Preparation, Coordination and Communication Are Key in Ongoing Response, Recovery

By Mary E. O’Dowd, MPH, Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Health

New Jersey’s ongoing response to Superstorm Sandy is a tribute to the resiliency and resourcefulness of the people of our state—especially our first responders, health care professionals, volunteers and public health officials at the local, state and federal levels.

Many health care workers left their homes and families and slept in hospitals or nursing homes and worked double and triple shifts. Nurses from the Visiting Nurse Association and teams of health care professionals from the U.S. Public Health Service spent countless hours volunteering in shelters, providing medical assistance, wound care and emotional support.

Despite suffering storm damage, several EMS agencies continued to serve their communities. New Jersey received EMS support from 135 ambulance units from 5 states: Indiana, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Massachusetts.

Virtually every health care organization in the state was affected in some way. When rising flood waters forced the evacuation of Hoboken University Medical Center and Palisades Medical Center, staff accompanied patients to other Hudson County hospitals and then remained there on the job.

Newark Beth Israel Medical Center and St. Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston performed six life-saving transplants in a three-day span while on generator power.

Barnabas Health also created a disaster relief plan to help staff at Monmouth Medical Center in Long Branch and Community Medical Center in Toms River who were either homeless or without electricity, transportation or gas.

Hospitals like Jersey Shore University Medical Center saw Emergency Department volume skyrocket as much as four times the average and worked to find creative solutions to meet demand.

Doctors and nurses from Hackensack University Medical Center delivered a baby boy during the storm at a Mobile Satellite Emergency Department (MSED) set up in Hillsborough. The MSED then relocated adjacent to Ocean Medical Center in Brick, where 150 patients were treated in an effort to decompress area Emergency Departments.

The MSEDS is now supporting Jersey City Medical Center through its rebuilding period and a second MSED was deployed Nov. 19 to Long Beach Medical Center in Long Beach, New York.

AtlantiCare’s Mission HealthCare team ensured homeless people had medication and medical treatment by visiting them at a temporary shelter in Egg Harbor.
Hurricane Health and Safety Resources

Mold/Food Safety/Drinking Water
The Department of Health opened a hotline on November 1, staffed with public health experts who are available to answer questions on mold cleanup, food safety, and drinking water concerns. The public can reach the hotline either through the state's 2-1-1 system or by calling 1-866-234-0964.

Additional Mold Resources:
After a flood, what you should know about cleaning and mold removal.

Flood Clean Up Booklet

Mold Clean Up and Remediation
http://www.cdc.gov/mold/cleanup.htm

A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home
http://www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html

Fact Sheet: Clean Up Safely After a Disaster
http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/cleanup/facts.asp

HIGHLIGHTS
- Stay away from damaged buildings or structures that have not been examined and certified by an inspector.
- Wear hard hats, goggles, heavy work gloves, and watertight boots with steel toe and insole cleanup work.
- Carbon monoxide can cause illness and death.
- Remove and discard items that cannot be washed and disinfected.
- Never turn power on or off or use an electric tool or appliance while standing in water.

Mental Health Resources
The New Jersey Department of Human Services' Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services - Disaster and Terrorism Branch is coordinating statewide efforts to help individuals and communities manage the emotional impact of the storm. The Disaster and Terrorism Branch partners with the Mental Health Association in New Jersey to offer assistance through a toll-free Disaster Mental Health Helpline: 1-877-294-HELP (4357). A TTY line is available for persons who are deaf and hearing impaired at 1-877-294-4356. The federal government also has a Disaster Distress website and provides 24/7 crisis counseling and support resources available at 1-800-985-5990 or Text TalkWithUS to 66746. The federal Helpline is staffed by trained counselors from a network of crisis call centers located across the United States.

Hurricane Recovery Volunteer Opportunities for Health Care Professionals
Healthcare professionals interested in helping with New Jersey's response to Hurricane Sandy can register with the New Jersey Medical Reserve Corps (NJMRC) program. The NJMRC Program is a statewide county-based program that is comprised of healthcare professionals and community health volunteers.

Individuals can submit an application online to volunteer for an MRC Unit where they reside or work. Once the application is submitted, an NJMRC Unit Coordinator will be in contact. Contact information for all NJMRC Unit Coordinators in New Jersey is available on the NJMRC website.

