

Emergency Preparedness Planning For Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities are not always mentioned specifically in the planning that is occurring at the national, state and local public health department level. Yet, should a crisis occur, there may be large numbers of persons on a campus who need to be informed, kept safe and possibly treated for a physical and/or mental condition. The purpose of this guide is to provide a checklist of concerns that should be addressed by colleges and universities in order to have an effective local response to manage incidents and disasters of all kinds.

I. Emergency Declaration

- Identify and define all hazards that may trigger a state of emergency on the campus.
- Designate who will declare a state of emergency and who's in charge when a state of emergency exists. Identify administrative and medical decision makers who will provide leadership, coordinate with external agencies and monitor breaking news bulletins.
- Identify the team members representing all sectors of campus that will monitor and respond to emergency conditions until resolved.
- Anticipate and address the many legal issues related to emergency plans, e.g. isolation, quarantine, HIPAA compliance and legal authorities.

II. Workforce Planning

- Identify essential employees vital to the operations of the campus, whose presence is required regardless of the existence of an emergency condition, and whose absence from duty could endanger the safety and well-being of the campus population and/or physical plant.
- Anticipate employee absences and establish HR guidelines. Develop contingency plans for operations under prolonged staff shortages.
- Identify, train and prepare ancillary workers to assist in areas needing augmented staffing (e.g. non essential staff, contractors, retirees.)
- Establish lines of communication with county, private, volunteer and state organizations that may provide manpower and/or other resources during a state of emergency.
- Disseminate information to employees about the campus's preparedness and response plans.

III. Academic Contingency Planning

- Identify key persons who will meet and determine adjustments in academic calendar, opportunities for online teaching and/or alternate teaching sites.
- Determine proactive ways teaching staff can anticipate classroom teaching disruptions with students, e.g. contingency syllabi changes for 2-3 weeks cessation of classes.
- Consider postponing and/or canceling classes, programs, and activities.

IV. Supplies/Equipment

- Provide sufficient and accessible infection control supplies (e.g. hand-hygiene products, tissues and receptacles for their disposal) in all occupied areas of campus. Have adequate supply of cleaning and disinfecting products. Have abundant equipment for use in cleaning and disinfecting, e.g. power sprayers, disposable towels. Have plan in place to intensify environmental hygiene during an infectious disease emergency.
- Identify and maintain adequate supply protective equipment required by cleaning staff.
- Anticipate need for 24 hour operation which may require special resources for employees such as bedding, clothing, food, water and medications for chronic health problems.
- Identify equipment that can be helpful if power failure such as flashlights, short wave radio and generators.
- Anticipate for infectious disease emergency the need for large supply of surgical masks, disposable thermometers and disinfectant for the residential life community, and other staff, e.g. public safety, transportation services, and environmental safety.

V. Communication

- Develop a plan to educate the campus community prior to the onset of various incidents and disasters.
- Have an early warning system in place to communicate an impending or evolving state of emergency to entire community. The system should include methods for notifying campus community after normal work hours.
- Plan to hold meetings, disseminate flyers, position posters to inform campus community and visitors about emergency conditions.
- Have a plan in place to recall essential staff after normal work hours.

- Identify the key staff that will be responsible for public relations including media interviews, regular web page updates and regular administrative announcements.
- Develop a list of local media contact names and numbers and methods to quickly send out information.
- Establish various communication strategies that will be effective when emergency associated with power failure, cell phone outage, etc.
- Have a plan in place for prompt communication with and answer questions from parents and guardians of students.
- Anticipate the need for staff dedicated to responding to phone calls, emails and possibly Faxes from persons off and on the campus.
- Know how to access sources of up-to-date information on emergency event and new developments as they occur.
- Develop and disseminate programs, posters and materials covering emergency planning fundamentals (e.g. early warning system, signs and symptoms of illness, infection control measures.)
- Ensure that communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Develop platforms (e.g. hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating emergency status and actions to campus community, vendors, and suppliers, on and off campus, in a consistent and timely way.
- Establish communication plan to advise all parties when emergency conditions have ceased and when some operations/activities will resume.
- At conclusion of emergency event plan to debrief faculty, staff, and stakeholders to clarify what worked and what needs to be changed. Adjust and revise to improve effectiveness for next emergency declaration.

