



Health Care Regulation Guidance Letter

Number: GL 23-0001
Title: Preparing for Hurricane Season
Provider Types: Abortion Facilities, Ambulatory Surgical Centers, Birthing Centers, Chemical Dependency Treatment Facilities, Community Mental Health Centers, Comprehensive Out-Patient Rehabilitation Facilities, Crisis Stabilization Units, End Stage Renal Disease Facilities, Freestanding Emergency Medical Care Facilities, Hospitals – General, Hospitals – Limited Services Rural, Hospitals – Psychiatric & Crisis Stabilization Units, Hospitals – Special, Laboratories – Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA), Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselors, Narcotic Treatment Programs, Portable X-Ray Services, Rural Health Clinics, and Special Care Facilities
Date Issued: June 26, 2023

1.0 Subject and Purpose

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) provides guidance to licensed acute health care providers. This letter outlines provider responsibilities and expectations and provides resources regarding preparing for hurricane season.

2.0 Letter Details & Provider Responsibilities

Health care providers face unique risks and challenges during hurricanes, including loss of refrigeration, thermostability, security systems, lighting, and communications.

Providers must maintain an Emergency and Disaster Preparedness plan and ensure that staff are fully trained on how to execute it.

2.1 General Information

The Atlantic hurricane season begins on June 1 and ends on November 30 each year. Coastal areas are especially vulnerable, but direct storm impact is not required for providers and facilities to be affected by hurricanes. Slow moving or stalled storms can cause some of the worst damage due to winds and flooding.¹

2.2. Planning for Hurricane Season

Providers should make sure that staff have time and resources to prepare for disasters. Providers should review Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Plans often and update them whenever necessary. Providers should plan to meet the needs of current patients or clients, as applicable, and a possible influx of patients or clients from similar programs and facilities. To ensure patient or client and staff safety, facilities should gather emergency supplies, such as food, water, and medical supplies early.

As hurricane season continues, providers should listen closely to communications from local officials and be ready to act quickly. According to the National Weather Service, a hurricane, tropical storm, or storm surge **watch** means dangerous conditions are possible in your area. The National Hurricane Center (NHC) typically issues hurricane watches 48 hours before it anticipates tropical storm-force winds.

A hurricane, tropical storm, or storm surge **warning** means dangerous conditions are expected in your area. The NHC typically issues a hurricane warning 36 hours in advance of tropical storm-force winds. A warning is more serious—staff and providers should follow their Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Plan quickly and evacuate immediately, if so ordered.²

2.3. Staying Safe during Hurricane Season

If the facility uses portable generators, it is important to follow all manufacturer safety guidelines. Never run portable generators indoors, even if doors and windows are open, as this can cause an accumulation of carbon monoxide. Facilities should always ensure carbon monoxide detectors are functioning and tested regularly. View the [CDC's Carbon Monoxide – Generator Safety Fact Sheet](#) for details. Facilities should post this fact sheet and share it with clients and staff.

¹ [Hurricane Safety Tips and Resources, NWS](#)

² [Hurricane and Tropical Storm Watches, Warnings, Advisories and Outlooks, NWS.](#)

Providers can experience secondary stress following disasters. Caring for emotional health can help providers respond to stressful situations more effectively. Providers should take advantage of mental health resources such as SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990³ and share these resources with both clients and staff.

2.4 Notifying HHSC of an Emergency/Disaster

When any licensed health care facility experiences a disaster that causes an emergency closure or change in daily operations or services provided, the facility must notify HHSC. Providers must ensure the safety of clients and then submit [Form 3215, Emergency/Disaster Notification](#) to notify HHSC of any resulting changes in the facility's operation due disasters, accidents, and other events that are out of the facility's control to as soon as possible after the change.

2.5 Requesting an Emergency Rule Exception for End Stage Renal Disease Facilities

End stage renal disease (ESRD) facilities may request an emergency rule exemption when facing an emergency or disaster. ESRD facilities requesting an emergency exemption to the ESRD licensing requirements must complete and submit [Form 1011, ESRD Facility Emergency Rule Exception Request](#).

Please note [Form 1011](#) is not a substitute for [Form 3215](#).

3.0 Background/History

As we enter the Atlantic hurricane season, HHSC provides guidance to health care providers on responsible hurricane preparedness planning.

4.0 Resources

CDC-promoted hurricane resources are provided below:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/>
- <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/prepare/ready.php>
- <https://www.ready.gov/hurricanes>
- <http://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/hurricane>

³ [SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline](#).

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) emergency-related resources are provided below:

- <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/Emergency/EPRO/EPRO-Home>
- <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/Emergency/EPRO/Past-Emergencies/Hurricanes-and-tropical-storms>

Department of State Health Services (DSHS) resources are provided below:

- <https://texasready.gov/>
- <https://texasready.gov/be-informed/>
- <https://texasready.gov/make-a-plan/>
- <https://texasready.gov/build-a-kit/>
- <https://texasready.gov/video-series/>
- <https://texasready.gov/resources/>

FEMA emergency-related resources are provided below:

- <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20230531/get-ready-now-hurricane-season-starts-tomorrow>
- <https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2018/08/16/proper-emergency-kit-essential-hurricane-preparedness>

HHSC's emergency-related resources are provided below:

- HHSC's Emergency Preparedness and Response webpages, provided at <https://hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/health-care-facilities-regulation/emergency-preparedness-response>
- <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/providers/health-care-facilities-regulation/emergency-preparedness-response>
- Health Facility Licensing Emergency/Disaster Notification form 3215, provided at <https://texashhs.secure.force.com/EMR3215/>
- End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) Facility Emergency Rule Exception Request form 1011, provided at <https://texashhs.secure.force.com/EMR1011/>

Mental health support and trauma resources can be found below:

- <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Watches, Warnings or Advisories for Texas, provided at <https://alerts.weather.gov/cap/tx.php?x=1>.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Resources specific to Chemical Dependency Treatment Facilities and Narcotic Treatment Facilities are provided below:

- <https://www.samhsa.gov/types-disasters/hurricanes-tropical-storms>

Texas Department of Transportation Hurricane Information and Evacuation Routes, provided at <https://www.txdot.gov/driver/weather/hurricane.html>.

To receive future updates, sign up for GovDelivery at:

<https://service.govdelivery.com/accounts/TXHHSC/subscriber/new>.

5.0 Contact Information

Email the Policies and Rules Unit at HCR_PRU@hhs.texas.gov if you have any questions about this letter.