

09/01/2005

Infectious Disease Advisory for Hurricane Katrina Volunteers

Rationale

This advisory is directed at those individuals who are entering the area impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Specifically this advisory is directed towards: utilities workers, rescue personnel, emergency medical services staff, fire fighters, military personnel, and law enforcement personnel.

Background

As operations in the affected areas continue, the risk of infectious disease is rising. At this point many people have sheltered in close quarters with limited or no access to running water or hygiene facilities. In addition, the flood waters inundating the area provide a medium to carry several infectious diseases. Currently, the Infectious Disease Surveillance Staff have received only isolated reports of diarrhea illnesses; however, the situation is expected to worsen. As such, volunteers should follow the guidelines below.

Food/water Borne Diseases

Many of the illnesses that we face in this situation are the result of people swallowing materials contaminated with feces. It is therefore important to wash hands as regularly as possible and utilize hand sanitizers if available. Additionally, avoid swallowing any water that has not been appropriately treated and only eat food that has been properly prepared.

- It is important to stay well hydrated while working in this climate and the following steps will help prevent disease. Currently, only bottled water is considered safe for drinking. If bottled water is not available, water from other sources is to be boiled for at least 10 minutes at a rolling boil. If this is not possible, disinfect 1 gallon of clear water with 1/4 tablespoon of fresh chlorine bleach.
- Food is essential for the optimal functioning of rescuers however it is important that only properly stored and prepared food be consumed. When possible rescuers should take advantage of the MREs or food prepared for rescuers at proper facilities. Do not eat fresh or cooked foods that have been contaminated by flood-water or that have not been effectively refrigerated or contained. This includes but is not limited to fruit and vegetables in the affected area.

Bloodborne Diseases

When handling patients or victims it is always important for rescuers to practice standard precautions to reduce their risk of blood borne pathogens. Universal precautions include wearing latex gloves when handling patients or body fluids.

Airborne Diseases

Tuberculosis is endemic to Louisiana and volunteers may encounter people who have the disease. Tuberculosis is usually transmitted by long-term close contact with people who are shedding the bacteria that cause the disease. At this time tuberculosis is not

considered to be a significant public health concern for volunteers. If a patient or victim is actively coughing, providing them with a surgical mask is an appropriate precaution.

Other Diseases

- Tetanus is a threat in any flood situation. This disease is caused by a common bacteria in the environment and can cause lethal infections. Tetanus can be prevented with proper vaccination.
- Any bites or scratches from animals that rescuers incur require immediate evaluation by a physician..
- All injuries should be promptly and properly treated at a triage center. All wounds should be cleaned and bandaged until evaluation.
- Animal and human remains may be encountered by rescuers. These bodies pose little infectious disease risk to rescue and recovery personnel however universal precautions should always be followed.

Vaccines

Vaccines are expected to be available to rescuers in the next 24 to 48 hours. The vaccines that have been ordered include Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Tetanus and Diphtheria. Vaccine will be made available to volunteers who have not previously been vaccinated for these diseases.