



EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT NEWS
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Homeland Security and Emergency Management
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State officials answer reporters' questions about H1N1 flu at a news briefing on Aug. 13. (l-r) Kathleen Murphy of the Department of Education; Gov. Lynch; Chris Pope, Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management and Dr. Jose Montero, Director of Public Health Services.

STATE PREPARES FOR H1N1 FLU AS SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS – With students about to head back to school, public health and education officials in New Hampshire are concerned about the return of the H1N1 flu. But according to Dr. Jose Montero, the state's Director of Public Health, it never really went away. Cases of the disease, including New Hampshire's first fatality (see below), continued to occur through the summer months. The World Health Organization has classified H1N1 as a pandemic, but Dr. Montero cautioned that the designation is an indication of how widespread the disease is, not its severity. Schools are the prime concern now because the seasonal flu will be returning soon and schools are ideal incubators of infectious disease.

In a conference call with more than 200 school administrators on Aug. 20, Dr. Montero said schools should only be closed as a last resort (see below) and that decision should be made on the basis of local conditions.

Dr. Montero said school officials should encourage basic hygiene, such as thorough hand washing, and covering coughs and sneezes. He said students and school staff should stay home if they become sick and stay there until 24 hours after they recover. The most vulnerable people are those aged six months to 24 years, caregivers to young children, pregnant women and anyone who has a respiratory condition or is immune-compromised, as well as health care and emergency workers. He said vaccine will be given on a priority basis to those most susceptible to the disease, but there is no firm word yet on when or how much vaccine will be available. A conference call for municipal officials and public safety personnel is scheduled for Aug. 27. For more information on H1N1, go to: http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/DHHS/DHHS_SITE/swineflu.htm.

FIRST N.H. FLU FATALITY – A 22-year-old Hillsborough County woman has become the first New Hampshire resident to die of H1N1 flu. The death was announced on Aug. 17 by the Department of Health and Human Services. Commissioner Nicolas Toumpas said the woman had other health problems that may have contributed to her death. Commissioner Toumpas extended his sympathy to the woman’s family. Thus far, H1N1 has resulted in at least 522 deaths in the United States.

SCHOOLS DON’T NEED TO CLOSE BECAUSE OF HINI – Officials of the Centers for Disease Control say that schools do not need to close if students become ill with the H1N1 flu this fall. A number of schools around the country shut down last spring when even a few students showed flu symptoms. But the CDC now says closing schools is not a good idea and students who come down with the disease can return to class 24 hours after their fever breaks. The previous recommendation was seven days. The CDC says the benefits of closing schools to stop the spread of the disease are in most cases outweighed by social costs such as unsupervised children, healthy workers stuck at home to care for children, missed meals and missed education. The CDC recommends other means to slow the spread of the disease, such as keeping students more widely separated and stressing hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes. Sick students should be sent home promptly and parents need to take responsibility for not sending feverish children to school. Schools should designate a room where sick students can stay until picked up.

Additional information on the CDC guidelines for school may be found at <http://www.flu.gov>.

DES TABLETOP DEALS WITH FLOOD ISSUES – The N.H. Department of Environmental Services held a day-long tabletop exercise on Aug. 6, designed to engage all of the department’s units in a coordinated response. The exercise scenario was a familiar one – spring snowmelt and saturated ground compounded by heavy rain. Those factors caused flooding which threatened dams and swamped municipal and private water supplies and wastewater treatment plants. The DES units formulated plans to mitigate the damage, while working with other agencies to take care of victims. Staff from HSEM and DHHS functioned as the state Emergency Operations Center to coordinate with other agencies. A detailed debriefing on the exercise is scheduled for Aug. 28.

HURRICANE, RAIN CAUSE WEEKEND PROBLEMS – After a quiet beginning to the Atlantic hurricane season, Hurricane Bill arrived to stir things up. Bill reached its maximum strength as a Category 3 storm as it headed north in the Atlantic, but it was considerably weakened as it brushed the New England coast on Aug. 22/23. The storm didn't cause any significant damage, but the rough seas proved to be too great of an attraction for some. Several people were swept away by the high seas and had to be rescued. A seven-year-old girl was killed after she was swept into the ocean at Acadia National Park in Maine.

More weekend weather problems resulted from heavy thunderstorms approaching from the west. The Monadnock Region received up to five inches of rain, resulting in road washouts and flooded basements in Peterborough, Jaffrey, Harrisville, Greenfield, Nelson and Dublin.

FEMA TO ADDRESS CHILDREN IN DISASTER – Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Craig Fugate has formed a working group within that agency to consider issues related to the care of children in disasters. The working group will allow FEMA and its partners to explore and implement planning and response strategies specific to children. It will also work to ensure that during a disaster the unique needs of children are not only considered, but are fully integrated into how FEMA administers support to states and the public. The panel will develop child-specific guidance on evacuation, sheltering and relocation, tracking and reunification of families and enhanced preparedness for schools and child care centers and for children in the welfare and juvenile justice systems.

The Children's Working Group will be composed of FEMA employees across multiple directorates and offices to ensure coordination and action, and will report directly to the Office of the Administrator.

VISTA VOLUNTEER WORKS WITH HSEM – Chris Schroeder, an Americorps VISTA volunteer, has joined the staff of N.H. Homeland Security and Emergency Management. Chris is from Edgewood, Ky., and has worked for FEMA on recovery operations following Hurricanes Ike and Katrina. He will be here through August 2010, working on presentations explaining the process of applying for Public Assistance and Individual Assistance to emergency management directors and other local officials. Welcome aboard, Chris!

CORRECTION – Last month's *Emergency Management News* gave an incorrect number of Seabrook warning sirens. There are 121 sirens in the Seabrook Emergency Planning Zone, 94 of which are in New Hampshire and 27 in Massachusetts. The sirens will be tested at 12:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 18.