

City Health Information

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New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS AND THEIR PATIENTS

- Establish an emergency plan for staffing, maintaining communications with patients, and storing medicines and vaccines if clinical service or electricity is disrupted.
- Identify patients who are most vulnerable to disruptions in care, including older adults and young children, people with disabilities or illness, people with low to no income or no health insurance, people of color, and people who require life-saving equipment.
- Continually discuss personal preparedness with vulnerable patients and their caregivers, including a family emergency plan, a supply of extra medications, additional batteries, back-up power or a generator for medical equipment, and alternative sites of care.
- Educate patients about resources that will be available to them in an emergency.
- Promote staff's self-care to enhance well-being and reduce the risk of burnout before, during, and after a disaster.

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Natural or manmade disasters can disrupt your practice and patient care. Certain patient populations are particularly vulnerable to disruptions in care (**Box 1¹⁻⁸**) and many are not adequately prepared to meet their health care needs during a disaster or power outage requiring evacuation.¹ In a 2016 survey, only 40% of New York City (NYC) households with a member dependent on electrical medical equipment reported being registered with a utility company to receive a notification before a power outage. Among respondents with household members who needed assistance with daily activities, only 59% kept emergency supplies such as the recommended 3-day supply of drinking water and nonperishable food⁹ and a working flashlight.¹



Because disasters are disruptive events, primary care practices must consider the physical and mental health impact on staff and patients when developing their preparedness plans in order to support health and functioning during the event and promote better long-term health outcomes.

PREPARE YOUR PRACTICE

Develop a preparedness plan

Consult online resources (**Resources for Providers**) for guidance on developing a practical disaster preparedness plan tailored to your practice (**Boxes 2^{2,4,9-13}** and **3¹⁴**). When developing the practice's preparedness plan

- involve multidisciplinary staff in planning,
- check your insurance policy to determine whether it provides adequate coverage, including business interruption coverage,
- identify other practices in the area where your patients can seek care if your practice is unable to stay open in the event of an emergency.

Review and update the plan once a year or after any exercise or real-life activation.

BOX 1. FACTORS THAT MAY MAKE PATIENTS VULNERABLE DURING AN EMERGENCY¹⁻⁸

Physical and mental health concerns

- Limited mobility
- Daily need for medication, especially critical medication such as methadone or insulin
- Dialysis
- Need for durable medical equipment
- Ages 65 years and older and young children
- Physical or cognitive disabilities
- Need for assistance in performing activities of daily living
- Vulnerability to extreme heat (see [Help Prevent Heat-Related Illness and Death Among At-Risk Patients](#))

Social factors

- Housing instability or homelessness
- Immigration status
- Lack of health insurance
- Social isolation
- Racial or ethnic minority status^a
- Living in a high-poverty area
- Limited access to transportation

^aResearch suggests that Black and Latino patients are less likely to have a 3-day supply of medication and more likely to experience poorer mental health outcomes postdisaster

Back up essential documents

Back up important documents such as^{9,10}

- office forms,
- policies, payroll information, and employee contact information,
- credentials,
- office inventory (for insurance purposes).

Keep paper and electronic copies offsite and also use a portable storage device for redundancy of the electronic documents.^{9,11} Test electronic backups quarterly to make sure they are accurate and complete.

Store extra supplies

Assess what supplies you may need to continue operations in the event of an emergency. See [Primary Care Emergency Management Program](#) for tools and templates.

Keep educational materials on hand

Provide emergency preparedness materials and resources in multiple languages in your practice's waiting room (**Resources for Patients**). Disaster mental health educational materials such as posters, brochures, and referral information may also be helpful to both patients and staff (**Resources for Providers**).

