

New York State Department of Health

Important Informational Message

December 21, 2015

New York State Healthcare Provider Preparedness for Severe Winter Weather Events

This informational message is provided to remind providers of basic emergency preparedness activities that can help them to be better prepared to mitigate and withstand the effects of severe winter weather.

General Recommendations for All Providers:

New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) is recommending that all healthcare providers review their Emergency Response and Evacuation Plans to ensure procedures are up to date and understood by staff.

It is important to ensure that all contact information (business and emergency numbers) is available and updated for staff, key suppliers, repair services, patient/resident families, NYSDOH/New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOHMH) and local emergency response organizations. In case an impact of regular communications methods occurs, providers should review plans for use of alternate communications devices such as radio, or cellular/satellite or internet calling.

If you have a need to contact the NYSDOH after hours (5:00 pm to 8:00 am, all weekends and holidays) calling the following number will connect you to the NYSDOH Duty Officer line: **1-866-881-2809**. If your call is an emergency, press #1 at the voice prompt and you will be connected to the correct program representative.

All healthcare providers are encouraged to review plans for staff response that include: staff notification for when to report to work; management of staff absences or shortages due to transportation or other event impacts; and preparations for staff that remain on site if roadways are not passable. If warranted, facilities should have plans to bring in additional staff to ensure sufficient coverage during the weather event and recovery period.

Providers should ensure they have enough supplies to last a period of at least 72 hours after the severe winter weather begins without expectation of delivery from suppliers. During emergencies if providers are in need of services or supplies they should contact their local Emergency Manager through their local EOC or local Office of Emergency Management if the EOC is not activated.

Additional Recommendations for all Facility-based Providers:

Facility-based providers should test their emergency generators as soon as possible to ensure that they are operating properly. Those providers, 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. Adult care facilities that do not have generators should ensure they have adequate supplies of food that can be served without heating, and additional blankets and plans for keeping residents warm.

Facility-based providers should also check their fuel supply and take necessary action to ensure that it is adequate to cover operation for at least the next 72 hours. During and following severe winter weather, facilities needing assistance due to prolonged power outages should make requests for assistance through their local Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

Facility-based providers should ensure that as soon as possible and at all times, all entrances and egress locations are kept clear of snow, ice and other debris.

Additional Recommendations Homecare Agencies and Hospices:

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 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 contractors if a large proportion of their regular staff are unable to travel and perform any of their normal visits for a period of time.

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.

Additional Recommendations for End Stage Renal Dialysis Centers (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 Health Commerce System (HCS) Data Systems Used During Emergencies:

Every provider must ensure that all computers and networks, 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 during emergencies. Several key response agencies, including NYSDOH, NYCDOHMH, other NYS and NYC agencies, emergency response partners and healthcare trade associations, rely on the use of a number of key computer applications that are housed on and accessed through the HCS.

Each provider must ensure they have a cohort of staff with active (current password) HCS accounts and who are assigned to the HCS Communications Directory roles that provide access to each application, as indicated below. These applications include:

- **The HCS Communications Directory** – NYSDOH wishes to emphasize the importance of assuring that all business and emergency contact information for key administrative 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.
- **The 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 for Homecare and Hospice providers will be deployed through the HERDS.

Communications Directory roles that must be assigned to staff to gain access to HERDS: *HERDS Data Manager, HERDS Data Reporter, or HERDS Survey Reporter.*

- **The Facility Profile Application** – ([Active only for facilities located in the five \(5\) boroughs of New York City at this time](#)) – this application provides important information that is used in key decisions during the evacuation of facilities, and also enables facilities to create “send-receive” arrangements with each other in advance of dangerous weather to ensure safe relocation of patients and residents if evacuation becomes necessary. Therefore, all facilities [in the NYC counties only](#), should ensure their profiles have been updated at this time.

At the time there is an anticipated evacuation, those facilities that potentially may evacuate should verify with those facilities that have agreed to receive their patients/residents, that those arrangements are still tenable.

Communications Directory Role that must be assigned to staff to gain access to the Facility Profile Application: *Facility Profile Coordinator.*

- **The eFINDS Patient Tracking Application:** If evacuation of hospitals, nursing homes or adult care facilities becomes necessary, the NYSDOH 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. Should evacuations become necessary, the NYSDOH will activate eFINDS and send a notification to facilities using the HCS notification system with instructions regarding eFINDS use.

All facilities should ensure that they know where their eFINDS supplies are stored, (i.e., barcode scanner, wrist bands, and paper tracking logs) and assure that staff who have been trained on the use of the system are ready and available to perform this function. If facilities have questions or need assistance with eFINDS use, please send email to: efinds@health.ny.gov. Staff from NYSDOH will respond. eFINDS quick reference cards are available on the HCS. Simply enter “eFINDS” in the search box on HCS, and all eFINDS help resources will be available.

Communications Directory roles that must be assigned to staff to gain access to eFINDS: *eFINDS Data Reporting Administrator or eFINDS Data Reporter.*