

KHELPS *News*

In Times of Need, Kentucky Helps

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Public Health Response for the 2010 Haiti Earthquake

Margaret A. Riggs, PhD, MPH, MS
CDC Career Epidemiology Field Officer
Kentucky Department for Public Health

On January 12, 2010, a devastating earthquake struck Haiti killing more than 240,000 people, injuring more than 300,000, and displacing 1.4 million. Even before the earthquake, Haiti had a minimal public health system and the worst health indicators in the entire hemisphere. Haiti had the lowest rate of immunization of infants, the highest rate of mortality during childbirth, and was plagued with water-borne diarrheal disease and vector-borne diseases to name a few. The earthquake greatly exacerbated these problems.



Dr. Margaret Riggs
with test kits in Haiti.

A challenge for providing assistance to Haiti was to put in place a rapid assessment of the situation and a surveillance system to accurately identify health problems. To help meet this challenge, I was part of a five-member team, the Public Health Branch, deployed by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) into the Incident Response Coordination Team sent to the field that assists with the organization and oversight of all HHS assets. We were sent to Haiti for the response effort in cooperation with the global humanitarian relief led by the United Nations.

The Public Health Branch played an integral role in developing morbidity surveillance during the initial period that provided valuable information for the recovery and also is being used to strengthen Haiti's future public health infrastructure. It was a very large relief effort. Other responsibilities of the team were to assist HHS responders and military force protection in performance of their duties by ensuring field hospital sites, where the Haitian people were receiving medical care, had adequate environmental health and sanitation. We were in contact with Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs) at field hospital sites daily to summarize and standardize the reporting of patients being seen to better understand trends in disease and injury.

There were many challenges faced during this response effort, most importantly communication and cultural competency. In any disaster response it is essential to effectively coordinate volunteers with deployed forces and have open communication among all agencies involved so that efforts are not duplicated and all work is productive through genuine cooperation and teamwork. In addition, situational awareness and adequate understanding of the community being assisted is crucial. Although responders must move quickly during disasters, such as the earthquake, it is imperative that they take time to receive thorough information about health and safety issues prior to deployment. Responders must respect and cooperate with the community's existing infrastructure as well as other governmental and international agencies to achieve the greatest benefit in assisting those who have been affected by disasters.

In addition, earthquake response presents some unique challenges that differ from other disasters.

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Experiencing Disaster from a Child's View

2009 brought Kentucky a year of numerous severe weather events including four Presidentially declared natural disasters. All citizens experience emotional and behavioral reactions to these events. Children, however, can be more sensitive to experiencing emotional and behavioral reactions to normal weather events following exposure to a natural disaster. Disasters can leave children feeling frightened, confused, and insecure. Whether a child has personally experienced trauma, has merely seen the event on television, or has heard it discussed by adults, it is important for parents to be informed and ready to help if reactions to stress begin to occur.

Some normal reactions parents may see their children display are:

- Crying/Depression
- Bedwetting
- Thumb sucking
- Nightmares
- Clinging/fear of being left alone
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Excessive fear of the dark
- Inability to Concentrate
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Not wanting to attend school
- Headaches
- Fighting
- Increase in physical complaints

Preparedness Can Help Promote Resiliency in Children

The best way to promote resiliency in our children is to prepare them for any severe weather event or disaster by providing them an opportunity to establish a sense of personal control. One way to establish a sense of control and to build confidence in children before a disaster is to engage and involve them in preparing a family disaster plan. Talk to your children about all the possible severe weather events or disasters that could occur in your home community (tornados, flooding, earthquakes, etc). Have them help you create a family plan on how you will respond in each of the different types of potential events. Your plan should include what you will do with your family pet(s), a family communication plan, and have children help put together an emergency supply

kit. Preparing for disaster helps everyone in the family accept the fact that disasters do happen, and provides an opportunity to identify and collect the resources needed to meet basic needs after disaster. Preparation helps build resiliency; when people feel prepared, they experience less stress reactions and cope better. This is true for children, too.

For more information, visit these helpful sites for parents and children.

www.ready.gov/kids/parents

www.readyclassroom.discoveryeducation

Contributions to this article are from Deborah Anderson, Executive Director, KCCRB

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Following an earthquake, provisions must be made for medical care and sheltering outdoors. Lack of safety and stability create challenges in caring for the affected population as well as housing them and responders. Aftershocks are a constant threat and further damage buildings not to mention the toll they take on the mental health and resiliency of a population that has already been devastated when feeling the earth move. Considerations for these extreme conditions should be taken in earthquake response planning for areas not designed to handle quakes of great magnitude.

This response has been one of the most memorable experiences in my life. The Haitians are very resilient and were kind and welcoming despite going through such a terrible disaster. One of the most rewarding aspects for me was being able to identify and address issues quickly to assist in their recovery. It truly was an honor to work with the Haitians and to be part of the aid to their nation during such a great time of need.

