Hospitals in Evacuation Zones

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Hospital</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Hurricane Region</th>
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<tr>
<td>Beaufort Memorial Hospital</td>
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<td>Jasper</td>
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<td>East Cooper Medical Center</td>
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<td>Horry</td>
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<td>Encompass Charleston)</td>
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Changes This Season – Exemption and Hospital Maintenance of Essential Services Plans

There is a significant change in exemption procedures for general acute care hospitals this season. In prior years, when a Mandatory Medical Evacuation Order (MMEO) was anticipated, hospitals were asked to apply at that time to DHEC for exemption from the MMEO. This process may now be completed ahead of time by general acute care hospitals via the submission of Hospital Maintenance of Essential Services Plans to DHEC. Submitted plans are reviewed by DHEC, who assigns individual general acute hospitals the level of storms for which they may shelter and those for which they must evacuate. A separate exemption process, like the process in prior years, will not be established this season. In any instance, it is understood that the risk to evacuate some patients poses a greater risk than keeping them in a facility during the emergency, and sheltering of medically-fragile patients, as well as staff to care for them and to re-open the
facility, based on provider insight and knowledge is allowed. The following procedures provide guidance as a storm approaches our coast.

**Pre-Storm**

In addition to communication with DHEC regarding the Hospital Maintenance of Essential Services Plan, which should have been completed before a storm approaches, all hospitals in evacuation zones will review their hurricane evacuation and sheltering plans with local emergency management officials to ensure that all components of the area’s emergency response are coordinated and will function effectively and collaboratively during and following the storm.

Ensure that all of the following plans, at a minimum, are discussed:
- Census reduction/de-risking
- Evacuation
- Transportation
- Staffing
- Lodging
- Supplies for 96-hours post impact
- Reopening

Additionally, it is advised that general hospitals determine and communicate in advance with their staff who will be deemed essential during and after a storm.

At the state level, as storms develop, DHEC and SCHA will be in constant communication, and at the local level, the hospital and local emergency management should be in constant communication. When it is anticipated that a MMEO will be issued, SCHA and DHEC will contact the CEOs and emergency managers of the potentially impacted hospitals in the evacuation zones. For state level preparedness, these hospitals will be asked to inform DHEC and SCHA of their plans to prepare and respond to the impending hurricane. While the Order will include all licensed healthcare facilities in the zones, general hospitals, as members of the area’s emergency response structure, are required to coordinate their activities with DHEC in order to reduce the threat of harm to their patients, their staff, and others remaining in the coastal area.

**Mandatory Medical Evacuation Order – Exempted General Acute Care Hospitals**

Upon issuance of the MMEO, exempted general hospitals in the evacuation zone(s) will be listed in the MMEO and must maintain communication with DHEC throughout the event by email (ace-hq@dhec.sc.gov) or phone 803-898-3685 as well as:
- Reduce their census of patients;
- Cancel elective procedures;
- Maintain current information in the Critical Data Sheet (via RedCap platform);
• Provide facility-wide bed availability data through the Bed Availability Reporting Tool in PalmettoEOC and the evacuation survey tool;
• Maintain proper notification protocols internally and externally; and
• Shutter at the time of EMS stoppage and notify the public they will be shuttered during this time but may render aid, to the degree safely possible, to first responders or others who come to the hospital in extremis.

Mandatory Medical Evacuation Order – All Non-Exempt/Evacuating Hospitals (to Include Hospitals not Exempted for the Level of Storm)

All hospitals in the designated evacuation zones and/or counties listed and not specifically listed as Exempt in the MMEO must evacuate in accordance with the MMEO prior to the arrival of tropical storm force winds. General acute care hospitals that otherwise evacuate may, if they choose, shelter medically-fragile patients in accordance with the MMEO (see ‘Sheltering Medically-Fragile Patients’ section), and/or may shelter staff on site so they can re-open immediately following the storm. Such hospitals must:

• Initiate evacuation procedures;
• Stop admission of any non-emergent patients;
• Immediately begin reducing their census of patients;
• Limit services to emergent or essential patient needs (for example, dialysis, childbirth, medications, and chemotherapy);
• Notify DHEC of plans to shelter-in-place medically-fragile patients and/or staff;
• Notify DHEC immediately of any change in plans to shelter-in-place patients and/or staff;
• Inform DHEC of the number of patients and number of other persons who will shelter-in-place;
• Have a written plan on file with DHEC that provides for the safety of the patient(s), staff, and those remaining with the patient(s);
• Have a written plan that ensures there is sufficient food, water, medications, and equipment and other logistical support internal to the hospital to maintain every person within the hospital for ninety-six (96) hours post impact of the hurricane;
• Coordinate storm-related emergency services with local EMS providers to ensure the hospital’s emergency services are available when needed by EMS and other first responders;
• Have a written plan on file with DHEC addressing the provision of urgent and emergent services as soon as the storm has subsided, and it is safe for EMS to operate;
• Notify the public the facility will be closed from the time EMS in the hospital’s area ceases to operate until the storm has subsided;
• Shutter the hospital’s ED during the period that EMS is not operating (during this period, hospitals should render aid, to the degree safely possible, to first responders or others who come to the hospital in extremis); and
It is important to begin evacuating hospitals in advance of the approaching hurricane and prior to general population evacuation to ensure the safety of patients and staff. Recognizing that evacuation takes time, that it must be completed prior to the onset of tropical storm force winds, and that the needs of each hospital are different, each facility must keep DHEC, and county emergency management informed about facility capacity, census, and capabilities until such time after the storm that all services are deemed back to normal. Such notification to DHEC should be made by email at acc-hq@dhec.sc.gov or by phone 803-898-3685.

