



EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & PUBLIC HEALTH **BLOOMINGTON**

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Public health implications in a natural disaster

Denise Dunn



Concern about the health consequences from Katrina prompted the Bush administration to declare a public health emergency for the entire Gulf Coast on August 31, 2005.

We have all been watching as the survivors of Hurricane Katrina face multiple health threats in the wake of this unprecedented disaster. Although we know we will never have to face a hurricane here, we do have our share of natural disasters to contend with, such as floods, tornadoes, and ice storms. So just what are some of the health threats that tend to follow natural disasters? Here's a run-down of some of them:

Drowning: With any natural disaster that involves water, drowning is usually the greatest cause of death. One of the greatest dangers is a flooded roadway. Two-thirds of the drowning deaths caused by Hurricane Floyd were due to people trapped in their cars.

Electrocution: Water conducts electricity and live power lines can be deadly— especially if they are downed or not easily visible.

Fire and carbon monoxide poisoning: Without electricity, people often turn to camp stoves, charcoal grills, and generators to supply their cooking and lighting needs. These items must be used out of doors as carbon monoxide can build up in enclosed areas.

Physical trauma: Cuts, bruises, broken bones, and more serious injuries are common in the aftermath of a disaster. Oftentimes it is during the cleanup phase of the event that many of these injuries occur. Life-threatening infections can occur if wounds become infected from contact with contaminated waters.

(continued on back)

Avian Influenza

Karen Stanley



Concern over widespread infection of avian influenza in humans has caused public health officials to monitor outbreaks of human illness associated with “bird” flu. Although avian influenza viruses *usually* do not infect humans, human infections and outbreaks have been reported since 1997. Most of these cases are thought to have resulted from contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. To date, there has not been documentation of sustained human-to-human transmission of avian influenza. However, viruses have the potential to change and may become more likely to spread easily between people.

Avian influenza viruses occur naturally among birds of all types. Wild birds carry the viruses in their intestines but usually do not get sick from them. However, these flu viruses are very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds very ill or cause death.

Symptoms of bird flu in humans included typical flu-like illness such as fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases and other severe and life-threatening complications, depending on which virus caused the infection.

There has been some preliminary success in developing a vaccine to protect against avian influenza but it will be several years before a vaccine will be ready for use.

If you are traveling to countries in Asia with known outbreaks of avian influenza avoid:

- poultry farms
- contact with animals in live food markets
- contact with surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals

CLINIC PARTNERSHIP MEETING

INFLUENZA UPDATE: Emergency Preparedness '06

Date: September 29, 2005 • 8:00 - 9:00 a.m.

Place: McLeod Conference Room,

Bloomington Civic Plaza

Contact: Denise Dunn: 952-563-4962

How prepared are you for an emergency?

Rosalind Johnson

September is National Preparedness Month. Are you and your family prepared for a large-scale emergency? While adults recognize the importance of preparedness, fewer than one in ten U.S. households have followed the guidelines set by the American Red Cross. These are:

Make a Disaster Plan

- Discuss with your family what to do and who to call in various types of emergencies
- Identify places to meet: one outside your home and one outside your neighborhood
- Identify a family contact person outside your city. Make sure everyone has this number
- Know where to turn off your water, gas, and electricity
- Know what to do about your pets (see inset)

Buy or Make an Emergency Disaster Kit

Gather supplies for a kit or buy a kit. Store emergency supplies in a backpack or container:

- A three-day supply of water (one gallon per day per person) and non-perishable food
- Clothing and bedding
- A first aid kit
- Battery-operated radio, flashlight, and extra batteries
- Candles and matches
- Toiletries and extra medications
- Games, books, cards, and toys for children
- Plastic sheeting and duct tape
- Whistle to signal for help
- Personal identification and medical information
- Cash or travelers checks

Disaster kits and first aid kits can be purchased through www.mplsredcross.org, local Target stores or online at www.target.com.

Be Informed

- Find out what your community is doing to prepare for an emergency
- Become trained as a volunteer in programs such as the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) or the American Red Cross

For more information, go to:

www.mplsredcross.org

www.ci.bloomington.mn.us/publichealth

www.ready.gov

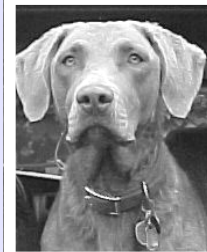
WANTED: Local health volunteers

In the event of a public health crisis or natural disaster, Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers would assist public health and medical staff. Duties could include answering hotline calls, dispensing antibiotics, giving vaccinations, and providing medical care.

To learn more call 952-351-5234 or visit the website at www.mrc-hennepin.org.

What to do with your pets in a disaster?

Hurricane Katrina made it evident that planning for pets in an emergency is crucial. Locally, we will be looking at this issue as we continue emergency preparedness plans for our community.



However, most emergencies are not of the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina. For most emergencies requiring evacuation, the Humane Society (HSUS) states you should take your pet with you. (Additional suggestions can be found online at: www.hsus.org)

- Make sure pet's ID tags are up to date and securely fastened to your pet's collar.
- Have your dog on a leash or cat in a kennel if you evacuate.
- Have dog emergency supplies in your disaster kit.

Public health implications *(continued)*

Gastrointestinal illnesses: Floodwaters are often full of sewage due to destruction of infrastructure. Drinking contaminated water, inadvertently or in desperation, often leads to diarrheal illness. Lack of refrigeration and poor sanitary conditions due to inoperative water systems can contribute to this problem.

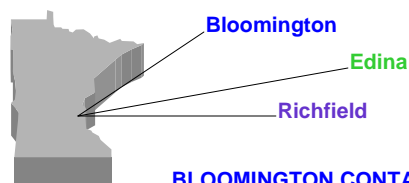
Pre-existing conditions: Many may have lost or left behind life-saving medications. This is especially a concern for those with chronic illnesses. These people are also often more susceptible to the effects of disease and weather extremes.

Mental health: The stress of surviving a natural disaster and possible loss of life and property takes a great toll. Bringing some degree of normalcy back to the lives of survivors as quickly as possible appears to help. Many will require support over a long period of time and will be vulnerable to psychological problems.

Both Katrina and the recent tsunami have called attention to the health implications of natural disasters. We will be analyzing "lessons learned" from these events as we continue to prepare within our own communities.

Information provided by Bloomington Public Health and funded through the Minnesota Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

Bloomington Public Health serves the communities of



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