



THE SENTINEL

Reporting on Preparedness



Public Health

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In This Issue

Winter Preparedness	1
National Health Security Preparedness	1
Yellow Dot Program	1
Habersham Exercise	2
Influenza season	3
Colder winters	3
Celebrate Healthy N. GA	4

Winter storms highlight the need for personal preparedness

January and February 2014 may likely be remembered by many as the winter storms that shut down Atlanta and much of north Georgia, including those of us in District 2. If you were lucky, you did not lose power, but how prepared were you for a power outage? Many of us probably need to prepare more for these events and take steps to reduce the possibility that a weather event could potentially be life threatening.

The first step in preparedness is to anticipate likely events in your area that could quickly change into emergency situ-

ations and thoughtfully prepare for them. On that note, any weather incident has the potential of becoming less, or more severe, than meteorologists may forecast. This is because conditions affecting weather can change so abruptly. Therefore, it is important for every person to have an emergency kit for their home and vehicle.

Home kits need enough water and food to last each family member for 72 hours. Also, needed medications, specialty items such as baby formula and pet food

Continued on page 2

Index released for preparedness measurement and improvement

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, along with more than 20 public health organizations and associations, officially released the National Health Preparedness Security Index (NHPSI) in December 2013. The developers report that this is a first-of-its kind tool used to measure and advance the nation's readiness to protect people during disaster. The NHPSI is aligned with Presidential Policy Directive 8, the National Health Security Strategy, as well as other national measures of preparedness.



There are five domains specified in the new index including Health Surveillance, Community Planning and En-

agement, Incident and Information Management, Surge Management, and Countermeasures Management. States will be scored on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest and then scores will be averaged for an overall total. In 2013, the overall score for the U.S. was 7.2.

Information for the NHPSI is gathered at the state level, however local health departments can use the information for activities and plans thereby increasing the state's overall level of preparedness. This intent of the Index is to provide a snapshot of national preparedness to demonstrate progress and identify areas for improvement. For more information about the NHPSI, go to <http://www.nhpsi.org/content/results>

Yellow Dot Program now available in all U.S. states

Imagine a program that could aid response workers if they found an occupant unconscious or unable to respond. Now a simple, low-cost method for achieving this goal is available. Simply placing a yellow dot on the window of your vehicle alerts first responders that a corresponding yellow envelope containing passengers' valuable medical information and picture is in the glove box. This means that within seconds first responders can have a list of prescription medicines or medical conditions that you have



recorded in a matching booklet and placed in your car.

The Yellow Dot Program can also be used by travelers. A special passport-sized booklet, is available from some states, along with a luggage tag to indicate that information is in your luggage. The first Yellow Dot Program was started in Connecticut in 2002. All 50 states now have programs but with some variations. EMTs in all states have been trained to look for vehicles displaying the yellow dot. Go to http://www.myyellowdots.com/georgia_yellow_dot.php to learn about this program in Georgia.





Winter storms highlight the need for personal preparedness

Continued from page 1

should be included. Items such as flashlights or light sticks, a crank-type radio with weather band, personal hygiene items, warm clothing, blankets, and some cash (small bills and coins) are essential. It is wise to include copies of insurance policies, identification, a list of contacts and other important documents.

During a weather related incident, power outages caused by wind, ice, falling trees or limbs are common. A safe, approved alternate source of heat for these emergencies may be needed depending on the outside temperature. If using an alternative fuel source, make sure you follow safe operation instructions included with the device. NEVER use an unvented gas, propane or kerosene heating device indoors because these produce carbon monoxide, which can be deadly. If you are not sure what you need, seek the advice of an expert.

For your vehicle, make a small emergency kit with bottled water, granola bars, and seasonal supplies, like blankets for winter. Be sure to include a flashlight with bat-

teries, battery jumper cables, and a help sign.

Some people may want to expand the kit and include tools, tire inflator, tire gauge, tire repair kit, roadside flares, and reflective markers. Maps of the area may also be useful, and always make sure someone knows your destination and the route(s) you may take.

As with any stored item, routinely check your emergency kits to make sure all of the items are in safe working condition. Rotate water and food items to ensure that expiration dates have not been exceeded.

Before a potential event occurs, monitor your local news and weather to determine what actions you may need to take. Listen for instructions from authorities and follow their advice. Before and during the event remain in contact your family members, friends and neighbors to ensure they are well. Offer assistance if they need help or resources.