Currently there are more than 5,800 volunteers statewide in 25 MRC units. Health care professional makes up approximately 3,800 of the volunteers and more than 2,000 are community volunteers.
The CDC, in collaboration with state and local health departments and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), is continuing to investigate a multi-state outbreak of fungal meningitis and other infections among patients who received contaminated steroid injections. This form of meningitis is not contagious. Several patients suffered strokes that are believed to have resulted from their infections. The investigation also includes fungal infections associated with injections in a peripheral joint, such as a knee, shoulder or ankle. CDC and public health officials are referring any patients who have symptoms that suggest possible fungal infection to their physicians, who can evaluate them further. Patients who received injections in peripheral joints only are not believed to be at risk for meningitis, but they could be at risk for joint infection.

Nationally, 490 cases have been reported by 19 states. There have been 34 deaths associated with this outbreak. New Jersey has reported 33 cases and no deaths.

Get the Facts on Antibiotic Resistance

November 12-16 was “Get Smart About Antibiotics Week”

- Antibiotic resistance has been called one of the world’s most pressing public health problems.
- The number of bacteria resistant to antibiotics has increased in the last decade. Many bacterial infections are becoming resistant to the most commonly prescribed antibiotic treatments.
- Every time a person takes antibiotics, sensitive bacteria are killed, but resistant germs may be left to grow and multiply. Repeated and improper uses of antibiotics are primary causes of the increase in drug-resistant bacteria.
- Misuse of antibiotics jeopardizes the usefulness of essential drugs. Decreasing inappropriate antibiotic use is the best way to control resistance.
- Children are of particular concern because they have the highest rates of antibiotic use.
- Antibiotic resistance can cause significant danger and suffering for people who have common infections that once were easily treatable with antibiotics. When antibiotics fail to work, the consequences are longer-lasting illnesses, more doctor visits or extended hospital stays, and the need for more expensive and toxic medications. Some resistant infections can even cause death.

For more on antibiotics visit: [http://www.cdc.gov/Features/GetSmart/](http://www.cdc.gov/Features/GetSmart/)

Video: Parents Want To Do What’s Best

When your child is sick, antibiotics may not be the answer. Work with your child’s doctor or nurse to learn how you can help your child feel better. CDC created a 30-second TV public service announcement to highlight this important information. You can view and download the video or access it on your mobile phone.

Meningitis Investigation

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Supporting Those Most in Need

In October, Governor Christie joined Commissioner O’Dowd at several events highlighting the administration’s unwavering support for New Jersey’s most vulnerable residents. Early in the month during a visit to Zufall Health Center in Dover, they highlighted a record $50 million in this year’s budget to community health centers to provide care to the uninsured. The center and more than 100 others like it provide quality care that improves the health of those they serve. Last year, more than 450,000 patients received needed medical and dental care at New Jersey health centers; and in total, there were more than 1.4 million patient visits to these facilities. Whether providing primary or preventive care, acting as a medical home or serving as the lifeblood of communities across our state, health centers play an indispensable role in keeping our residents healthy and improving quality of lives.

During a visit to Hunterdon Medical Center, the Governor and Commissioner promoted another initiative that strengthens the health care safety net—the New Jersey Cancer Education and Early Detection Program (NJCEED). NJCEED provides free screenings for colorectal, cervical, breast and prostate cancer to low income, uninsured New Jersey residents. The Governor has increased funding to the program by $3.5 million, and when combined with federal funding, the Department provides a total of $12 million to 21 NJCEED agencies in every county in the state. Survival rates are much higher when cancer is detected early and this program ensures that our most vulnerable residents have access to these life-saving services. Since the program’s inception more than 20 years ago, more than 121,000 residents throughout the state have received cancer screenings through NJCEED. More than 1,900 cancer cases have been diagnosed since 1993; and last year, the program provided 32,000 screenings to nearly 22,000 people statewide.

Later in the month, Governor Christie and Commissioner O’Dowd announced that the state was awarding 54 grantees more than 19.5 million in funding for the care, prevention and treatment of those with HIV/AIDS while visiting Hyacinth AIDS Foundation in New Brunswick. At the event, they spoke with clients whose lives have improved thanks to Hyacinth’s work and the state’s support. The clients’ stories were poignant and their experiences point to the progress that has been made in the treatment of HIV/AIDS. Now, if diagnosed early through testing, HIV/AIDS can be managed as a chronic illness, and people who are affected can live long and healthy lives.

