

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****September 12, 2018****Contact: HHS Press Office****202-690-6343****[media@hhs.gov](mailto:media@hhs.gov)**

## HHS Secretary Azar Declares Public Health Emergency in Virginia Due to Hurricane Florence

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar today declared a public health emergency in Virginia to prepare for potential impacts of Hurricane Florence. The declaration follows President Trump's emergency declaration for the state and gives Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS) beneficiaries and their healthcare providers and suppliers greater flexibility in meeting emergency health needs.

"As the President has emphasized, we are fully prepared to support communities that need our help because of the storm," Secretary Azar said. "We are working closely with state health and emergency management officials to anticipate communities' needs and be ready to meet them."

Secretary Azar acted under his authority in the Public Health Service Act and Social Security Act in declaring the public health emergency in Virginia and authorizing flexibilities to support CMS beneficiaries. These actions and flexibilities are retroactive to Sept. 8, 2018.

In addition to making this declaration, HHS worked with FEMA to pre-position approximately 400 medical and public health personnel from the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, the National Disaster Medical System and across the department, along with caches of medical equipment for HHS medical teams, so that they are readily available immediately after the storm. Approximately 150 additional HHS health responders are on alert to deploy if needed.

Approximately 300 ambulances are standing ready to assist with patient care, transport and evacuation. Two 250-bed Federal Medical Stations are staged to support care for displaced people with special health needs, including those with chronic health conditions, limited mobility, or common mental health issues.

The HHS Office of Civil Rights issued guidance to state and local agencies and community organizations to help ensure equal access to emergency services and the appropriate sharing of medical information during Hurricane Florence, including how federal civil rights laws apply in an emergency, how HIPAA laws apply in an emergency. OCR also provided a HIPAA Disclosures for Emergency Preparedness Decision Tool.

The HHS Secretary's Operation Center, managed by the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), remains activated 24/7 to coordinate federal public health and medical support, bringing to bear the federal government's full range of health-related assets and resources. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also activated their emergency operations centers to support the Secretary's Operations Center and to coordinate hurricane response activities across their divisions and with their state and private sector partners.

ASPR and CMS collaborated to provide information to state health officials in South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia on the number of Medicare beneficiaries who rely on dialysis or on special medical equipment at home and the type of equipment, such as oxygen concentrators, in the potentially impacted areas. This information assists health and emergency management agencies in saving lives, particularly after extended power outages.

HHS divisions continue to work with state and private sector contacts to prepare for the storm. FDA, for example, is prepared to assist manufacturing firms in the hurricane's projected path if needed after the storm. Potential flooding is one of the greatest concerns for manufacturing facilities.

To learn more about how to prepare, and for health safety information, [visit the HHS emergency website](#).

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