

June 2008 Special Supplement

2008 Hurricane Season: A physician's guide

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Health First Information Hotline

(activated before impending storm):

321-434-8989

(select Option #4 for Medical Staff updates)

Experts are predicting an above-average probability of a major hurricane making landfall during the 2008 Atlantic Hurricane Season, which runs from June 1 until the end of November. It's of course vital that all physicians on the Medical Staffs of HF hospitals have the necessary information to facilitate the highest level of patient care during any emergency. Storm researchers with the Tropical Meteorology Project at Colorado State University are predicting 15 named storms during the 2008 Hurricane Season, with eight at hurricane strength. They also predict four hurricanes will become "major storms"—Category 3, 4, or 5 on the Saffir-Simpson Scale. This long-time, well-respected research project also predicts a 45-percent chance of a major hurricane hitting somewhere on the U.S. East Coast, including the Florida Peninsula. These annual predictions, while an inexact science, remind us that now is the time to prepare. While last year's Hurricane Season was mild compared to the predicted number and intensity of storms, we again hope for the best this year but must be prepared for the worst case in the event that some of the predicted storms form and impact our area. No one can fully predict any Hurricane Season's outcome but we can be fully prepared to handle any situation that develops.

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New for this Hurricane Season

- The expanded emergency generator system at CCH has been completed on the Northwest corner of the campus. The two-story structure houses three generators capable of providing campus power needs for several days. This expanded ability to power critical electrical, cooling, and sewage systems provides more flexibility during storms that may not require an evacuation for every storm — depending on a particular storm's predicted landfall and strength and evacuation orders determined by the Brevard County Office of Emergency Management. The new generator housing and system will also allow for a smoother re-opening following a major storm that does require the hospital to be evacuated. The generator system also provides the ability to protect vital medical supplies from spoilage or contamination during an outage of the municipal electricity system.
- Each healthcare system in Brevard County "adopts" a special needs shelter to help augment medical staffing needs. This year, Health First is assigned to provide assistance at the special needs shelter at Quest Elementary School in Viera. Health First Physicians and HF nurses will assist at the shelter as needed or assigned.
- The Pro-Health & Fitness Center in Viera that's nearing completion, with an expected Grand Opening scheduled in early September, will be available after opening as a respite/evacuation shelter for critical medical staff and their immediate family members.
- County emergency officials have agreed to treat your hospital Medical Staff identification (ID) badge as a "pass" to get you past roadblocks as needed to perform critical functions at the hospital and special needs shelter. Your HF ID badge will also allow you to be out past a curfew as needed as part of your physician work.
- Remind your patients to keep an adequate supply of their medications on hand in case of evacuations. Health First is working with county emergency officials to identify a number of pharmacies that can remain open longer before a storm and then reopen more quickly following an evacuation and will provide this list once available as a resource for your patients.

Inter-hospital cooperation

The Medical Staff Offices at CCH and HRMC/PBCH will work closely together during any storm that requires an evacuation at CCH:

- In the event of a hurricane approaching from the East/Southeast, our plan is for CCH-based associates and physicians to prepare the campus for evacuation. Typically storms coming from the West create the possibility of evacuation at CCH, while storms approaching from the East and Southeast lead to mandatory evacuation based on Brevard County mandates for evacuation of the beaches and barrier islands. If evacuations are ordered, all evacuated CCH patients will be transferred to HRMC.
- If a hurricane is approaching from Florida's West Coast, the hurricane plan may be partially activated based on variables such as predicted wind speed upon landfall, and the direction and strength of the storm once it crosses the Florida Peninsula. Since CCH may not be evacuated, such cases could generate a "shelter-in-place" scenario, with enough staff staying onsite at CCH during the storm event to care for patients who require hospitalization.
- If a physician with dual staff privileges at CCH and Wuesthoff Medical Center (WMC) desires that his or her patient be moved to WMC, this will have to be done as a transfer prior to CCH's evacuation, if beds are available, and according to WMC's protocol and approval.