Whether at a health center, a hospital or non-profit organization, there is a commitment in our state to help those who are in need of assistance. The Christie Administration and the Department will continue to work with our community partners to ensure the state’s safety net is strong and all residents receive the care they need.
Flu season is here and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Department are reminding everyone that the best way to prevent the flu is to get the flu vaccine.

Everyone who is at least 6 months of age should get the vaccine, especially if you are in high risk groups that include:

- Parents of infants/toddlers
- Parents of school-aged children
- Older adults
- Individuals with chronic health conditions
- Young adults
- Pregnant women
- Healthcare workers
- Individuals in close contact with these groups.

Two types of flu vaccine are available, a “flu shot” that is an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm; and the nasal-spray flu vaccine — a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that is given as a nasal spray. The viruses in the nasal spray vaccine do not cause the flu. The spray is approved for use in healthy people 2 through 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

Information on where you can get vaccinated against the flu in New Jersey is available on the Department of Health’s website at: http://www.state.nj.us/health/flu/findflushot.shtml.

Every flu season is different, and influenza infection can affect people differently. Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. Over a period of 31 seasons between 1976 and 2007, estimates of flu-associated deaths in the United States range from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people. During a regular flu season, about 90 percent of deaths occur in people 65 years and older.

The 2012-2013 influenza vaccine is made from the following three viruses:

- An A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- An A/Victoria/361/2011 (H3N2)-like virus;
- A B/Wisconsin/1/2010-like virus (from the B/Yamagata lineage of viruses).

Steps that people can take to help prevent the spread of the flu include:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.

Complete flu information is available at the CDC flu website: http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season-2012-2013.htm
Community Outreach & Events

October 2012

October 1 – Governor Christie and Commissioner O’Dowd toured Zufall Health Center in Dover. The Governor announced a record $50 million in funding to New Jersey’s 105 Community Health Centers.

October 2 – Governor Christie and Commissioner O’Dowd visited Hunterdon Medical Center to promote the DOH New Jersey Cancer Education and Early Detection program.

October 12 – Commissioner O’Dowd received the FDR Visionary Award for outstanding leadership and support of the March of Dimes and its Mission.

October 22 – Gloria Rodriguez, Assistant Commissioner provided remarks about the Department’s efforts to encourage breast feeding. The event was sponsored by Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, Hamilton and held at the RWJ Center for Health and Wellness.

October 23 – Governor Christie and Commissioner O’Dowd announced $19.5 million in HIV/AIDS funding for the care, prevention and treatment for those impacted by HIV/AIDS. The announcement took place at the Hyacinth AIDS Foundation in New Brunswick.

November 8 – Commissioner O’Dowd took part in a roundtable discussion at Jersey Shore University Medical Center to discuss the state’s and hospital’s response to Hurricane Sandy.

November 14 – Deputy Commissioner Dr. Arturo Brito celebrates National Rural Health Day on Nov. 14 with Theresa Berger, President and CEO of the Ocean Health Initiative.

November 20 – Commissioner O’Dowd takes part in the New Jersey Public Interest Research Group annual press conference on unsafe toys.

Staff Notes

Congratulations to...

Alison Gibson, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Health Facilities Evaluation and Licensing, on her appointment as President-Elect of AHFSA, the national Association of Health Facility Survey Agencies. The organization represents the state licensing and certification agencies in all 50 States.


Jeanette Bergeron, Executive Assistant, Health Facilities Evaluation and Licensing, for her presentation at the 5th Annual Public Performance Measurement and Reporting Conference on “Using Performance Measures to Budget.” The conference took place on September 21, more than 400 city, state, and federal employees attended.
**Hurricane Sandy**

...by the Numbers

- **2** The number of hospitals evacuated
- **5** Number of state shelters opened
- **11** The number of long-term care facilities evacuated
- **39** The number of acute care hospitals that lost power
- **60** Number of DOH staff who worked in Health Command Center and the Regional Operations and Intelligence Center
- **73** The number of conference calls hosted by DOH with partners
- **74** The number of assisted living facilities that lost power
- **100** Number of EMS Task Force units activated
- **127** Number of shelters at height of the storm
- **135** Number of out-of-state ambulance units, sent from 5 states, that assisted during the storm
- **137** The number of health care facilities that lost power
- **885** The number of health care facility residents evacuated
- **1,746** The number of email addresses that received Hippocrates updates
- **7,005** Number of households that lost power at the height of the storm
- **2.7 million** Number of households that lost power at the height of the storm

**NJ Newborn Screening Lab Keeps Hundreds of Babies Safe through Hurricane Sandy**

The following blog is available on the CDC website

Life-saving public health initiatives like newborn screening (NBS) can’t be put on hold, even during and after a devastating storm like Hurricane Sandy. In this guest blog post, Dr. Scott M. Shone, a research scientist and manager of the NBS lab at the New Jersey Department of Health, talks about his staff’s remarkable dedication and hard work to keep NBS testing going during the storm.

