



FEMA

Backgrounder

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL DISASTER MEDICAL SYSTEM (NDMS)

The National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) is a federally coordinated, public/private partnership, the purpose of which is to manage, coordinate and deploy an integrated national medical response. This capability assists state and local authorities to deal with the medical and other effects of major natural disasters, emergencies, or terrorist events.

Background

NDMS began in 1984 and works as a partnership between the Departments of Health and Human Services (where NDMS was first located), the department of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency within the Department of Homeland Security. The System has three components: direct medical care; patient evacuation; and definitive care. NDMS was created as a nationwide medical response system to: supplement state and local medical resources during disasters and emergencies; provide back-up medical support to the military and VA health care systems during an overseas conventional conflict; and to promote development of community based disaster medical systems. The availability of beds in civilian hospitals is coordinated by the VA and DOD through a system of Federal Coordinating Centers.

The NDMS medical response component is comprised of over 9,000 private sector medical, mortuary, veterinary medical and support personnel organized into 107 teams across the nation.

Current Activities

In 2003, NDMS (along with other components of the Office of Emergency Preparedness) was transferred to the Department of Homeland Security, and then into FEMA. Some activities were placed in the Preparedness Division (Noble Training Center and the Metropolitan Medical Response System program, which has since been moved to the DHS Office of Domestic Preparedness). Other activities were placed in the Response Division – some were placed in the Logistics Branch and the Response Operations Branch. The NDMS/medical section was retained in the Operations Branch.

As currently structured, the NDMS Section is responsible for team management, deployment, training, and staffing.

Deployment Activities

NDMS provides the lead for medical response during disasters and other events. Activities/functions/responsibilities include:

- Assessment of health/medical needs
- Provision of on-scene medical care and mental health services
- Victim identification/mortuary services
- Veterinary medical services
- At disaster sites, provide triage, austere medical care, casualty clearing/staging and patient reception at local NDMS reception area

- The NDMS Joint Management Team (JMT): responds to disaster areas; provides management support to deployed teams; interfaces with local disaster management system; and uses Incident Command System

Types of NDMS Deployments

While the rest of FEMA only operates during Presidentially declared disasters and events (Stafford Act), NDMS deploys for other types of activities as well, including:

- National Special Security Events (NSSEs) – NSSEs are decided by the U.S. Secret Service, and change from year to year. Examples of NSSEs include: State of the Union Address (annual); Republican and Democratic national conventions; Presidential inauguration and inaugural events; G-8 summits; World Bank summits; Olympics; and NATO 50th anniversary events. These deployments are not reimbursable, and must be paid from current appropriations.
- Major transportation accidents – NDMS deploys with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) to the sites of airline, train crashes to provide mortuary support to the local medical examiner, medical support to NTSB and other responders, and family assistance/mental health support to the families of the victims. Logistics Branch maintains two NDMS portable morgues and can deploy them along with a staffing unit to set up the morgue and the equipment and supplies. This activity is reimbursable, and is billed to NTSB.
- Public Health Emergencies – The Department of Health and Human Services can declare a public health emergency (flu pandemic, immigration repatriation, other public health mass casualty event). Upon request, NDMS can provide medical assistance at multiple locations. This is a reimbursable activity.
- International – At the request of the State Department, NDMS can provide medical/surgical teams ready to deploy overseas to provide medical care to U.S. embassies and humanitarian care. This activity would be reimbursed by the State Department.