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INTRODUCTION
Community assistance for disaster and emergency preparedness and response range from patient education to volunteer service inside and outside the community. Family physicians possess unique abilities, skills, and relationships with patients to help as a catalyst for better preparedness and response to disasters and emergencies in their communities.

This guide includes resources on standard methods of communication when responding to a disaster or emergency, volunteering during a disaster or emergency, and interacting with local health departments to both prepare and respond to disasters and emergencies.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT
The National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) training provide a comprehensive approach to managing a disaster or emergency.


VOLUNTEERISM
Many opportunities exist on the local and national level for physicians to train prior to a disaster or emergency and volunteer during an event. Training opportunities include:

- The National Disaster Life Support Foundation (NDLSF) offers training programs focused on disaster life support, mass casualty triage, and emergency medicine. More information about NDLSF training can be found at www.ndlsf.org.

- Many local training opportunities exist for basic and advanced life support training. Make sure your Basic Life Support (BLS) certification is current and consider becoming certified or recertified in Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS), Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS), and Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS).

- The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) offers year-round training in a variety of locations for the Advanced Life Support in Obstetrics (ALSO®) course at www.aafp.org/cme/programs/also.html.

- Consider joining your local medical response team or other disaster medical assistance team (state, regional, or national).

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)
The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) uses a variety of health care providers to supplement emergency and public health resources during disasters and emergencies. Qualifications require state licensure and other certifications as specified by the local unit. More information about MRC can be found at mrc.hhs.gov.

Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs)
Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs) are designed for rapid response to a disaster during the first 72 hours following a disaster. The DMATs’ responsibilities may include triaging patients, providing medical care, and preparing patients for evacuation. DMAT members are required to maintain appropriate certifications and licensure within their discipline. More information about DMATs can be found at www.phe.gov/Preparedness/responders/ndms/ndms-teams/Pages/dmat.aspx.
Emergency Systems for Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals (ESAR-VHP)
The Emergency System for Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals (ESAR-VHP) is a registration system which assists states in establishing a standardized health professional volunteer registration system that keeps an up-to-date list of volunteer identity, license, credentials, accreditation, and hospital privileges. More information about ESAR-VHP can be found at www.phe.gov/esarvhp/pages/about.aspx.

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
A Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program educates community members about disaster preparation and provides training in basic disaster response skills, including disaster medical operations. More information about CERT can be found at www.ready.gov/community-emergency-response-team.

Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Response Association (DERA)
The Disaster Preparedness and Response (DERA) organization is an international non-profit association that links professionals, volunteers, and organizations to prepare for emergencies. More information about DERA can be found at www.disasters.org/.

Non-government organizations
There are many organizations that respond during disasters and need medical volunteers. Most organizations such as the American Red Cross will require registration and training before accepting a volunteer.

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENTS
Consider contacting and becoming active in your local health department. Your assistance could be needed during a disaster or emergency. Public health departments work with you to develop your own plans and include you on any updates regarding disease activity in your area, how the health department handles reporting, or changes in community resources.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains a directory of nationally-accredited health departments by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). A list of those health departments can be found at www.cdc.gov/stltpublichealth/accreditation/departments.html.

For a directory of all local health departments, the National Association of County and City Health Officials has a tool to search for local health departments by state at www.naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory.