



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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Dear Colleague,

It has already been a long, hot, stormy summer resulting in severe health threats and we have not yet arrived at peak hurricane season. I would like to thank you for your ongoing efforts to provide your patients with the timely medical advice they need to prepare and implement thoughtful emergency preparedness plans. With your assistance I am confident that we can increase community resilience and decrease the loss of life and morbidity resulting from events such as hurricanes and extreme heat emergencies. This correspondence will focus on personal/family preparedness, business continuity planning for your practice and “medication preparedness” resources to share with patients as they plan for emergencies.

In medical practices, severe weather emergency preparedness begins by assuring that you, your staff and your families have an emergency plan and related resources. Excellent personal and family preparedness information is available at <http://www.vaemergency.gov/readyvirginia>. Once you are personally prepared and confident that a critical mass of staff will be able to work during an emergency, the next step is to be sure your practice or institution has a written and tested continuity of operations plan (COOP). Continuity of operations is not just an abstraction; when healthcare facilities are able to continue operating during a crisis they not only allow other scarce response resources to be directed elsewhere but help to provide a sense of stability to the community. The price that a community pays when healthcare facilities (including doctors’ offices, urgent care and dialysis centers as well as home health care providers) are not able to continue operations during emergencies is very high. Comparatively, the cost of preparing these healthcare facilities and their operations for emergencies is much smaller.

I would like to provide you with a brief overview of the steps for a health care COOP as outlined in the journal, *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*¹:

- 1) Similar to the risk profiling and stratification in clinical practice that influences prevention and treatment strategies for your patients, each region in Virginia has a slightly different emergency risk profile that impacts the type of planning required. Through communications with your local emergency manager (<https://lemd.vdem.virginia.gov/Public/>) or district health department director (<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/>) you can confirm the most likely hazards/threats in your area to be sure your practice’s planning efforts are most appropriately targeted.
- 2) Know the capabilities and limitations of your practice location’s mission critical systems (electrical power, water supply, HVAC, IT, communications).

¹ AB Bierenbaum, et al. Importance of Business Continuity in Health Care. *Disaster Med and PH Prep* 2009 3:57

- 3) Develop contingency plans should your power, water or other critical systems fail and consider ways to both lessen the impact of the most likely hazards/threats and enhance practice resiliency.
- 4) Before an emergency, communicate with your power, water and communications providers to be sure you are listed among their priority recovery groups. Seek formal agreements where possible.
- 5) Educate all staff on their roles in the COOP.
- 6) Evaluate and improve your plans at least annually as a result of planned exercises and real world experiences.

A COOP template is available at:

<http://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/BusinessContinuityPlan.pdf>

To facilitate emergency “medication preparedness,” I am providing a checklist as an attachment to this letter to share with your patients as they prepare for emergencies. You can assist their efforts by:

- Providing updated medication lists whenever there is a change in their medication regimens.
- Reminding them to keep a small “grab and go” bag of important medications, including over-the-counter drugs, in waterproof bags with a copy of their medication list in the bag.
- Encouraging them to refill medications while they still have a few days’ supply left.

Building resilience in our healthcare delivery system and assisting your patients with their planning can dramatically mitigate the impact of disasters and emergencies in Virginia.

Lastly, I would like to share that in an effort to improve communication and provide you with information to facilitate care, the Virginia Department of Health will be implementing an email subscription service. This monthly service is similar to the previously produced and very popular “Monthly Epi Bulletin.” If you are interested in subscribing and receiving our monthly email, please visit, www.vdh.virginia.gov/clinicians. From the Resources for Health Care Professionals web page, please click “Sign up” to be directed to the VDH Public Health Information Network. After registering with the VDH Public Health Information Network, you will be able to select topics of interest and as that information becomes available, begin receiving updates.

Sincerely,

Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP
State Health Commissioner

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR MEDICATIONS FOR EMERGENCIES

A CHECKLIST

- Always carry an up to date detailed list of all your medications with you.
 - The list should include the medication names, strengths, directions and prescriber.
- Keep a small “grab and go” bag of important medications, including over-the-counter drugs, in waterproof bags.
 - An extra copy of your medication list should also be placed in the kit.
- Refill medications while you still have a few days’ supply left.
 - The extra medicine can be put aside and stockpiled in your disaster kit.
 - After you obtain a refill, use the old labeled containers to store emergency supplies.
 - Periodically rotate the medications in the kit with new ones to prevent product expiration.
- If you have complex medication regimens, such as injectable medications or medications delivered by nebulizer, consider creating your emergency plans with the assistance of your pharmacist or the prescriber.
- Review the resource links below for additional detailed guidance and to create your own medication list

Resource links

- Tips to help you prepare
 - <http://www.safemedication.com/safemed/MedicationTipsTools/WhatYouShouldKnow/PreparingforEmergencies.aspx>
- Instructions for drugs requiring refrigeration
 - <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/EmergencyPreparedness/ucm085213.htm>
 - <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/EmergencyPreparedness/ucm085200.htm>
- Create Your Own Medication List
 - <http://www.rxresponse.org/PublicResources/Pages/EmergencyPrescriptions.aspx>