

# TAKE THE FIRST STEP!

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



### Individuals with Chronic Health Care Needs

While it is important for everyone to prepare for a public health emergency, individuals with chronic illnesses must consider how a public health crisis might affect their well-being. Chronic health conditions such as, diabetes, cancer, asthma and high blood pressure often require routine medical treatments or medication on a daily basis.

A preparedness poll conducted by the American Public Health Association<sup>1</sup> found that while 90% of adults with chronic medical conditions take medication a few times per week, only 19% have a one-month supply on hand in case pharmacies close during a national crisis. Further, 38% stated they would run out of medication in one week or less. This is of great concern given almost 4 out of 10 of those with chronic illnesses reported it would be a 'very serious problem' if drug stores and pharmacies closed during a public health emergency.

Of individuals with chronic illnesses that need to visit health care facilities on a regular basis for treatments such as, kidney dialysis, 49% stated it would be a 'very serious problem' if doctors' offices, hospitals and health clinics closed.

Low levels of preparedness among individuals with chronic health needs could present a real challenge if a public health disaster or emergency strikes. Forty-six percent of the adults with chronic illnesses stated they have spent only one hour or less preparing for an emergency and 82% reported they do not wear any type of medical identification to alert health care workers to their conditions.

So what steps should individuals with chronic illnesses take to prepare for a public health emergency? Following are a series of questions that can be answered to help create a plan that fits with their unique health care needs:

#### **Step 1: Do you have an emergency supply of essential medications in the event you can't get them from a pharmacy?**

- How long would your emergency supply last?
- How often do you refresh your supply to avoid expiration?
- If it is not possible to keep an emergency supply, have you talked to your doctor or pharmacist about what you can do to prepare?

#### **Step 2: Have you identified a back-up treatment facility in the event your normal place of care is closed?**

- Have you asked your health care provider where you could go if you could not access your regular care?
- Do you have recent copies of your health care records, including a current list of medications and treatment information?
- Do you wear a medical identification bracelet or necklace to alert health care workers about your health condition?

<sup>1</sup> Under contract with APHA, Peter Hart Research Associates, Inc. conducted a national survey of 409 adults with chronic medical conditions, from February 9-13, 2007. At the 95% confidence level, the margin of error is +4.9.



# TAKE THE FIRST STEP!

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



### Step 3: If you are unable to transport yourself out of your home, have you devised an evacuation plan based on your unique needs?

- Have you provided your local fire department with your home address and informed them that you would need assistance during an evacuation?
- Are your neighbors aware that you would need assistance in the event of an emergency evacuation?

Individuals living with chronic illnesses can prepare an emergency kit to meet their unique preparedness needs. Below is a list of suggested contents:

#### Emergency Kit Contents:

*Try to keep the kit as lightweight as possible in case you need to "grab & go."*

- At least a one-month supply of medication
- Medical supplies such as, glucose tests or a blood pressure cuff to monitor your condition
- Copies of insurance cards and personal identification
- Copies of recent medical records
- Thermometer
- Surgical mask
- Self-care manual for your specific condition, such as how to handle chemotherapy side effects during a disaster<sup>2</sup>
- Self-care products such as, hand warmers for individuals with arthritis

#### Other resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,  
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/chronic.asp>

2 Accessed February 8, 2007 at [http://www.coe-cnns.jp/english/group\\_cncr/manual/manual08/index.pdf](http://www.coe-cnns.jp/english/group_cncr/manual/manual08/index.pdf)

