



SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

This section provides an overview of how federal health agencies function in an emergency and what kind of assistance they may provide.

- » The National Response Plan (NRP) coordinates federal assistance to tribal, state, and local authorities when federal assistance is needed.
- » The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is the lead federal agency for protecting the health of all Americans, but overall emergency response is coordinated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
- » Different federal agencies take the lead depending on the type of emergency (e.g., natural disasters, natural outbreaks, bioterrorism attacks, chemical incidents, radiological incidents).

**THE KEY FUNCTIONS OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES IN AN EMERGENCY**



THE KEY FUNCTIONS OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES IN AN EMERGENCY

Although a great deal of the response to a terrorism event or other public health emergency will take place at the local, state, or tribal government level, the federal government generally supports the local, state, and tribal response when one or more of the following occurs:

- › A state requests assistance from the federal government and the President
- › The President declares a state of emergency or a major disaster
- › An incident takes place in areas that are owned or controlled by the federal government

The overall federal response is coordinated through DHS and will operate in support of and coordination with the Incident Command System, which is guided by NIMS. Detailed information on NIMS can be found at <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtm>.

NATIONAL RESPONSE PLAN

A more comprehensive picture of the federal response to emergencies can be found in the National Response Plan (NRP) at <http://www.dhs.gov/nrp>. The NRP is an all-discipline, all-hazards plan that establishes a single framework for the management of domestic incidents. It provides the structure and mechanism for the coordination of federal response to tribal, state, and local governments for catastrophic incidents, including natural disasters and terrorist attacks. Please note that the NRP does not supersede incident management at the local level. It is only operational in an “Incident of National Significance,” which is defined in the NRP as “an actual or potential high-impact event that requires a coordinated and effective response by an appropriate combination of federal, state, local, and nongovernmental and/or private sector entities in order to save lives and minimize damage and provide the basis for long-term community recovery and mitigation activities.” Emergency Support Function (ESF) #8, the Public Health and Medical Service Annex, provides information specific to health and medical emergencies (see <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/frp/frpesf8.pdf>).

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM HHS

HHS is the U.S. government’s principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans. The overall goal of HHS’

preparedness and response program is to ensure sustained public health and medical preparedness within our communities and our nation in defense against terrorism, infectious disease outbreaks, medical emergencies, and other public health threats.

In a public health emergency, HHS’ responsibilities include:

- › Monitoring, assessing, and following up on people’s health
- › Ensuring the safety of workers responding to an incident
- › Ensuring that the food supply is safe
- › Providing medical, public health, and mental/behavioral health advice
- › Establishing and maintaining a registry of people exposed to or contaminated by a given agent

To fulfill this role, HHS works closely with tribal, state, and local public health departments, DHS, other federal agencies, and medical partners in the private and nonprofit sectors. Under the Public Health Service Act, HHS has the authority to:

- › Declare a public health emergency (HHS Secretary)
- › Make and enforce regulations (including those regarding isolation and quarantine) to prevent the introduction, transmission, or spread of communicable diseases into the United States or from one state or possession into another
- › Conduct and support research and investigation into the cause, treatment, or prevention of a disease or disorder
- › Direct the deployment of officers of the Public Health Service, a division of HHS, in support of public health and medical operations
- › Provide public health and medical services and advice
- › Provide for the licensure of biological products

CRISIS COUNSELING SERVICES

If there is a Presidential Declaration of Disaster, HHS’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has a cooperative agreement with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to administer the Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program. This program provides funds for crisis counseling, outreach, and training activities for direct and indirect victims of disasters and other emergencies.



The SAMHSA Emergency Response Grant program provides limited resources for communities needing mental health and substance abuse emergency response services when a presidential declaration of disaster has not occurred.

HOW HHS WORKS WITH OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

IN ALL EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In all disasters, HHS' Secretary's Operations Center becomes operational immediately upon notification and begins the collection, analysis, and dissemination of requests for medical and public health assistance.

HHS operates under the NRP in all situations involving an "Incident of National Significance," declared by the Secretary of Homeland Security under these criteria:

- › A federal department or agency acting under its own authority has requested the assistance of the Secretary of DHS.
- › The resources of state and local authorities are overwhelmed and federal assistance has been requested by the appropriate state and local authorities.

HHS FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PREPAREDNESS

HHS provides funding annually to states, territories, and selected municipalities to strengthen their ability to respond to terrorism and other public health emergencies. In 2006, HHS provided \$1.2 billion in funding—\$766.4 million through CDC to strengthen public health preparedness overall and \$460 million through HRSA to improve hospital preparedness. (Please note that as of December 2006, hospital funding is provided through the HHS Hospital Preparedness Program.) The latest funding information and news about HHS public health emergency preparedness activities can be found at <http://www.hhs.gov/aspr/>.

