

New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH)

Winter Storm January 23, 2017

Guidance for Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Homecare Agencies, Hospice, Outpatient and Adult Care Facilities

A winter storm arriving this afternoon across the State will have impacts including, rain, freezing rain, sleet, snow strong winds. Widespread minor and localized coastal flooding can be expected with the moderate effects in the Long Island area. Higher snow totals can be expected in the at higher elevations and in the normal snow belts of the State. Strong gusty winds can potentially cause localized power outages.

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 a forecasted 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 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. 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.

ESRDs:

Apart from communicating with appropriate local office 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 and try to reschedule dialysis patients when necessary to provide an earlier treatment when a storm is predicted.

Critical Health Commerce System (HCS) Data Systems Used During Emergencies:

Every facility 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 data systems that are housed on and accessed through the HCS.

Each facility must ensure they have staff with active (current password) HCS accounts and who are assigned to the HCS Communications Directory roles that provide access to each data system, as indicated below. These data systems 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 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, HPN Coordinator.

- eFINDS Patient and Resident tracking application: In the event that 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 with instructions regarding eFINDS use for that emergency.

All facilities should 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.

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”.