

HEALTH ALERT

MULTI-HAZARD SEVERE WEATHER EVENT

January 9, 2024 & January 10, 2024

Guidance for Hospitals, Diagnostic and Treatment Centers, Nursing Homes, Adult Care Facilities, Homecare, Hospice and, Dialysis Centers

A powerful multi-hazard storm system will impact the region with very strong to damaging southeast winds, widespread moderate to heavy rainfall, and accumulating wet snow expected mainly above 1500 feet Tuesday into Wednesday.

KEY POINTS

- Winds are going to start picking up during the day Tuesday, strongest being Tuesday afternoon through first part of Tuesday night. Highest gusts will be across Western and Northern New York regions and the New York City coastline, with possibility of 60-70 mph wind gusts, though wind advisories, watches, and warnings have been issued throughout the state.
- Expecting widespread heavy precipitation, may be initially snow for some parts of Upstate. Rainfall totals could be over 3" in the New York City Metropolitan Area. Combination of melting snow and heavy rainfall will lead to risk of flooding and ponding of water on roadways and low-lying areas.

Additional information from the National Weather Service Alert Page can be found [here](#).

HEALTHCARE FACILITY PREPAREDNESS ACTIVITIES CHECKLIST

	Ensure that adequate staffing will be available for the duration of the storm.
	Check supplies to ensure that adequate supplies of food, medical supplies and bedding are sufficient for the duration of the storm if resupply becomes unavailable.
	Review emergency facility plans and test emergency standby power to ensure systems are in good working order.
	Consider appropriately re-locating patients who have needs consistent with electric power generation (BiPAPs, accommodative devices, electronic monitoring etc.) within the facility if the facility does not have facility-wide electric power generation abilities.
	Confirm that all systems necessary for disaster planning and response are supported by generator power.
	Review emergency plans and confirm 24/7 contact information for key staff in case emergent communication is needed.
	Check eFINDS supplies (i.e., barcode scanner, wrist bands, and paper tracking logs) and ensure that staff who have been trained on the use of the system are ready and available to perform this function.
	Update business and emergency contact information in the Health Commerce System Communications Directory to ensure important alerts and notifications are received by the facility.
	Request emergency assistance through the local Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and/or local Emergency Operations Center (EOC) if needed during and following the storm.
	Report disruption of services or infrastructure to the New York State Department of Health.
	Facilities in need of evacuation should immediately notify the appropriate New York State Department of Health Regional Office.

REMINDERS:

- The Health Electronic Response Data System (HERDS) - HERDS surveys may be conducted to capture important information regarding a facility's status during an emergency.
- eFINDS Patient and Resident tracking application: In the event that evacuation of hospitals, nursing homes or adult care facilities becomes necessary, the New York State Department of Health is reminding facilities that use of the eFINDS system will be required to track the movement of all patients and residents between sending (evacuating) and receiving facilities. If facilities have questions or need assistance with eFINDS, please email efinds@health.ny.gov.

Roster of Contact Information for New York State DOH Divisions

ALL Divisions Off Hours

(5:00 pm to 8:00 am, all weekends and holidays)

New York State DOH Duty Officer 866-881-2809

Division of Hospitals and Diagnostic & Treatment Centers (includes Community Health Centers)

Region	Title	Phone Number
Capital District	Regional Program Manager	518.408.5329
Central New York	Regional Program Manager	315.477.8592
Metropolitan Area	Regional Program Manager	212.417.5990
Western New York	Regional Program Manager	716.847.4310 (Buffalo) 585.423.8141 (Rochester)

Division of Nursing Homes and ICF/IID Surveillance

Region	Title	Phone Number
Capital District	Regional Program Manager	518.408.5372
Central New York	Regional Program Manager	315.477.8472
Metropolitan Area-NYC	Regional Program Manager	212.417.4999
Western New York	Regional Program Manager	716.847.4320 (Buffalo) 585.423.8020 (Rochester)

Adult Care Facility and Assisted Living Surveillance Program

Region	Title	Phone Number
Capital District	Regional Program Manager	518.408.5287
Central New York	Regional Program Manager	315.477.8472
Metropolitan Area	Regional Program Manager	212.417.4440 631.851.3098 (Long Island)
Western New York	Regional Program Manager	585.423.8185

Division of Home and Community Based Services

Region	Title	Phone Number
Capital District	Regional Program Manager	518.408.9436
Central New York	Regional Program Manager	315.477.8472
Metropolitan Area	Regional Program Manager	212.417.4921
Western New York	Regional Program Manager	716.847.4320 (Buffalo) 585.423.8121 (Rochester)

HEALTH CARE FACILITY GUIDANCE

Winter Storm Season 2023-2024

Guidance for Hospitals, Diagnostic and Treatment Centers, Nursing Homes, Adult Care Facilities, Homecare, Hospice, and Dialysis Centers

As the weather becomes colder and winter approaches, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) reminds facilities and providers to take the actions below to best prepare for the upcoming winter weather season. Winter weather storms can vary wildly in severity and length, so early preparation can help ensure safe and continuous operation during a storm.