Contributions to this article are from CAPT Holly Williams, CAPT Mehran Massoudi, CDR Daphne Moffett, LCDR Roque Miramontes, and LCDR Juliana Grant.

What You Can Do To Help

- **Keep family routines:** Children benefit from family routine of meals, activities and bedtimes being kept as close to normal as possible. This allows the child to feel more secure and have sense of control.
- **Children’s reactions are influenced by the behavior, thoughts and feelings of adults.** They can detect adults’ fears and sadness. Parents and adults can make disasters less traumatic for children by taking steps to manage their own feelings and plans for coping.
- **Indulge special needs:** Allow a traumatized child to be more dependent on you for a period of time. This may involve more holding or hugs than usual, not sleeping alone, having the light left on, returning to a favorite teddy bear or blanket, or permission to be clingy rather than socially outgoing.

- **Talk about what happened:** Children are often confused about the facts and their feelings. Clarify misunderstandings about risk and danger by listening to children’s concerns and answering questions. Give honest, simple, brief answers to your child’s questions.

- **Monitor and limit your family’s exposure to the media.** News coverage related to a disaster may elicit fear and confusion and arouse anxiety in children. This is particularly true for large-scale disasters where significant property damage and loss of life has occurred. Particularly for younger children, repeated images of an event may cause them to believe the event is recurring over and over.



We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop
 ~Mother Theresa

Spotlight—Volunteers Assist With H1N1 Vaccination Campaign

The Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness conducted a comprehensive immunization campaign to protect the community from H1N1 influenza.

This campaign was executed through community and school H1N1 clinics as well as the distribution of vaccine to health care providers throughout the community.

To date, Louisville Metro Public Health and Wellness has directly provided H1N1 immunizations to nearly 75,000 children and adults and has distributed another 220,000 doses to 350 hospitals and health care providers throughout the community.

On November 11 and 12, the department gave more than 19,000 immunizations against H1N1 flu at drive-thru and walk-in clinics at Papa John’s Cardinal Stadium, the home of the University of Louisville Cardinals. In fact, the Department may have set the Guinness World Record for the most immunizations given on a single day on Nov. 11.

This gargantuan effort was made possible by partnering with the University of Louisville to hold the event and by the more than 400 volunteers from the U of L School of Nursing, the U of L School of Public Health and Information Sciences, the Belarmine School of Nursing, the Medical Reserve Corps and the Red Cross.

Save The Date

- **K HELPS/MRC Orientation and Introduction to the Strategic National Stockpile—July 24, Somerset;** free CEUs for nursing professionals. For more information, contact Jessica Gover at (606) 678-4761 or JessicaM.Gover@ky.gov
- **Mass fatality incident response planning is a critical part of disaster planning.** Kentucky is currently developing plans to respond to mass fatality incidents as well as natural death surge (NDS) events. The Kentucky Department for Public Health is conducting workshops to discuss the roles and

responsibilities associated with planning for, responding to, and recovering from a NDS and to provide planning guidance and technical expertise for continued NDS planning. Target audience—public health representatives, coroners, funeral directors, emergency managers, law enforcement, fire/EMS, and state and local government officials. June 14-15, in Bowling Green; and June 28-29, in Morehead. For more information: T.J. Sugg at Tennis.Sugg@ky.gov or (502) 564-7243.

Bloom where you are planted.





COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY

Cabinet for Health and Family Services
Department for Public Health
Division of Epidemiology & Health Planning
Public Health Preparedness Branch
275 E. Main Street
Frankfort, KY 40621
Phone: (502) 564-7243
chfs.khelps@ky.gov



A Letter from the Commissioner

Dear KHELPS Volunteer,

Thank you for registering with K HELPS and volunteering to protect the health of Kentuckians. With recent natural disasters and disease outbreaks, it is easy to see how the entire healthcare system (public health and private providers) could be overwhelmed with individuals needing treatment. The need to rapidly meet this demand would be critical. In preparation to respond to these emergencies, the Kentucky Department for Public Health created K HELPS, the Kentucky Health Emergency Listing of Professionals for Surge program.

K HELPS allows public health officials to quickly access one of our most important resources, our fellow health-care professionals, to get help where it is needed. In coordination with existing Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), K HELPS streamlines the registration and emergency credentialing of prospective volunteers to allow for more efficient deployment. Currently, MRC units cover nearly every county in Kentucky, with local health departments and emergency management agencies sponsoring most units.

Thank you for your leadership and for volunteering with K HELPS.

Sincerely,

William D. Hacker, M.D., FAAP, CPE
Commissioner, Kentucky Department for Public Health