

**New York State Department of Health – Health Advisory**  
**Relief Efforts for Hurricane Katrina 9/7/05**

In light of the tremendous destruction and massive evacuations in Louisiana and Mississippi caused by Hurricane Katrina, federal and state agencies and professional organizations have been inundated with volunteer requests to support emergency response efforts. To assist the efforts at the federal level, the New York State Department of Health is working with the State Emergency Management Office (SEMO), the State Hospital Associations, the Medical Society of the State of New York (MSSNY), and the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) to coordinate volunteer efforts on behalf of the State. This effort is to both streamline and clarify the process for volunteering, activation, and deployment, as well as ensure that volunteers from New York State are provided with essential information, resources, logistical arrangements and liability protection,

The summary below outlines the process by which volunteers can be integrated into relief efforts. The NYSDOH recommends the following strategy by which to volunteer in the most efficient and effective way. More information regarding each option can be found in detail below.

1. State and local public health workers - volunteer through health department of employment
2. Hospital staff – volunteer through hospital-based teams
3. Local Medical Reserve Corps – volunteer through local MRCs
4. Individuals
  - a. Volunteer through DHHS
  - b. Volunteer through MSSNY and NYSNA databases for events within NYS

Other alternative mechanisms by which to volunteer are also described below.

**Volunteering through these mechanisms do not guarantee deployment. Assets will be requested and deployed based upon many factors, including: geographic proximity, availability, and skill set.**

**Volunteers should not report directly to the affected areas unless directed by a volunteer coordination agency. Self-dispatched volunteers can put themselves and others in harm's way and hamper rescue and recovery efforts**

#### **New York State and Local Health Department Staff**

- Public health workers employed by state and local public health agencies are being coordinated through the NYSDOH and the SEMO via the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). SEMO has developed an Intergovernmental Agreement which will enable public health department employees to volunteer under EMAC for relief efforts. This agreement will be forwarded by SEMO to County Emergency Managers for execution by the presiding officer of county or city government and returned to SEMO. Coordination of volunteers will occur between the local emergency management office, SEMO and the NYSDOH. Once this has been accomplished, public health employees who want to volunteer will be able to do so via skills survey, to be posted on the HIN (Health Information Network). Responses from Local Health Departments will be sent directly to the NYSDOH, and added to an ongoing database of potential volunteers.

EMAC is an agreement among 48 states to share resources during a disaster, and is a legislatively ratified organization that provides form and structure to interstate emergency mutual aid. Through EMAC, a disaster-impacted state can request and receive

assistance from other member states quickly and efficiently, resolving key issues upfront: licensure, liability and reimbursement. The EMAC agreement will also provide logistics of, and payment for, travel to sites where volunteers are deployed. More information about the EMAC can be found at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) web site at <http://www.astho.org/?template=1bioterrorism.html>, and also specifically at the EMAC web site at <http://www.emacweb.org/>.

### **Individual Health Care Providers Who Wish to Volunteer (including NYSNA and MSSNY Volunteers)**

- For multidisciplinary healthcare professionals and relief volunteers from non-public health organizations, the Federal Government is mobilizing and identifying individuals with expertise in several specific professional areas. Volunteers can go the CDC or DHHS websites, or call the DHHS toll-free number to register directly for appointment by DHHS to assist in Hurricane Katrina efforts.
  - CDC website
    - [http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/hhs\\_announcement.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/hhs_announcement.asp).
  - Department of Health and Human Services website and toll-free number
    - <https://volunteer.hhs.gov>
    - 1-866-KAT MEDI
- Individuals selected will be non-paid temporary Federal employees, and will be eligible for coverage under the Federal Tort Claims Act for liability coverage and Workman's Compensation when functioning as HHS employees. Travel costs and a per-diem will be provided. Questions regarding the online application should be directed to the Hurricane Katrina Volunteer Call Center at 1-866-KATMEDI (1-866- 528-6334).

**This should not preclude individual NYS physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and nurses who wish to volunteer within the state to continue to utilize the volunteer lists coordinated by the MSSNY and the NYSNA. The lists are not restricted to association members; non-members are welcome to participate. Although this system was available to assist with federal efforts, DHHS created an alternative and direct mechanism to solicit federal volunteers. However, should an event occur in the future within NYS, the expectation is that for the first 72-96 hours the State will need to rely on its own medical resources, prior to the arrival of EMAC or Federal assets. A list of critical clinical resources will continue to be imperative for New York's own response efforts. Additional information and applications can be found at:**

- NYSNA website
    - [http://www.nysna.org/rn\\_response/nr.htm](http://www.nysna.org/rn_response/nr.htm)
  - MSSNY website
    - [http://www.mssny.org/pub\\_health/Bioterrorism/DOHSURVEY31.pdf](http://www.mssny.org/pub_health/Bioterrorism/DOHSURVEY31.pdf)
- Individual health care professionals wishing to volunteer their services outside the scope of their hospital or health system can find information and sign up at <https://volunteer.ccrf.hhs.gov>. This is being coordinated by the Office of the Surgeon General.
  - The Medical Reserve Corps (MRCs) have been activated through the MRC National Program Office, in collaboration with the American Red Cross (ARC). MRCs and ARC

are seeking to deploy their volunteers to specific roles related to shelter operations. Each local MRC unit has been provided detailed information and an application packet for distribution to members who wish to volunteer. The ARC will deploy MRC volunteers and provide travel and lodging costs. Liability protections will be provided 100% by the ARC, and the ARC has established agreements with all states through Reciprocal Waivers to practice in other states. Additional information about local MRCs can be found at: <http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/index.cfm?MRCaction=MRCunit>

The Central NY MRC has developed a *Hurricane Katrina Activation Plan*, and is also a source for additional materials, the application process, and position descriptions for volunteers most needed at this time. Additional information can be found at their website, as well: <http://www.upstate.edu/medicalreserve/activation.php>.

## Hospitals

- The American Hospital Association is working with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and other national and state hospital associations to help coordinate medical relief efforts for hospitals and patients affected by Hurricane Katrina. The agency will mobilize up to 40 250-bed federal emergency shelters to stabilize and provide basic medical care to hospital and nursing home patients evacuated from the affected areas, as well as individuals with storm-related injuries. In order to set up these facilities, HHS will ask for assistance from the nation's hospitals in staffing and managing the centers. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.hospitalreliefforts.org/hospitalreliefforts/index.jsp>
- Hospitals or healthcare systems are developing institutionally-based teams to support these federal medical emergency shelters. The NYSDOH encourages individual healthcare providers to work with their hospital or healthcare system to pursue an inter-organizational agreement with SEMO to include hospital-based teams as a state asset through EMAC. This will enable the hospital teams to be deployed and tracked through the state, and afford members of the teams the same protections as state and local public health workers.