BOX 2. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLAN BASICS FOR PROVIDERS^{2,4,9-13}

The written emergency plan for your practice should include

- List of staff roles during an emergency
- Telephone tree
- Plan for communicating with patients, particularly those who need daily medication or medical equipment
 - identify a back-up phone service to offer a basic level of care during and shortly after an emergency
 - obtain alternative charging technology for cellphones, such as portable D-cell battery charger or solar charger
- Description of how your practice will function if your electronic health record system is inoperable
- List of alternative care sites where patients should go in case your practice is closed
- Location of essential documents, such as office forms, policies, payroll information, credentials, office inventory, and employee contact information
- Chart detailing the location of
 - essential medical equipment
 - office and emergency supplies
 - back-up power sources

PREPARE YOUR STAFF

Review disaster plans with practice staff. Discuss the responsibilities and limitations of their personal lives and reach agreement on event-related roles and responsibilities. Everyone exposed to a disaster will experience some level of stress. Acute stress can negatively affect your staffs' ability to cope and function. If left unmanaged, stress can adversely affect both physical and mental health in the long term. Ensure that you and your staff understand normal stress reactions and stress management so you can perform necessary tasks safely and effectively and prevent burnout (**Mental Health Resources for Providers, Staff, and Patients**).

Encourage all staff to learn psychological first aid

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a first aid technique for psychological injuries that reduces stress and supports functioning and coping (**Box 4¹⁵**). Psychological first aid is not a treatment for stress-related mental health conditions. Applying PFA does not require medical or specialized mental health training. All staff, including nonclinical staff, can learn and apply PFA (**Resources for Providers**).

PREPARE YOUR PATIENTS

Identify patients who may be especially vulnerable in a disaster

Systematically identify patients who may benefit from disaster preparedness counseling.

- Query your electronic health records (EHR) system to identify vulnerable patients according to your EHR system's features and your patients' diagnoses (eg, multiple sclerosis, congestive heart failure, dementia, functional impairment) and other factors (age, living on a high floor, or living in a flood zone).
- Consider creating a list of patients who may be particularly vulnerable in the event of an emergency.
- Ask patients to consider what additional assistance they may need during a disaster.
- Engage with case managers/patient navigators/care coordinators/health coaches working with patients with complex health care needs and other issues that make them socially vulnerable.

Counsel on disaster preparedness

Emergency planning: Proactively discuss emergency planning with patients (**Box 5^{2,4,12,16,17}**) and offer resources to help them create a plan, including

BOX 3. IF YOU KEEP A LARGE VACCINE STOCK¹⁴

- Develop a written vaccine storage plan that includes emergency procedures for
 - ordering vaccines
 - managing vaccine inventory
 - storing vaccines and monitoring storage conditions
 - protecting vaccine inventories, eg,
 - buying a portable generator and keeping extra fuel on hand^a
 - arranging 24-hour access to an alternative site, such as a community hospital, where vaccines and diluents can be safely stored
- Make the vaccine storage plan accessible to appropriate staff and keep a copy near the vaccine storage unit(s)
- Designate primary and alternative vaccine coordinators
- Review and update plan once a year or after any exercise or real-life activation

^aFor information on generator safety, see [Electrical Safety and Generators](#)

See the [CDC Vaccine Storage and Handling Toolkit](#) for detailed suggestions, including equipment considerations for storage units and thermometers

BOX 4. PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID¹⁵

The basic principles of PFA are to help people feel safe, calm, and connected with others; to enable them to feel control over some aspect of the situation; and to help them retain a sense of hope.

- Limit repeated exposure to disturbing media news and images
- Provide accurate and up-to-date information on issues related to patient care
- Educate affected people on stress reactions and management
- Identify each person's immediate needs and concerns and offer tailored help
- Connect people with services that support health, coping, and functioning, including alternative care sites
- Communicate in a compassionate, nonintrusive manner to create a calm environment
- Enhance a sense of safety by meeting immediate and ongoing needs, such as medication, equipment, food, and housing
- Provide physical and emotional comfort, including breaks for staff

See Resources for Providers for PFA training opportunities

information about special services offered by utility companies for people who use life-sustaining equipment (**Resources for Patients**). The NYC Health Department recommends that patients review and update the plan every 12 months and after any disaster or change in patient's health status. In addition, educate patients on the mental health impact of disasters and the importance of seeking help when needed (**Resources for Patients**).