DHS also provides information on other grants related to disaster and emergency preparedness at <http://www.dhs.gov/xopnbiz/grants/>.

- › More than one federal department or agency has become substantially involved in responding to an incident.
- › The Secretary of DHS has been directed to assume responsibility for managing a domestic incident by the President.

Please refer to sections 4 and 5 of this guide for more specific information regarding food security and water/environmental issues, respectively.

IN A NATURAL DISASTER

- › DHS coordinates the federal response to a natural disaster, which may include floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, droughts, and epidemics.
- › As in all crises, the HHS Secretary's Operations Center will lead federal medical and public health support to local and state governments.
- › HHS will also gather and analyze data to help identify, monitor, and manage medical and health consequences for the public.
- › HHS' activities will be closely coordinated with several other agencies and organizations, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency under DHS, the National Guard and Reserve, and the American Red Cross.

IN A NATURAL OUTBREAK

- › HHS will, through CDC, work closely with local and state public health officials to identify, track, and monitor outbreaks of diseases.
- › Disease surveillance and detection systems, including NEDSS, provide the framework for communication of public health information throughout the nation and help public health officials detect and fight outbreaks.
- › In coordination with DHS, HHS will provide direct public health support—both staff and medical supplies—to a state, if requested by its leadership (see the NRP's Biological Incident Annex at http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/NRP_FullText.pdf).



- › Many federal agencies would play a role in the management of an outbreak considered to be an Incident of National Significance, such as pandemic influenza or serious emerging infectious disease.
- › HHS will lead all federal public health and medical responses for such an incident.

IN A BIOTERROR ATTACK

- › HHS leads federal public health and medical response in a bioterrorist incident because response and recovery efforts will rely on public health and medical emergency response.
- › The Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response will coordinate responses with DHS and other federal and state agencies from the HHS Secretary's Operations Center.
- › HHS will lead the federal public health and medical response to a bioterror attack (see the NRP's Biological Incident Annex at http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/NRP_FullText.pdf).

IN A CHEMICAL INCIDENT

- › HHS will work as part of the emergency management team in the emergency operations center of the agency with primary responsibility, the Environmental Protection Agency or the DHS/U.S. Coast Guard (see the NRP's Oil and Hazardous Materials Annex and ESF #10 at http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/NRP_FullText.pdf.) in the event that the emergency activates ESF #8.
- › CDC, through its Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov>) and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/emres>), will assume roles in evaluating chemical spills and environmental contamination and providing safety and health recommendations to responders (e.g., the wearing of personal protective equipment).
- › HHS will determine whether illnesses, diseases, or complaints may be attributed to exposure to a hazardous substance. It will establish disease exposure registries, conduct appropriate testing, and provide information on the health effects of toxic substances.

WHEN RADIOLOGICAL MATERIALS HAVE BEEN RELEASED

- › DHS is responsible for the overall coordination of incident management activities for all radiological or nuclear Incidents of National Significance.
- › If radiological materials have been released, HHS will work in cooperation with the emergency operations center of DHS and/or the agency it appoints as the coordinating agency. For example:
 - Radiological terrorism incidents would be initially coordinated by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), unless the material or facilities were either owned or operated by DOD or licensed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. In those cases, the respective agency would serve as the coordinating agency.
 - Radiological terrorism incidents include:
 - Radiological Dispersal Device** (e.g., radioactive material plus conventional explosives)
 - Improvised Nuclear Device** (e.g., "suitcase bomb," crude nuclear bomb)
 - Radiation-Emitting Device** (e.g., hidden, not exploded, radiological materials used to expose people to radiation, sometimes referred to as a "silent" source)
- › Management of an incident at a nuclear facility would be coordinated by the agency that licenses, owns, or operates the facility; this would be the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, DOD, or DOE. For nuclear facilities not licensed, owned, or operated by a federal agency, the Environmental Protection Agency would coordinate incident management.
- › In the event of a nuclear weapon accident/incident, DOD or DOE would serve as the coordinating agency, based on custody at the time of the event.
- › HHS will assess, monitor, and follow people's health; ensure the safety of workers and responders involved in the incident; ensure that the food supply is safe; and provide medical and public health advice.
- › If there is a mass casualty situation, the American Red Cross will take a lead role in management as well.



KEY HHS AGENCIES INVOLVED IN PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY RESPONSE UNDER EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION #8 OF THE NRP

- › Administration for Children and Families (ACF)
- › Administration on Aging (AoA)
- › Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- › Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)
- › Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- › Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
- › National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- › Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

There are many other agencies that work with HHS as part of the response to public health emergencies. For a list of these agencies, see Emergency Support Function #8, the Public Health and Medical Services Annex of the NRP (http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/NRP_FullText.pdf).

