



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

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June 7, 2023

MEMORANDUM

TO: North Carolina Immunization Program (NCIP) Participants

FROM: Amanda Fuller Moore, PharmD, Deputy Epidemiology Section Chief 

SUBJECT: 2023 Hurricane Season Preparedness

The purpose of this memo is to remind NCIP providers of the 2023 hurricane season and to ensure you are prepared ahead of time for severe weather conditions that might impact your facility. The 2023 Atlantic hurricane season is part of the annual tropical cyclone season in the Northern Hemisphere. It officially began on June 1, 2023, and will end on November 30, 2023. During the months of June through November, hurricanes or tropical storms could pose a threat to North Carolina. These threats can vary widely depending on where you live. It is not just those along the coast that can experience significant, life-threatening impacts. Proper preparation is key to successfully handling an emergency, whether it is a hurricane, unexpected power failure, or a refrigerator or freezer malfunction. A direct storm impact is not required to have effects from a hurricane. Some of the worst historical damage is from slow moving or stalled tropical storms, not hurricanes. If a hurricane makes landfall, the Immunization Branch will coordinate vaccine response efforts with Local Health Departments to deliver Tdap vaccine to locations in need. The time to prepare for a hurricane is now. We ask that you take the following steps and precautions to protect your vaccines before an emergency.

To ensure your facility is ready, please take a moment to review your vaccine storage and handling preparedness:

- Once you're under pressure, having a written plan will take the guesswork out of what you need to do to protect your vaccine supply.
 - Review and update your Emergency Vaccine Management and Routine Vaccine Management Plans.
 - Ensure all staff are familiar with emergency management plans including after-hours roles and responsibilities.
- Remember that in flood-prone areas, disaster threats to your facility may continue for days after the initial storm has passed.
- Suspend vaccination activities whenever possible **BEFORE** the onset of emergency

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conditions to allow enough time to prepare your office for the conditions expected.

- Vaccines should be sheltered in place, when possible. We request that you only move vaccines when it is apparent that you will be without power for an extended amount of time, and it is safe for you to do so.
 - Know where you will get your vaccine transport supplies now. It may be difficult to acquire supplies during an emergency.
- Make sure any vaccine supplies, such as ancillary kits for COVID vaccine, are stored on shelves off the floor to prevent damage from potential flooding.
- Set up and maintain a monitoring/notification system during times of inclement weather or other conditions that might cause a power outage.
- Test emergency generator(s) if you have them and review test log(s) to make sure the weekly/monthly tests are successful and verify enough fuel is available for at least 72 hours of continuous use.
- Review the vaccine transport guide(s) and verify that you have the appropriate packing materials to safely transport or temporarily store your vaccine.
 - https://www.immunize.nc.gov/providers/ncip/pdf/transport_guidance.pdf for general vaccine transport guidance
 - <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/media/3070/download?attachment> for COVID-specific guidance
- Use a CDC acceptable certified, calibrated digital data logger to monitor temperatures. Place new batteries in your digital data logger thermometers. If the primary data logger can easily be moved, it may be packed with the vaccine being transported if a backup is not available.
- Confirm that your staff have a current Tdap booster as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). If not, make plans now to fully immunize all staff members, so they are protected before an emergency occurs.

Key points to remember if a power failure occurs:

- Determine the cause of the power failure and estimate the time it will take to restore power. If a time frame for the restoration of power cannot be determined, do not leave vaccine in a non-working unit.
- Maintain thermal conditions during a power outage, never open the storage unit door until power is restored or it is determined that vaccines need to be packed in separate storage containers and/or transported to an alternative storage facility. The storage unit temperature may be maintained with the proper amount of water bottles in the refrigerator and frozen water bottles in the freezer. You should have at least a case (24) of 8 or 16.9 fluid ounce frozen water bottles on-site, that can be conditioned and used for transport.
- Begin preparing for your emergency procedure – shelter in place or transport, if necessary – after 30 minutes of a power outage. This includes pre-chilling on-site coolers or calling your emergency back-up location to prepare for your probable arrival. Please consider the type of vaccine you are transporting and the storage capacity at the location to which the vaccine is being moved.
- Place a digital data logger with your vaccines during transport and monitor the data logger thermometer to ensure vaccines remain within the appropriate temperature range(s). It is critical to avoid freezing vaccine during transport (improperly packing vaccine with ice can damage vaccines). Damage to the immunogenicity of a vaccine exposed to temperatures outside of the recommended range might not be visually

apparent.

- Do not wait for refrigerator temperatures to reach 8°C (46° F) or freezer temperatures to reach -15°C (5°F) to begin your emergency vaccine procedures. **Reminder:** immediate action is required when temperatures fall outside the recommended range(s).
- Document the date and time vaccines were moved to the back-up location and monitor temperatures in the back-up refrigerator/freezer where vaccines are stored. Back-up storage units must adhere to the same requirements as the primary storage units.

When power has been restored:

- Record the temperature in the unit as soon as possible after power has been restored. Continue to monitor the temperatures until they reach the normal 2–8°C range in the refrigerator, or -15°C or colder in the freezer. Be sure to record the duration of increased temperature exposure and the maximum temperature observed.
- Keep exposed vaccine separated from any new product you receive and continue to store at the proper temperature(s), if possible. Please note that during natural disasters which may impact large geographical areas, vaccine shipments could be suspended due to road conditions.
- Do not discard or administer vaccines exposed to out-of-range temperatures. Mark exposed vaccine with the date and time and label “DO NOT USE,” move the exposed vaccine to an approved working storage unit at your back-up location and contact the Immunization Branch at 1-877-873-6247, to report the incident and for further instruction.

Additional guidance on vaccine storage and handling is available from the CDC at: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/admin/storage/index.html>.

If you have an urgent question, please call the Immunization Branch at 1-877-873-6247. Note that the Immunization Branch may be closed during times of inclement weather, but if you leave a message one of our helpdesk staff will return your call as soon as possible. Messages left after 5 p.m. will be returned as soon as possible on the next business day.

Please regularly check the Immunization Branch website (<https://immunize.nc.gov>) or the North Carolina Immunization Registry announcements to ensure you have the most up-to-date information possible.

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