Patient care guidelines for pre- and during storm periods

Based on discussions between medical directors involved in this process, here are our Medical Staff member care guidelines for the 2008 Hurricane Season:

- CCH Medical Staff members have the responsibility to provide care for their own patients transferred to HRMC or must *personally* arrange satisfactory coverage using the guidelines discussed below.
- Cape Canaveral Hospitalists will provide physician coverage at HRMC for those patients who have been assigned to their service.
- Health First Physicians (HFP) will provide a group of CCH HFP doctors to cover patients of hospital-practicing HF Physicians who are transferred to HRMC.
- Non-HFP doctors can request that Cape Canaveral Hospitalists cover their patients if the request is made ahead of time—physician-to-physician. Cape Canaveral Hospitalists have their own assigned patients to cover as well. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that they can accept responsibility for an additional large number of transferred patients.
- The referring CCH Medical Staff member is responsible for speaking with the covering physicians during the transfer process so that any care plans are thoroughly communicated.

During an emergency, the key link in this process will be the CCH and HRMC Medical Staff Offices, whose staff will coordinate the list of on-call physicians at CCH and HRMC and help facilitate the smooth transfer of your patients. The HFP medical group hurricane roster is based on the existing on-call schedule at the time an emergency is declared. Emergency Medical Staff privileges can be granted on a case-by-case basis in keeping with Medical Staff by-laws at each hospital.

Awareness & planning

Throughout Hurricane Season it's important to monitor news media reports and hospital communications for updates once a tropical storm forms. If a storm escalates in strength and our area is in the projected storm path, physicians need to stay in close contact with their hospital(s') Medical Staff Office for timely updates about emergency declarations. In addition to coordinating patient transfers before each storm, physicians at all three HF hospitals are expected to:

- Cancel elective surgeries and procedures beginning approximately 30 to 36 hours before predicted landfall of a storm to avoid lengthy post-operative hospitalization that strains the system.
- Assess all their patients for possible discharge 24 hours before an official evacuation order is expected, as we hope to avoid a high volume of discharges on the day of evacuation.
- Make plans for families and pets as there's not enough respite space available in the hospitals. Starting in mid-September, a limited number of physicians and family members will be able to respite at the new Pro-Health & Fitness Center in Viera as noted previously.

Emergency information sources

You should receive letters and personal hurricane planning information from your Medical Staff Office. During a storm, the Medical Staff Offices will be communicating via pager, phone, or in-person with each and every Medical Staff member who has patients impacted by the emergency. Our offices will also liaise with the large, non-Health First medical practices to help disseminate information about our hospitals as well as storm impact updates.

The **Health First Information Hotline** is accessible at **321-434-8989** and will be updated frequently during any storm emergency, with **Option #4** dedicated to Medical Staff-specific information. This information also will be available on the HF intranet, *Inside Health First*, under "Quick Links" > "Disaster/Hurricane" and through the www.health-first.org Internet portal "For our Physicians & Staff" under "Crisis Information Center."

After a storm

If medical facilities are closed by a storm event, it's important to get them re-opened and functioning as quickly as possible. Local utilities are supporting this need by designating our hospitals as critical infrastructures with the highest priority for service resumption. Health First Physicians and Cape Canaveral Hospitalists have pre-set assignments to assist with patient transfer back to CCH during its re-opening. Because cell phone and pager use may be limited by storm damage, it's the physician's responsibility to check the Information Hotline for instructions on when to begin hospital rounds. It's especially critical that all physicians with pre-assigned on-call responsibilities be available for duty and either call into the hospital or simply report for rounds as planned. Historically, cell phones, pagers, and answering services are unreliable during a storm so it's vitally important that physicians listed on the call schedule take the initiative and responsibility to report for duty and be prepared for possible respite at the hospital.

If you have questions or concerns about any issue during this Hurricane Season, please contact the Medical Staff Office at the HF hospital at which you have Medical Staff privileges.