs of your patients.
- Develop a plan for your patients and their families so you will know how you will communicate in a crisis.
- Discuss electrical needs for essential equipment (e.g., refrigeration for food and medication, air conditioning, heating, oxygen concentrators, suction machines, etc) with your patients, their family members, local emergency services providers, and local utilities companies.



Home health care providers may be required to stay with their patients in special needs shelters during their stay. When assisting patients and their family members plan to shelter, consider the following:

- Learn the health and safety resources the shelter provides.
- Determine which additional resources your patients will require if the shelter is not able to meet their needs.
- Review your organization's plans, processes, and procedures for providing care and support for yourself and your patients while in the shelter.
- If patients are oxygen dependent, make arrangements to obtain extra supplies of oxygen canisters, refills, and other equipment as needed.
- Determine how patients will be transported to a special needs shelter and assist in making proper arrangements.
- Assist patients and their family members to prepare emergency supply kits with essential medications, equipment, and supplies that will not be provided by the shelter. Refer to www.ready.gov for a complete listing of kit supplies.
- Inform shelter managers if your patients have service animals. Pets are usually not permitted in special needs shelters.

Household Pet and Service Animal Considerations

Service animals (e.g., seeing-eye-dogs, hearing and signal dogs, assistance dogs, etc.) must be allowed in shelters as extensions of the patient under the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Therapy animals, such as dogs who visit patients in hospitals and nursing homes, are not considered service animals. Many state and local jurisdictions will shelter household pets. Coordinate with the local animal control to understand the options and inform patients and their family members so they can plan for their shelter needs. Other pet and service animal considerations:

- Assist patients in making arrangements with family members, relatives, friends, or other providers to care for pets during an evacuation or other extended emergency.
- Plan for a minimum of three (3) days and up to two (2) weeks of food and water (and possible medications) for your patients' pets and service animals.
- Prior to relocating to a shelter, assist patients in gathering necessary food, medications, food and water bowls, cat litter, cages, collars (with tags and/or paperwork showing proof of immunizations, if possible), leashes, and muzzles.
- Contact animal control, the regional Humane Society or affiliate office, or a local veterinarian for more information. Additional information can be obtained from the Humane Society of the United States at www.hsus.org.

Helping patients may mean taking the show on the road in an emergency

While staying in a well-prepared home with the help of a home health provider is often the best approach to getting through a crisis, sometimes evacuation is required. Home health care providers should consider evacuation as early as possible, even if it may prove later to be unnecessary, because of the challenges faced by those with special health needs. Remember, not all shelters can support everyone and service animals and pets will also need assistance.

Basic Questions About Evacuation Shelters

- Will your patients require evacuation?
- Has your organization, patients, or their family contacted the American Red Cross for information on shelters?
- Are alternate shelter plans in place in the event that your patients are not able to reach designated shelters?

Sheltering

The criteria for staying in a special needs shelter varies by state or local government guidelines. In general, special needs shelters provide supervised care and shelter to a limited number of people requiring assistance due to pre-existing health conditions. Patients may qualify to stay at a special needs shelter if they are:

- Dependent on electricity to operate medical equipment
- In need of assistance with medication, injections, or simple dressing changes
- Receiving dialysis
- Receiving hospice services
- Demonstrating mild dementia, without abusive or wandering behavior.

Emergency Plan Review

Review emergency plans and procedures with your patients, their family, and your organization each year. Be sure to review:

- All patient health and medical needs
- Supplies to reflect evolving patient needs
- Patient, family, and emergency contact information
- Healthcare-related legal documents
- Patient, family, and organization communication plans

Online Resources

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Home Health Care During an Influenza Pandemic www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/healthcare/homehealth.html
- National Association for Home Care and Hospice www.nahc.org
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security www.ready.gov
- The Joint Commission, Home Care Accreditation Program www.jointcommission.org/AccreditationPrograms/HomeCare



EMERGENCY REFERENCE INFORMATION

Emergency Reference Card for Individuals with Medical Needs Living at Home & Their Caregivers

Name:	DOB:	Blood Type:	
Street Address:	City:	State:	Zip Code:

Personal medical information that emergency responders need to know:

Allergies I have:

Medications I take:

Prescription Name:	Dosage (for example, 50 mg)	Frequency (for example, twice per day)

Vaccination Type:	Dose/Units:	Date Given (month/year)

Special needs (e.g., eye glasses, hearing aids, mobility assistive devices, language translation needs, etc.):

Emergency Phone Numbers (if not 911)

Local Dept:	Phone #	Emergency Contacts / Name	Phone #
Ambulance		Doctor	
Fire		Doctor	
Police		Doctor	
County Health		Clinic/Facility	
Emergency Mgmt		Pharmacist	
Local Red Cross		Dentist	
Local Shelters		Veterinarian	

Family and Friends - Emergency Contacts

	Name	Phone		Name	Phone
Family Member		Home: Work: Cell:	Friend/Neighbor		Home: Work: Cell:
Family Member		Home: Work: Cell:	Friend/Neighbor		Home: Work: Cell:
Family Member		Home: Work: Cell:	Friend/Neighbor		Home: Work: Cell:
Family Member		Home: Work: Cell:	Friend/Neighbor		Home: Work: Cell:
Family Member		Home: Work: Cell:	Friend/Neighbor		Home: Work: Cell: