

# TAKE THE FIRST STEP!

## PREPAREDNESS AND PUBLIC HEALTH THREATS: Addressing the Unique Needs of the Nation's Vulnerable Populations



### Hourly-Wage Workers

Preparing for a public health emergency can be particularly difficult for hourly-wage workers, especially those who earn less than \$30,000 per year. These individuals are less likely to be able to provide for themselves or their families if their place of employment shuts down because of a public health emergency. A recent preparedness poll conducted by APHA<sup>1</sup> found that 71% of employers who stated they would encourage employees to stay home during a national public health crisis, only 18% would continue to pay all employees if there were an interruption in operations for a period of two months. What's more, 29% of hourly-wage workers responded they are currently uncertain if they would continue to be paid.

It is not surprising that low hourly-wage earners have little or no money saved for a public health emergency. Only 15% report they have any dollars set aside for such an event. In addition, few people who earn low hourly wages report any emergency resources for a disaster. For example, only 31% of these same workers report having stocked up on non-perishable foods for a public health emergency, only 22% report having sufficient amounts of water set aside to last for three days, and more than three-quarters (77%) of low hourly-wage earners state they are unprepared for an emergency because they do not have money to spend on things they may never use.

So what steps can hourly-wage workers take to prepare for a public health emergency? Following are several questions an hourly-wage worker can ask him or herself to help them get started:

#### **Step 1: Do I know whether my employer has emergency response procedures in place?**

- Do I know how my employer will communicate with me during an emergency?
- If my workplace closed for an extended period of time, would my employer allow me to continue working at an alternate location, if possible?

#### **Step 2: Do I have any money saved in case I am unable to work for an extended period of time?**

- Can I save just \$10 out of every paycheck for an emergency?
- Do I have a credit card with some available funds for an emergency?

#### **Step 3: If I can continue working, but my normal means of transportation is unavailable, do I have another way to travel to work?**

- Can I organize a plan to carpool with a co-worker in case public transportation is unavailable during an emergency?

<sup>1</sup> Under contract with APHA, Peter Hart Research Associates, Inc. conducted a national survey of 306 hourly-wage earners, from February 9-13, 2007; the data in this fact sheet is based on 80 of these workers who earned less than \$30,000/year. At the 95% confidence level, the margin of error is +5.6.



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*Following is an action plan hourly-wage earners can implement to prepare for an emergency:*

1. Compile a list of contact numbers for your supervisor and co-workers in order to obtain information in case of an emergency.
2. If you own a car, store a few gallons of gas in a safe place to keep your car fueled for transportation in the event of a gas shortage.
3. Begin saving a small amount of money – even just \$10 per paycheck. Keep it on hand as cash or travelers checks and only access it in case of an emergency.
4. Call your local department of health to find out about emergency response plans and what kinds of actions you can take in your community to prepare for a disaster.

### **Other resources:**

Federal Emergency Management Agency, <http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/>