Dr. Shone’s lab is one of more than 70 NBS labs in the country that screens newborns within 48 hours of birth – a short but critical period when babies, even those who look healthy, are tested for hearing loss and certain genetic, endocrine, and metabolic conditions. The timing of these blood tests is critical because early detection, diagnosis, and treatment can prevent death or serious health problems later in life. Sometimes newborns need immediate medications or a special diet to save their lives or protect them from a lifetime of disability.

Please see the rest of the blog at: [http://tinyurl.com/9wm2r6b](http://tinyurl.com/9wm2r6b)
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Township until its offices reopened at the Atlantic City Rescue Mission and in the William L. Gormley AtlantiCare HealthPlex. AtlantiCare Behavioral Health staff made home visits or visited patients in shelters to ensure patients with severe and persistent mental illnesses had continued access to treatment and medication.

Hospitals like Robert Wood Johnson University at Rahway became true community centers, opening a community “charging station” in its lobby and offering hot meals from their cafeterias.

Sadly, 37 deaths have been tied to Sandy and at least five were attributed to carbon monoxide poisoning, mostly from the fumes of gas or diesel-powered generators.

I saw many of our health care heroes at work as I traveled the state. Among the hospitals I toured were Atlantic Regional Medical Center, Jersey Shore University Medical Center, Palisades Medical Center, Christ Hospital, Jersey City Medical Center and Hoboken University Medical Center. I also visited the shelter at the Atlantic City Convention Center and the New Lisbon Developmental Center, one of several medical needs shelters which the Department established.

The key to our success was preparation before the storm and coordination and communication during and after the storm. Our federal partners also provided incredible resources from free fuel for health care workers to Disaster Management Assistance Teams (DMAT), which provided medical care in shelters.

The Department’s Consumer, Environmental and Occupational Health Service has answered hundreds of calls on mold, food safety and drinking water concerns from homeowners and businesses who have suffered storm damage.

The Department’s Communicable Disease Service worked closely with a team from the CDC who conducted disease surveillance at the shelters.

Now that the recovery phase has ended and we have entered the rebuilding phase, I intend to host a series of conversations with communities so we can work together on lessons learned.

That discussion began last Friday when I joined leaders from New York and New Jersey at a meeting led by the U.S. Institute of Medicine and the New York Academy of Medicine to examine health care challenges in the response to the storm. The purpose of the session was to identify areas of research that would allow all states to be better informed so that we can strengthen our response in the future. I also participated in a panel discussion with New York Health Commissioner Dr. Nirav Shah and New Jersey Hospital Association President Betsy Ryan to identify obstacles and gaps the healthcare community faced during the storm and its aftermath.
Nearly half-a-million people die from tobacco-related illness (cancer, heart disease, stroke, lung disease) each year here in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That figure includes 11,000 New Jerseyans who are expected to die this year from smoking. You may be one of the 69 percent of smokers nationwide who want to kick the habit for good.

Quitting smoking or smokeless tobacco is not easy for most, but there are resources available to help tobacco users make a change. Sometimes small steps make for a great start. For instance, the Great American Smokeout held each November encourages tobacco users to attempt to abstain from tobacco use for just one day. And there are a number of tobacco cessation programs that can keep the momentum of that day going.

One resource available is the UMDNJ-Tobacco Dependence Program at The Cancer Institute of New Jersey (CINJ). Specialists can discuss a variety of treatment options, including the nicotine patch, gum, lozenge, nicotine nasal spray or nicotine inhaler – along with the prescription medications. These medications and nicotine replacement therapies help tamp down cravings and tame withdrawal symptoms. Such aids can be coupled with individual or group support as a way to explore behavior modifications. Such support is also available through telephone quitlines (1-866-NJ-STOPS).

So whether for better health, saving money, protecting others from second-hand smoke, or other reasons, there are many resources available to help you get started.