VI. Travel/International Operations

- Establish policies for restricting travel to affected geographic areas (domestic and international) and guidelines for student/faculty returning from affected areas.
- Establish communication channels with students and faculty stationed in an off campus site (domestic and international) and provide expert advisement regarding emergency situation.

VII. Health Care

- Establish health care response protocols in anticipation of various emergencies requiring increased access to health care services.
- Maintain a system to effectively communicate with public health officials, healthcare professionals and other key audiences. Establish relationships with local healthcare facilities, emergency responders, and the local public health agency. Establish daily communication with neighboring counties and state Health Department to stay abreast of regional conditions.
- Stay alert and conduct early surveillance of possible cases to obtain laboratory confirmation if possible index case on campus.
- Establish system to convert to 24 hour operation with limited staff.
- Identify alternative resources of medical assistance when available staffing resources are not sufficient to meet medical demands. Provide training for role and responsibilities.
- Establish 24 hour counseling services to address distraught, anxious and worried well among employees, students and parents.
- Establish a communication hub to handle inquiries about patients, to update administrators, and to keep the health care community abreast of ongoing medical demands and events.
- Educate, train and drill all health care workers in disaster response protocols and techniques.
- Educate health care staff about appropriate infection control procedures for influenza and other communicable diseases, as well as how to care for patients suffering from communicable diseases and its complications.
- Identify support staff and designate roles and responsibilities during emergency conditions.
- Identify, prepare and maintain adequate supplies of personal protective equipment for health care staff. Have dedicated equipment for use with highly infectious patients, e.g. stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs.
- Comply with federal regulations regarding proper screening and medical evaluations of personnel using respirators.

- Encourage and track annual influenza vaccination for health care employees and recommended pneumococcal vaccination.
- Counsel sick employees and family members to mitigate spread of disease. Establish return –to-work policy for employees who had been ill, if related to cause of emergency.
- Establish protocol for triaging that separates infectious from noninfectious patient care.
- Maintain adequate supply of patient contact and treatment forms, including a system to track the coming and going of all patients.
- Discontinue all medical procedures which may cause droplet transmission, e.g. throat swab, and spirometry.
- Make surgical masks readily available for persons with respiratory illness.
- Have access to supply of vaccines, antibiotic/antiviral medications, and supportive treatments necessary to treat and prevent the spread of communicable disease.
- Develop policies and procedures for mass clinic vaccination.
- Identify equipment, supplies and staffing for alternative health care site when larger space is needed to meet health care demands, when usual site is in an area of danger or when needing a second health services location.
- Maintain specific health educational materials for top health concerns for immediate dissemination when emergency condition occurs.
- Develop alternative means for transporting non-critically ill patients to other medical facilities that may be able to care for them.
- Develop method for separating, storage and disposing of solid waste (medical and non medical) that may be contaminated.
- Follow respectful practices for care of the deceased. Identify adequate storage area for deceased until transfer.

VIII. Residential Life

- Develop system to rapidly communicate with staff and students about emergency, e.g. arrange a designated area in the resident hall for information dissemination.
- Establish system to transport students with health related complaints to a health care facility.
- Post no visitors sign to minimize unnecessary contact
- Establish protocol to involve/communicate with parents and guardians.
- Maintain adequate equipment/supplies to keep students and staff in residence for a prolonged period of time. Include items that would help minimize the spread of infectious diseases, e.g. surgical masks, thermometers, and disinfectant.
- Maintain living quarters in a clean and sanitary condition. Intensify cleaning and disinfecting public areas.
- Develop a system for the orderly closure and evacuation of residence halls and fraternity/sorority houses. Include transportation planning for students without cars and/or travel funds.
- Identify accommodations for any international student or other student unable to return to permanent residence.

IX. Financial

- Develop system for rapid procurement and reimbursement for needed for supplies/equipment and services from vendors.
- Communicate and maintain relationships with businesses that can provide essential supplies and products during a state of emergency.
- Maintain a financial reserve that can be tapped if a total disruption of college/university educational mission for one semester. Have a business recovery plan that includes resumption of billing/payroll functions.

X. Research

- Identify essential requirements of animals that may need to be preserved during emergency conditions.
- Determine campus buildings that may remain open for research and essential operations.
- Ensure security of highly sensitive research laboratories.