For more information about weather related incidents visit these websites: www.ready.gov www.noaa.com www.weather.com

Habersham County Medical Center, community partners hold table top exercise

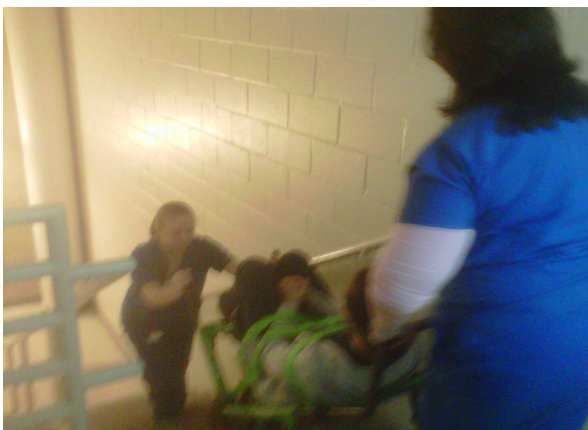
Evacuation of one or more floors, section, or even an entire facility is a real and present threat for hospitals and other short-and-long-term care facilities. To ensure that a facility evacuation plan is workable, organizations need to frequently test their plans and capabilities. Recently, Habersham County Medical Center and their community partners held a three-hour table top exercise to evaluate the following components of their plan: communications, resource mobilization and allocation, safety and security, staff roles and responsibilities, utility systems, and patient clinical and support care activities. The exercise scenario was presented in three modules with specific questions for

each section. In module one, smoke is discovered coming from an unoccupied second floor patient room. When the staff investigates, they discover a fire in the bathroom. This first module gave participants the opportunity to discuss emergency alerting protocol, as well as the communications plan. As the scenario unfolded, the group was asked to discuss the Incident Command Structure and possible changes in ICS as the scope of the event changes.

In the second module, community responders arrive and the group is asked to think about resources needed and how to handle the evacuation of patients on the affected floor. Other discussion points were changes in the ICS structure, public information, and safety concerns.

In the third module, the fire was extinguished and damage was assessed. This led to new questions about operations and clean up. The participants were asked to comment on resources needed, diversion and transportation needs for patients, and evaluation of the infrastructure of the hospital.

While exercises generally focus on a single event, like a fire as the cause of the emergency, the discussion that follows is applicable to many different scenarios. The interaction between the different departments and organizations builds the collaboration that helps communities become more resilient. This highlights why it is critical for community partners to exercise together.



Exercise participants demonstrate the use a stair chair for patient evacuation



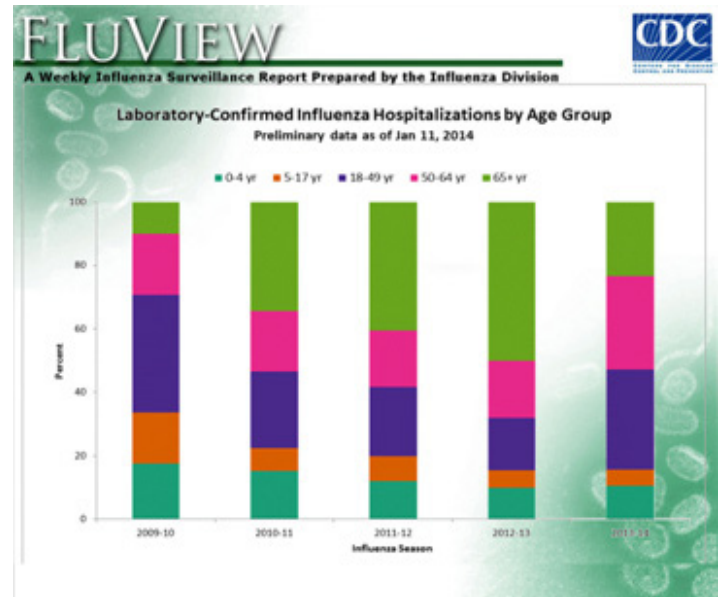
Influenza season sees higher numbers of youth and young adults falling ill

The 2013-14 flu season has been particularly more severe for youth and young adults as the virus continues to circulate. At the end of February, the Georgia Department of Public Health reported that 51 deaths statewide and over 800 hospitalizations in the Metro-Atlanta area were associated with influenza. This year the predominate strain was the H1N1 virus, the same strain that caused an epidemic in 2009.

According to the CDC, only about 40 percent of the people in the United States get vaccinated each year and how well the vaccine works can vary. Additionally, younger adults – especially those who are otherwise healthy – are less likely to get vaccinated. When you combine the numbers of people who have not previously been infected with H1N1, the number of people who do not get vaccinated and the possibility of waning immunity post-infection or post-vaccination, it's clear that many people in this country could still be susceptible to H1N1 infection.