Alternative sites of care: Help patients find an alternative site for care in the event their usual locations are unavailable,² especially patients who take methadone for an opioid use disorder, require dialysis, or have other chronic conditions.²

BOX 5. WHAT TO TELL PATIENTS ABOUT PREPARING FOR AN EMERGENCY^{2,4,12,16,17}

Make an emergency plan

- Visit online resources for guidance (**Resources for Patients**)
- Put together a go-bag of personal items (visit nyc.gov and search *go-bag* to learn more)
- Create a Personal Health Summary (see nyc.gov/health/healthsummary). Keep a copy in your wallet and your go-bag, and give a copy to a trusted family member or friend
- Always have enough medication to last for at least 7 days
 - contact your pharmacy to get a refill if you have less than 7 days' worth of medication left
- If you get your medications through a mail-order pharmacy and cannot get refills by mail in an emergency, take your medication label or a picture of the label to a local pharmacy; the pharmacist may be able to help you get a limited supply
- If you evacuate, take all your medications with you. Pack the original, labeled medication bottles or boxes with your name printed on them in your go-bag
- Keep medical equipment in an easy-to-reach place
- If you rely on oxygen, talk to your vendor about emergency replacements
- If you do not have access to oxygen, call 911 for immediate assistance
- Stay informed during the event (**Resources for Patients**)

For people who use life-sustaining equipment

- Programs may be available for people who use durable medical equipment (**Resources for Patients**)
- If utilities are included in your rent, you are still eligible to register for this program directly with the utility company

If you are having trouble coping, call NYC Well (1-888-NYC-WELL)

Heat emergencies: Advise heat-vulnerable patients to use their air conditioning during hot weather. If they do not have or can't afford to use air conditioning, patients can visit a city cooling center, which are opened during heat emergencies (**Resources for Patients**). Encourage low-income patients to visit myBenefits.gov or call the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) Hotline at 800-342-3009 to determine if they meet eligibility criteria for a free air conditioner.

See [Help Prevent Heat-Related Illness and Death Among At-Risk Patients](#) for detailed guidance on heat vulnerability and resources.

DURING AN EMERGENCY

Stay informed

Register for free resources (**Box 6**) to be sure you're informed of developments during an emergency and ensure staff are aware of any changes.

Communicate with staff and patients

Effective risk communication can help reduce stress and prevent the spreading of rumors due to uncertainty, especially during the acute postdisaster phase. Maintain communication with staff and patients to provide timely, accurate updates and instructions on staying safe and on accessing care and resources.

BOX 6. STAYING INFORMED ABOUT EMERGENCIES

- The [NYC Health Alert Network \(HAN\)](#) contains public health information for medical providers, including:
 - up-to-date health alert information, delivered to your inbox and archived on the web
 - online document library on public health topics
 - online community to exchange information and ideas with colleagues
- [Notify NYC](#) is NYC's official source for information about emergency events, providing alerts and updates on important City services. Registration is free; a downloadable app is available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/em/resources/notify-nyc-app.page>
- The [NYC Advance Warning System](#) delivers emergency alerts for organizations that serve people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs
- [Con Edison](#) and [PSEG](#) provide updates on power outages

To get City updates about a storm, go to nyc.gov or call 311

During and after any emergency, patients' needs can sometimes be addressed over the phone (eg, prescription refills and maintenance of chronic conditions). If possible, communicate by text messaging, which often works even when voice circuits are down.⁹

Monitor staff for signs of stress

Actively monitor staff for acute stress reactions and signs and symptoms of burnout. Administer or assign a staff member to administer psychological first aid if appropriate.

Seek or advise seeking help when normal, expected stress reactions worsen, persist, or interfere with daily functioning. Call 1-888-NYC-WELL (1-888-692-9355), text WELL to 65173, or visit nyc.gov/nycwell to chat.

AFTER THE EVENT

Your practice may be the first point of contact for patients with postdisaster needs. Resume treating patients as soon as possible and be ready to address the event's short- and long-term physical and mental health impacts, including new event-related conditions due to environmental exposures and trauma.

Continue to monitor staff and patients, especially those with multiple chronic conditions and preexisting mental health conditions, for signs of physical deterioration and stress. Refer to a mental health provider if appropriate.

