

Guest Editors

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We are excited and honored to serve as guest editors for this special edition focused on preparedness. The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Division of Public Health (DPH) works with its partners in developing plans, conducting preparedness outreach and training, and participating in drills and exercises. This issue comes during a busy time in emergency preparedness. In September, Hurricane Dorian's Category 5 fury caused unfathomable destruction in the Bahamas. Closer to home, DPH hosted a three-day graded preparedness exercise that involved multiple sites and 400 state employees and volunteers from the Delaware Medical Reserve Corps and the community. By the end of October, DPH will have participated in a multi-state regional preparedness exercise. Drills like these test our readiness to respond to a public health emergency and to dispense emergency medications during, such as response. Among our preparedness activities, DPH also recently hosted the 15th Family Preparedness Day in Dover with its partners, and is now holding statewide flu clinics (the largest of which follow DPH preparedness procedures), to remind Delawareans to get their annual flu vaccination to prevent illness and hospitalizations.

Public health preparedness vaulted to a historic height following the September 11, 2001 attacks and the anthrax release through the U.S. Postal Service, which created a need to develop public health preparedness programs around the country.¹ Funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Office of State and Local Readiness, Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program, permits DPH to operate its Office of Preparedness within the Emergency Medical Services and Preparedness Section, and to respond to public health emergencies or crises and/or respond to the health impacts of natural or technological disasters. DPH maintains a constant state of readiness with the Delaware Emergency Management Agency (DEMA) and other response and recovery partners.

In addition, DPH provides critical emergency response and recovery functions. Readers may find it reassuring to know that DPH's several hundred staff are assigned special response duties to support a division-wide response infrastructure called the State Health Operations Center (SHOC) as well as operations in the field such as setting up and staffing community shelters, Points of Dispensing, and high consequence infectious disease responses. The DPH director activates SHOC based on the size and scope of the emergency or disaster and the services needed. During a SHOC activation, more than 200 personnel from DPH and other state agencies may be required to support a public health emergency or disaster response. SHOC works closely with the State Emergency Operations Center (managed by DEMA) to ensure that the health care system is operational, that information is shared with health partners, and that DHSS maintains critical services during and following a disaster.

The Delaware Emergency Operations Plan, which defines state agency roles, tasks DHSS with several responsibilities, including Mass Care, which is the emergency support to residents who

seek shelter during an evacuation. The DHSS Disaster Committee meets quarterly to ensure that all DHSS divisions can maintain its delivery of critical and necessary services during a disaster with public health impacts, such as hurricanes and flooding, or a public health emergency, such as a chemical leak or a disease outbreak. Another DHSS duty is to assist DEMA and the Delaware National Guard (DNG) in supporting Radiation Reception Centers to screen residents with radiation contamination from a nuclear incident.

These pages provide more information and indispensable resources to help Delaware's households and businesses be more prepared for whatever is next. Do not procrastinate when it comes to emergency plans; prepared Delawareans will recover from emergencies faster and more easily than those who are not.

We would like to thank the *Delaware Journal of Public Health* for this opportunity to share our preparedness information. Moreover, we are grateful to our many partners who not only helped by submitting articles to this edition, but who make our communities safe each day. This includes all sections of DPH, all DHSS divisions, DEMA, our state and city emergency management agencies, first responders, community organizations, the DNG, the Delaware Department of Transportation, our state and local public safety agencies, and our health care partners.

References

1. Center for Disease and Prevention, Center for Preparedness and Response. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/whatwedo/phep.htm>

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