For All Providers:

Leadership and staff at all facilities and agencies should review their Emergency Response and Evacuation Plans to ensure procedures are up to date and understood by staff and that contact information for all key staff and response partners is current. Staff should be ready to activate these plans when needed. Plans for ensuring adequate staffing should be reviewed, and should include the following:

1. the use of redundant communications if normal mechanisms are impacted,
2. necessary notifications and alerts to staff,
3. adjustment of shifts and management of staffing shortages due to transportation impacts,
4. securing needed supplies and preparations for staff who remain on site if roadways are not passable,
5. process for bringing in and housing additional staff prior to a storm to ensure sufficient coverage during the storm event and recovery period, and
6. emergency power.

It is very important that inpatient and residential facilities test their emergency generators prior to the winter weather season and before any storm to verify that they are operating properly. Facilities with ventilator-dependent patients that identify problems with their generator operation should immediately call for service and inform their local Office of Emergency Management (OEM) if they are not able to have generator operations restored.

Fuel supplies for generators and food preparation should be checked and additional fuel brought in to ensure that it is adequate to cover operations for the 24-hour period leading up to a storm and for at least 72 hours following a storm. Enough supplies of food, potable water, clean linens, and other necessary general items should be available for the same time period without dependence on delivery from suppliers.

During and following a storm, providers experiencing prolonged power outages or other storm impacts should make requests for assistance through their local county Emergency Operations Center (EOC) or should contact their county OEM if the EOC is not activated. Those providers located within the five (5) boroughs of NYC who need services or supplies, should contact NYC Emergency Management. It is important to note that facilities should primarily plan to gather necessary resources prior to the storm from their normal suppliers and rely on resources from their local OEM as a primary source of pre-storm supplies.

Homecare:

Homecare agencies 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 a forecasted storm and that all patients are reminded of how/who 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 to limit travel and reduce exposure to hazardous conditions. Agencies should also ensure that staff and their patients have enough supplies to cover a period of at least 24 hours prior to and 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 an extended period 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. A plan for managing situations where patients refuse to evacuate a hazardous situation should be developed and included in the Agency's emergency response plan. **Homecare agencies and healthcare providers should consider reaching out to their most vulnerable patients** and encouraging them and caregivers to be mindful of over exertion while performing strenuous outdoor activities, such as shoveling or snow removal. Cold weather puts an extra burden on the heart; individuals with cardiac problems and/or high blood pressure are at increased risk.

End Stage Renal Disease Providers (ESRDs):

Apart from communicating with appropriate local OEMs 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 and try to reschedule dialysis patients when necessary to provide an earlier treatment, prior to an expected storm.

Critical Health Commerce System (HCS) Applications Used During Emergencies:

Every provider must ensure that all computers and network infrastructure necessary for disaster response are supported by generator power. The NYSDOH HCS is used for critical communications and data sharing during emergencies. Several key response agencies, including NYSDOH, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOHMH), other NYS and NYC agencies, emergency response partners and healthcare trade associations, rely on data gathered within several key applications accessed on the HCS.

Every provider must ensure they have staff with active (current password) HCS accounts who are assigned to the roles (indicated below) in the HCS Communications Directory that grants access to each of the following HCS applications:

- *The HCS Communications Directory* – assure that all business and emergency contact information for key facility and administrative staff is up to date in the HCS Communications Directory. 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.

The HCS Communications Directory role that has access to make role assignments for their facility is the Healthcare Provider Network (HPN) Coordinator.

- *The Health Electronic Response Data System (HERDS)* - HERDS surveys may need to be conducted to capture important information regarding a provider's status during an emergency and providers must be able to respond to any survey that might be activated.

The HCS Communications Directory Roles that enable staff to access HERDS include: HERDS Data Manager, HERDS Data Reporter, HERDS Survey Reporter, Administrator, and HPN Coordinator.

- *eFINDS Patient and Resident Tracking application*: If hospitals, nursing homes or adult care facilities must be evacuated, the use of the eFINDS system will be required to track the movement of all patients and residents between sending (evacuating) and receiving facilities. Should evacuations become necessary, the NYSDOH will send a notification to facilities with instructions regarding eFINDS use for that emergency.

All hospitals, nursing homes, and adult care facilities should ensure that their eFINDS supplies are available (i.e., barcode scanner, wrist bands, and paper tracking logs) and that staff who have been trained on the use of the system are ready and available to perform this function on all shifts. **If facilities need assistance with eFINDS use, please send an email to: efinds@health.ny.gov.** eFINDS quick reference cards are available on the HCS and should be downloaded prior to the storm. Simply enter "eFINDS" in the search box on HCS homepage, and links to all eFINDS help resources on HCS will be shown.

Additionally, staff should be trained to use eFINDS even in the event of a power outage and loss of internet connectivity.

The HCS Communications Directory roles that must be assigned to staff to enable access to eFINDS are: the eFINDS Data Reporting Administrator and the eFINDS Data Reporter.

Cold Weather Injuries:

Staff and facilities should be aware of the signs and symptoms of cold weather injuries. These injuries can occur when patients and residents are exposed to extreme temperatures for an extended period of time without appropriate clothing. Hypothermia, frostnip, superficial and deep frostbite are examples of common cold weather injuries which can occur; staff and providers should familiarize themselves with the signs and symptoms and take immediate action to ensure symptoms do not worsen.