SUMMARY

Establish an emergency plan for staffing, maintaining communications with patients, and storing medicines and vaccines if your clinic must close or electricity is disrupted. Identify patients who are most vulnerable to disruptions in care and continually discuss personal preparedness and local resources with them and their caregivers. Prepare yourself and your staff to manage stress and to provide PFA to patients and one another.

JOIN THE NYC MEDICAL RESERVE CORPS

The NYC Medical Reserve Corps (NYC MRC) is a multidisciplinary group of health professionals who can be called to serve during a public health emergency. NYC MRC volunteers

- Help distribute antibiotics and vaccine to New Yorkers during health emergencies requiring mass prophylaxis
- May also assist with medical surge capacity (eg, during a pandemic influenza outbreak) or mass sheltering operations (eg, during a coastal storm)
- Receive indemnification against liability through General Municipal Law section 50-K for actions taken when participating in MRC activities

Visit [New York City Medical Reserve Corp](#) to learn more or to register as a volunteer

RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

Emergency preparedness

- Community Health Centers & Private Providers: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/emergency-prep/community-health-centers-and-private-providers.page>
- Emergency Preparedness Toolkit for Primary Care Providers: <http://www.pacercenter.org/media/29523/pacer-mor-758%20emergency%20toolkit%20-%20final.pdf.pdf>
- A Disaster Preparedness Plan for Pediatrician: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/children-and-disasters/Documents/DisasterPrepPlanforPeds.pdf>
- CDC Vaccine Storage and Handling Toolkit: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/admin/storage/toolkit/index.html>
- Help Prevent Heat-Related Illness and Death Among At-Risk Patients: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/han/advisory/2018/advisory9-heat-related-illness.pdf>
- Heat Wave Preparedness Checklists for Vulnerable Population Service Providers: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/ehs/provider-heat-checklists.pdf>

Psychological first aid training

- NYC Health Department Mental Health First Aid Trainings: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/mental-health-first-aid.page>
- Psychological First Aid Online: <https://learn.nctsn.org/course/index.php?categoryid=11>
PFA online includes a 6-hour interactive course that puts the participant in the role of a provider in a postdisaster scene
- Psychological First Aid for First Responders Tips for Emergency and Disaster Response Workers: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Psychological-First-Aid-for-First-Responders/NMH05-0210>

Mental health

- Disaster Mental Health: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/emergency-prep/disaster-mental-health.page>
 - *Coping With Mass Shooting*
For hospital staff or patients who have been impacted by a mass shooting event
- Depression Action Kit: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/resources/public-health-action-kits-depression.page>

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RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS (continued)

- At Risk in Primary Care: <https://kognito.com/products/at-risk-in-primary-care> (requires a fee)
- Publications and Resources on Disaster Preparedness and Recovery: <https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-preparedness/publications-resources>
- Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Disasters and Other Traumatic Events: What Parents, Rescue Workers, and the Community Can Do: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/helping-children-and-adolescents-cope-with-disasters-and-other-traumatic-events/index.shtml#pub5>

Emergency alerts

- Notify NYC: www.nyc.gov/notifynyc
NYC's official source for information about emergency events and important City services
- NYC Advance Warning System: <https://www.advancewarningsystemnyc.org>
Emergency alerts for organizations that serve people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs
- NYC Health Alert Network (HAN): <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/resources/health-alert-network.page>

NYC Medical Reserve Corps

- NYC Medical Reserve Corps: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/emergency-prep/nyc-medical-reserve-corps.page>

City Health Information Archives: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/resources/city-health-information-chi.page>

- Diagnosing and Managing the Mental Health Needs of Adults Exposed to Disaster
Information on PTSD, depression, generalized anxiety disorder, and substance use disorder
- Clinical Guidelines for Children and Adolescents Exposed to the World Trade Center Disaster

RESOURCES FOR PATIENTS**Emergency alerts**

- Notify NYC: www.nyc.gov/notifynyc
NYC's official source for information about emergency events and important City services
- NYC Advance Warning System: <https://www.advancewarningsystemnyc.org>
Emergency alerts for organizations that serve people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs
- CDC Emergency Preparedness and Response: <https://www.emergency.cdc.gov/>
- SAMHSA Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery: <https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-preparedness>
- Con Edison: <https://www.coned.com/en/services-and-outages/text-alerts>
- PSEG: <https://myaccount.psegliny.com/user/login?DL=MyAlertProfile>