Non-exempted general acute care hospitals are expected to open the facility as quickly and as safely as possible following the storm.

**Sheltering Medically-Fragile Patients**

Under limited circumstances, a physician may determine that it is medically advisable for a medically-fragile patient to shelter-in-place in a hospital that has otherwise evacuated. In such cases, hospital management and the physician will weigh the risks of sheltering-in-place to care for the patient as compared to the risks of evacuating the patient. In this scenario, the hospital must:

- Obtain a written certification from a physician that the patient is too medically-fragile to be evacuated (the risk to the patient’s health or life by moving them is greater than the risk of remaining in the hospital during the emergency);
- Make reasonable efforts to consult with the patient or his/her legal representative prior to making a final determination to shelter-in-place a medically-fragile patient (in circumstances where a consultation is not possible, the hospital shall document in the patient’s medical record details of the efforts made to attempt a consultation);
- Inform DHEC of the number of patients and number of other people who will shelter-in-place;
- Have a written plan that provides for the safety of the patient(s), staff, and those remaining with the patient(s) during the sheltering-in-place; and
- Have a written plan to ensure there is sufficient food, water, medication, equipment, and other logistical support internal to the facility for ninety-six (96) hours post impact of the hurricane.

Notification to DHEC should be made by email at acc-hq@dhec.sc.gov or by phone 803-898-3685.

**Medical Needs Shelters**

DHEC will operate Medical Needs Shelters in various contracted locations outside of evacuation zones. To locate and refer someone to a Medical Needs Shelter or to see if they qualify, contact the DHEC Care Line at 855-472-3432. Triage phone lines are planned to open within 24 hours of the announcement of the MMEO.
Dialysis Needs

People needing dialysis services can contact:
  Network 6 (GA, NC, SC)
  IPRO: ESRD Network of the South Atlantic Toll-free Patient Line: (800) 524-7139
  Phone: (919) 463-4500
  Website: [www.esrd.ipro.org](http://www.esrd.ipro.org)

Returning to Normal

As operations return to normal, follow [DHEC’s established procedures](#).

SCHA and DHEC’s Process to Evacuate Patients

The Mutual Aid Agreement is automatically activated upon issuance of the MMEO. If the Mutual Aid Agreement is activated and a hospital needs assistance identifying bed placement for patient transfers, the evacuating hospital should follow the process below:

- The evacuating hospital contacts SCHA’s Emergency Preparedness team at 803-603-8580 or scdisaster@scha.org and states their hospital’s need for assistance in evacuating patients.
- The evacuating hospital provides the number of beds needed for the specific type of patient(s) needing transfer without providing any protected health information.
- SCHA will communicate with DHEC, and both will identify the hospital(s) that has(have) corresponding bed availability (receiving hospital) – Note that only hospitals that are part of the Mutual Aid Agreement will be identified.
- SCHA or DHEC will contact the designated representative and/or emergency manager listed on the Mutual Aid Agreement of the receiving hospital to confirm bed availability.
- Once bed availability is confirmed at the receiving hospital, SCHA or DHEC will connect the designated representatives from the receiving and evacuating hospitals for them to determine all transfer details between hospitals, including transportation.
- SCHA or DHEC will ask both facilities to confirm/follow up with one another once the patients have left the evacuating facility and have arrived at the receiving facility.
- If for any reason, state, federal, or other resources are needed, SCHA will communicate these needs directly to DHEC, and DHEC will activate these resources.
- If beds are no longer available in the state and out-of-state evacuations are needed, DHEC will coordinate evacuation with affected facility(s) and SCHA will activate coordinate all necessary federal resources.

DISCLAIMER: This document serves as guidance for mandatory medical evacuations of hospitals in preparation for a hurricane projected to impact South Carolina. SCHA and DHEC have developed this guidance together. However, all healthcare facilities remain subject to local,
state, and federal laws and regulations, as well as all directives in the Governor’s order(s) during the event. This document is guidance only.