



National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

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Infection Control and Prevention for the Volunteer Community

The following is issued by the National VOAD Disaster Health Committee, with reference to information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to help guide voluntary organizations in their efforts before, during and after disasters. This document is for informational purposes only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with health care providers nor does it replace or supersede guidance from the CDC, your local health department or organization.

Protect Yourself and Those You Serve

The safety and well-being of disaster survivors, responders and volunteers is of critical importance. The following information is a compilation of common health practices to reduce transmission of disease and protect you and those you serve.

1. Practice Basic Hygiene and Hand Washing

- Regular hand washing is one of the best ways to remove germs, avoid getting sick and prevent the spread of disease to others. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can quickly reduce the number of microbes on your hands, but sanitizers do **not** eliminate all types of germs. Always wash your hands and encourage others to do so, especially in the following situations:
 - After using the toilet
 - After touching garbage
 - Before eating food
 - Before, during and after preparing food
 - Before and after nose blowing, coughing or sneezing
 - Before and after every patient contact
 - Contact with contaminated objects or persons
 - Contact with an animal, animal feed or animal waste
- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and other shared items, especially after each contact by a person who is ill. Surfaces include the handles of doors, faucets and flush toilets; handrails, phones, refrigerator doors, steering wheels, soap dispenser tops and toys. Disinfect these surfaces in your home and public places such as an office.
- Practice respiratory hygiene. Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. Cough or sneeze into a sleeve where transmission is unlikely. If using a tissue, dispose of used tissues in waste containers.
- Practice proper wound care. Keep wounds clean and covered. If you have open cuts or sores, wash them well with soap and clean water, then keep them clean. If a wound develops redness, swelling or drainage, seek immediate medical attention.

2. Take action if you, or someone for whom you are caring, is known to have a disease, is exhibiting symptoms or is feeling ill.

- Workers who are sick should stay home and avoid contact with others.
- To reduce transmission, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- If you or someone for whom you are caring becomes ill, contact your health provider. Tell the provider about symptoms prior to going to the office or emergency room so arrangements can be made, if necessary, to prevent transmission to others in the health care setting.
- Know your organization's policy about providing direct patient care when you are ill.

3. Practice a safe and healthy lifestyle.

- Make sure your routine and annual vaccinations (such as seasonal influenza vaccination) are up-to-date.
- See your primary health care provider for regular check-ups and as often as directed.
- Eat healthy, stay active and get sufficient sleep. Good health can positively impact physical and emotional well-being.
- Take steps to recognize and reduce anxiety. Understand and be aware of how you process information. In emergency situations, you will most likely receive information from many sources, some of which may be inaccurate and cause unnecessary anxiety. To reduce stress, use a reliable news source such as the CDC or your local health department.
- Know when to seek professional help to maintain physical, mental and emotional health.

4. Be informed and have a plan.

- Know the policies and procedures of your organization regarding contagious disease, including where and how you would isolate an individual that could be infectious.
- Practice and communicate this plan to staff, volunteers, family and those you serve.
- Consider how you can address and dispel rumors and misinformation to reduce fear and anxiety.

For more information please visit the following:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - <http://www.cdc.gov/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration - <http://www.samhsa.gov/>