Emergency planning

- Ready New York: Guides and App: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/em/ready/guides-resources.page>
Emergency planning resources in multiple languages
- Tips for Prescription Preparedness: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/em/prescription-prep-tips.pdf>
- Personal Health Summary: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/emergency-preparedness/medication-card.page>
In multiple languages
- American Academy of Pediatrics. Family Readiness Kit: Are You Prepared for Disasters?: https://www.aap.org/en-us/Documents/disasters_family_readiness_kit.pdf

- CDC. Plan Ahead: <https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/prepareyourhealth/PlanAhead.htm/>
- Coastal Storm Preparedness for Durable Medical Equipment Users, Dialysis Patients and Individuals with Limited Mobility: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/emergency-preparedness/individuals-and-families-dme.page>
- NYC Emergency Management: Community Emergency Planning Toolkit: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/em/ready/community-preparedness.page>

Generator safety

- NYC Fire Department. Generator Safety: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/fdny/insider/events/2012/110112c.shtml>
- CDC. When the Power Goes Out, Keep Your Generator Outside: <https://www.cdc.gov/co/pdfs/Generators.pdf>

Cell phone service outage information

- Verizon Service Outages Information: <https://www.verizon.com/support/residential/service-outage>
- AT&T Support: <https://www.att.com/esupport/index.jsp>. Search for "outage"

Utility services for people who use life-sustaining equipment

- Con Edison Special Services: <https://www.coned.com/en/accounts-billing/payment-plans-assistance/special-services>; 1-877-582-6633 (TTY: 1-800-642-2308)
- PSEG (Rockaways) Critical Care Program: <https://www.psegliny.com/myaccount/customersupport/customerassistanceprograms/criticalcareprogram>; 1-800-490-0025 (TTY: 1-631-755-6660).

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RESOURCES FOR PATIENTS (continued)

- National Grid Life-sustaining Equipment: <https://www.nationalgridus.com/upstate-ny-home/storms-outages/life-sustaining-equipment>
 - Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island: 718-643-4050, or dial 711 for New York State Relay Services
 - Rockaways: 1-800-930-5003

Mental health

- Emergency Preparedness. Information for Individuals and Families: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/emergency-preparedness/information-for-individuals-and-families.page> *Information on preparing for and coping with disasters, including guidance for older adults, parents, and pet owners*
 - Health Bulletin: Stay Healthy in Emergencies: Plan Ahead (available in Chinese, Creole, Russian, and Spanish)

Heat-related illness

- Extreme Heat Safety Quiz: <http://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Heat/index.html>
- Summer Heat: It's Enough to Make You Sick: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/cd/keep-cool-bro.pdf>
- Extreme Heat and Your Health: www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/emergency-preparedness/emergencies-extreme-weather-heat.page
- Extreme Heat: www1.nyc.gov/site/em/ready/extreme-heat.page
- Cooling Assistance Program: <https://www1.nyc.gov/nyc-resources/service/3945/cooling-assistance-program>
- Cooling Center webpage: <https://www1.nyc.gov/nyc-resources/service/4843/cooling-center>

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS, STAFF, AND PATIENTS**Hotlines**

- NYC Well: English: 1-888-NYC-WELL (1-888-692-9355), press 2
Español: 1-888-692-9355, press 3
中文: 1-888-692-9355, press 4
Call 711 (relay service for deaf/hard of hearing)
nycwell.cityofnewyork.us
A 24-7 call, text, and chat line for people seeking suicide prevention and crisis counseling; substance use services; peer support; short-term counseling; assistance scheduling appointments or accessing other mental health services; follow-ups to ensure connection to care. Interpreters available in 200 languages

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24 hours a day/7 days a week): 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)

Meditation apps

- Kaiser Permanente. 14 meditation & relaxation apps reviewed: <https://wa-health.kaiserpermanente.org/best-meditation-apps/>

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Have questions or comments
about Emergency Preparedness?

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