Generally, influenza activity peaks in January and February and has followed the same pattern this season. Although activity in Georgia dropped back below the baseline in February, the severity of influenza illness remains high. Public health officials continue to encourage individuals that have not been vaccinated for influenza

that it is not too late to get the flu shot. Antivirals can also help ease the effects of influenza if taken within 48 hours of onset of symptoms. Because influenza can occur at any time of the year, and since the H1N1 strain has been active during the summer months in the past, experts agree it would be beneficial to get vaccinated even now.



Note greater number of persons age 18 to 64 in 2013-14 season

Future winters may bring colder temperatures, more snow to U.S.

The winter of 2013 in North America may be a taste of what is to come. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA), Arctic Report Card, arctic changes may be setting the stage for more severe winters in the United States, and even in the South.

Near record sea-ice loss and higher than normal temperatures in the arctic have forced colder air to push further south causing colder temperatures and a more

active winter in the U.S. Federal researchers report that summer sea-ice cover was the third lowest extent recorded since 1979, when satellite measurement began. Additionally, snow cover lasted the least amount of time in the Arctic since record keeping began in 1966, and Greenland reported record-setting high temperatures, ice melt and glacier loss.

NOAA researchers concluded that whatever is going to happen to the rest of the world, happens first and to the greatest extent in the Arctic. The report goes on to say that while individual weather extreme events cannot be directly linked to larger scale climate changes, recent data analysis and modeling suggest a link between loss of sea ice and a shift to an increased impact from the Arctic on mid-latitude climate. With future loss of sea ice, and more ocean area to absorb heat from the sun, we have a potential climate change contradiction. Rather than a general warming everywhere, the loss of sea ice and a warmer Arctic can increase the impact of the Arctic on lower latitudes, bringing colder weather to southern locations. For the report, go to: http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/reportcard/ArcticReportCard_full_report.pdf





Celebrate Healthy North Georgia initiative important to emergency preparedness

The Celebrate Healthy North Georgia initiative seeks to recognize the successful implementation of programs, policies, and services that improve the health of residents in our 13-county area. This collaborative includes District 2 Public Health, its partners, and stakeholders who desire to form partnerships to address the health and wellness issues and concerns that affect our residents.

Why is this initiative important to preparedness?

Research has shown that individuals who are healthy are better able to handle disasters. Furthermore, as communities and leaders work together to provide opportunities for health and wellness, entire communities benefit. This can be measured in the overall health status of a community. Preparedness efforts can be measured by the efficiency of community partners working together and depending on each other during times of crisis.

By exploring ways to utilize the environment and other resources for meeting the needs of its residents, communities can become more resilient and sustainable. Examples of past projects that met these criteria include community gardens, physical activity programs, employee wellness programs, and resource conservation initiatives. Every featured project can serve as an educational opportunity for residents to learn best practices and how to start programs in their communities.

How are nominees selected?

Twenty-one awardees are chosen each year from the 13-county area of District 2. Any organization, business, or individual, who has shown exemplary leadership in any area of health or wellness, can be nominated. Simply go to www.celebratehealthynorthga.org and complete the nomination form. Nominations are due in December of each year and the selection committee will notify award-ees when chosen. In January, the awardees are honored at the annual Celebrate Healthy North Georgia conference. The conference features workshops, displays, and speakers with a focus on celebrating the policies, initiatives, and programs that are improving the health of our residents.

This year's awardees were honored on January

16 at the Forsyth Conference Center on the Campus of Lanier Technical College, Cumming, GA. The 2014 award-ees included the following organizations, businesses and individuals and represented ten of the thirteen counties in District 2:

1. Gainesville Housing Authority
2. Family Life Center, First Baptist Church (Gainesville)
3. Hamilton Gardens, Hiawassee
4. Good News Clinic
5. Forsyth County Government
6. Activate4kids, Hall County Schools
7. Royston Housing Community Garden
8. The Redbud Project: A Model for Conservation
9. Spout Springs School of Enrichment
10. North Georgia Health Systems (Wellness Program)
11. Hart County Community Garden
12. Hall Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program
13. Evans Oglesby Foundation (Education and Wellness)
14. White County Schools 21ST Century Learning Center
15. North Hall Middle School
16. Farm-to-School Pilot Program - Hilliard A. Wilbanks Middle School
17. City of Clayton Community Garden
18. Forsyth County YMCA
19. Glory Seeds Farm
20. Emmanuel College
21. Lumpkin County Parks and Recreation



This year's awardees at Forsyth Conference Center

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