To learn more please visit www.cinj.org.

Michael Steinberg, MD, MPH, FACP, is a member of The Cancer Institute of New Jersey and director of the UMDNJ-Tobacco Dependence Program. He is also an associate professor of general internal medicine at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and an associate professor of health education and behavioral science at UMDNJ-School of Public Health.
New Jersey Hospitals Receive Organ Donation Award from HHS

The United States Department of Health and Human Services, on October 4, honored 404 hospitals, 38 organ procurement organizations and 174 transplant programs for their success in increasing the number of organs available and transplanted. Eight New Jersey hospitals were recognized for their achievements.

The following NJ hospitals received the Silver Medal of Honor for Organ Donation: AtlantiCare Regional Medical – City Division; Cooper University Hospital; Hackensack University Medical Center; Jersey Shore Medical Center; Morristown Memorial Hospital; Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital; and St. Joseph’s Hospital.

Newark Beth Israel Medical Center also received two Silver Medals for its heart and lung transplant programs. Transplant programs were recognized based on their performance on post-transplant survival rates, transplant rates and mortality rates after patients are placed on waiting lists.

CMS Report Shows Significant EHR Implementation for NJ Providers

New Jersey is seeing significant progress in electronic health record adoption, according to a recently released report from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

Since the start of CMS’ EHR incentive program, 3,482 New Jersey physicians and 66 hospitals have received federal funding for implementing a certified EHR. Combined EHR funding was more than $181 million. The report shows that hospitals received close to $118 million and physicians $62 million.

Despite a significant federal investment in technology, this funding does not cover the cost of EHR implementation, but does help incentivize progress. There are many difficult aspects for qualifying for the incentive funding that decrease over the next several years. Providers need to show that they are meaningful users of EHR systems and are required to use a certified EHR system that includes all the functionality required to replace a paper medical record. EHR vendors need to go through a rigorous process to get this certification. Hospitals that have developed a custom EHR system, such as Holy Name Medical Center in Teaneck, had to have their systems certified according to federal guidelines to qualify for incentive funding. These certifications are very difficult, but necessary to ensure EHR systems function properly and can enhance the quality of patient care.
New Jersey Pledges to Reduce Preterm Birth Rates

Commissioner O’Dowd attended the March of Dimes A Meeting of the Minds conference and announced that New Jersey has signed a pledge to reduce the state’s preterm birth rate by eight percent by 2014 to give more children a healthy start in life. New Jersey is one of 48 states, along with District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, who have signed on to the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials’ Healthy Babies Project. The initiative is in partnership with the March of Dimes.

Commissioner O’Dowd felt it was important for the Department to take a leadership role in setting this goal for New Jersey, where every year 10 percent of the more than 106,000 babies delivered in our state are born premature. Infants that are born preterm are at a greater risk for lifelong health challenges such as respiratory problems, cerebral palsy, vision or hearing loss or learning disabilities and death. Commissioner O’Dowd stressed that it is only possible to achieve the goal of reducing preterm birth through strong collaboration with public health partners, providers and community leaders.

The March of Dimes recognized the Commissioner last month at their Celebration of New Beginnings breakfast. She received the FDR visionary award for outstanding leadership and support of the March of Dimes and its mission.

Office of Nutrition and Fitness to Promote Healthy Lifestyles in Children in Partnership with Nemours

As part of a five-year cooperative agreement from the CDC, the New Jersey Department of Health’s Office of Nutrition and Fitness will partner with Nemours, an internationally recognized children’s health system, to assist early care education (ECE) providers to adopt healthy lifestyle practices in the childcare setting. The agreement, that was awarded in September, is funded at $4.2 million in the first year and is part of a six state initiative that will impact 84,500 children in New Jersey, Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, and Missouri. New Jersey was included due to the success of our work begun in the child care setting through ShapingNJ, our public-private partnership of more than 200 organizations collaborating to fight obesity.

The project will train ECE providers to make ongoing improvements in nutrition, breast feeding support, physical activity, and television and computer screen time policies. The project’s goal is to spread policy changes that will transform ECE programs.

“The best way to battle childhood obesity is to reach children as early as possible,” said Peri Nearon, MPA, Director, Office of Nutrition & Fitness, Division of Family Health Services. “By giving providers the resources and training to institute change you set the stage for long-term, sustainable outcomes that will impact obesity rates in New Jersey and the nation.”