

New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH)

Storm Guidance October 1, 2015:

Healthcare Facility Preparedness for Potential Impacts of Hurricane Joaquin

Due to the potential for heavy rains, strong winds, flooding, loss of power and other storm related impacts in the Metro New York City, Long Island and Lower Hudson Valley areas related to Hurricane Joaquin, the New York State Department of Health has compiled key guidance for Healthcare Providers to assist them in responding to this storm.

It is important to note that the National Hurricane Center does not have high confidence in the current track or intensity (as of 1000 on 10/1/15). This is subject to change over the next 12-24 hours. Due to this uncertainty, there may be impacts to numerous parts of New York State (similar to storms Irene and Lee in 2011). If the storm tracks more like a hurricane, the sustainment of tropical storm force winds is currently expected to be 1400 (2PM) on Monday October 5th (this is commonly referred to as “Zero Hour”). It is important to note that Zero Hour will change as the forecast changes. Facilities should plan to have all pre-storm activities completed by this time.

All Facility-based, Outpatient and Home Care and Hospice Providers:

All Administrators and managers should review their Emergency Response and Evacuation Plans to be ready to activate these plans, to ensure procedures are up to date, understood by staff and contact information for all key staff and response partners is current.

All facility based, outpatient, home care and hospice providers are encouraged to review plans for staff response that include: any necessary notifications and alerts to staff, adjustment of shifts and management of staffing shortages due to transportation impacts, securing needed supplies and preparations for staff that remain on site if roadways are not passable and what to do if communications are impacted. If warranted, facilities should consider bringing in additional staff to ensure sufficient coverage during the storm event and recovery period.

It is very important for facilities to test their emergency generators as soon as possible to ensure that they are operating properly. Facilities, particularly nursing homes with ventilator dependent patients, that identify problems with their generator operation, should immediately call for service, and inform their local office of emergency management if they are not able to have generator operations restored.

Facility fuel supply should be checked and necessary action taken to ensure that it is adequate to cover operations for the period leading up to the storm and for at least 72 hours following the storm. During and following the storm, facilities needing assistance due to prolonged power outages should make requests for assistance through their local Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

All facilities should ensure they have enough general supplies to last a period of at least 72 hours after the storm begins without expectation of delivery from suppliers. Now is the time to ensure supplies are on hand, ordered, and/or being delivered. During emergencies, facilities located in the 5 boroughs of NYC in need of services or supplies, should contact New York City Emergency Management. Facilities in need of assistance on Long Island and Westchester (or other parts of New York State) should contact their County EOC or County Office of Emergency Management if the EOC is not activated. It is important to note that facilities should rely on these resources as a backup and not the primary source should they need supplies pre-storm.

Adult Care Facilities (ACF):

Those ACFs without a generator should ensure they have adequate supplies of food that can be served without heating, and additional blankets and plans for keeping residents warm.

Homecare and Hospice:

Homecare agencies and hospices are encouraged to review patient care needs and consider adjustment of visits to ensure that Level 1 patients are visited prior to the start of the storm, and that these, and all patients are reminded of how to call for assistance if they lose their power or have a medical emergency.

Plans for adjusting staff schedules/prioritizing patient visits in the days immediately following the storm should be made, particularly if travel is still impeded, with a focus on reassigning staff based on proximity to patients so as to limit travel and reduce staff exposure to hazardous conditions. Agencies should also ensure that staff and their patients have enough supplies to cover a period of at least 72 hours following the start of the storm.

Agencies should be ready to contact staffing services if a large proportion of their regular staff are unable to travel and perform any of their normal visits for a period of time following the storm.

Agencies should also be ready to communicate with their patients during and immediately following the storm to perform checks on their safety and condition of their health.

During emergencies if agencies are in need of services or supplies they should contact their local Emergency Manager through the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

ESRDs:

Apart from communicating with the NYC or county offices of emergency management regarding any specific needs, ESRDs in the impacted area should also communicate with the New York State ESRD Network, which assists in planning and response and can also direct assistance to the providers. Dialysis centers should consider potential impacts on transportation services for Monday and try to schedule dialysis patients currently scheduled to come in on Monday for an earlier treatment.

Critical Preparedness and Response Information Systems Used During Emergencies:

Every facility must ensure that all ITS components necessary for disaster planning and response are supported by generator power. The NYSDOH Health Commerce System (HCS) is used for critical communications and data sharing. Several key response activities for NYSDOH Office of Health Emergency Preparedness, the Health Evacuation Center (HEC), and other agencies, emergency response partners and associations rely on applications that reside on the Health Commerce System Portal. A number of key data systems will be used to enable response in this event.

All of these systems require each facility to have staff with current HCS accounts and appropriate assignment in HCS Communications Directory roles that provide access to each system. The systems include:

- The HCS Communications Directory - all business and emergency contact information for key administrators and roles in the Communications Directory must be updated and accurate. This contact information is the main data source used by the NYSDOH alerting and notification system for sending emergency and informational notifications to providers, and conducting one on one communications and discussions where needed. If this data is not up to date, providers may not receive key information.
- Facility Profile Application – this application provides important information that is used in key decisions during a HEC activation. All facilities should ensure their profiles have been updated prior to landfall and impacts of Hurricane Joaquin. Role that must be assigned for access is: Facility Profile Coordinator. Sending activities should also contact facilities with which they have made evacuation send/receive arrangements to verify that these arrangements are still tenable.

- Health Electronic Response Data System (HERDS) - HERDS surveys will be conducted with Hospitals, ACFs and Nursing Homes to begin capturing data for evacuation for both beds needed and beds available. All facilities, both in and out of evacuation zones, will need to respond to these surveys. Additionally, a survey designed specifically for Homecare and Hospice providers will also be deployed through the HERDS system.

Roles that must be assigned for access to HERDS: HERDS Data Manager, or HERDS Data Reporter, or HERDS Survey Reporter.

- eFINDS patient tracking application: In the event that evacuation of hospitals, nursing homes or adult care facilities becomes necessary, the NYSDOH is reminding facilities that the eFINDS system will be used to track the movement of all patients and residents between sending (evacuating) and receiving facilities. All facilities should ensure that they know where their eFINDS supplies, i.e., barcode scanner, wrist bands, and paper tracking logs are stored, and that staff who have been trained on the use of the system are available to perform this function. If facilities have questions or need assistance with eFINDS use, please send email to: efinds@health.ny.gov and staff from NYSDOH will respond. Also, eFINDS quick reference cards are available on the HCS. Just enter “eFINDS” in the search box on HCS, and all eFINDS help resources will be available.
- Roles that must be assigned for access to eFINDS: eFINDS Data Reporting Administrator and the eFINDS Data Reporter.

Should evacuations become necessary, the NYSDOH will activate eFINDS and notify facilities to begin preparing their patients and residents with wristbands and registering their wristband barcode in the eFINDS system. Any evacuation operations will occur under the Operation titled “**10/3/2015 Hurricane Joaquin**” which has already been created in eFINDS. Any facilities that become involved in an evacuation due to the storm will be required to scan/record their patient/resident data under this operation. If a facility decides to evacuate prior to any formal evacuation order from a local chief elected official or notification from NYSDOH, must also use eFINDS.