

K HELPS: The Kentucky Health Emergency Listing of Professionals for Surge

Volunteer Health Professionals Program Strengthening State's Response to Emergencies

by *Rebecca Gillis*

Public health emergencies and natural disasters are unpredictable and can strike at any time. In the event of a large-scale public health emergency, health and medical systems would be overwhelmed with people seeking treatment. The need to meet this demand would be critical. It is important to be prepared to deal with events like these by having medical volunteers to provide an important surge capacity during this period.

In 2005, the Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) established the Kentucky Health Emergency Listing of Professionals for Surge (K HELPS) program, a state-based system to register medical professionals and others interested in volunteering during public health emergencies or disasters.

K HELPS complements existing Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) programs, which are community-based organizations utilizing medical professional volunteers to supplement existing local emergency and public health resources for emergency response. Currently, all 120 counties in Kentucky are covered by MRC units. More information about the MRC units in Kentucky can be found at www.medicalreservecorps.gov.

Volunteers can register with K HELPS at <https://khelps.chfs.ky.gov> and will be assigned to the MRC unit in their geographical area. The local MRC unit will complete the approval process and will serve as the primary point of contact for volunteers. The program is set up to allow volunteers to get involved at any level.

- **SERV-KY (State Emergency Registration of Volunteers) Affiliation:** Approval based upon meeting standards for background check, signed KYEM 50 form, signed Code Of Conduct/Confidentiality form, and if a medical volunteer—verification of credentials. SERV KY affiliated volunteers would be called on to respond only after MRC lists have been exhausted. This group would be provided necessary just-in-time training if called to an event.
- **BASIC MRC Affiliation:** MRC approved volunteers who completed SERV-KY requirements and minimal training requirements.
- **INTERMEDIATE MRC Affiliation:** MRC approved volunteers who completed SERV-KY requirements, BASIC MRC training, and recommended core competency training.
- **ADVANCED MRC Affiliation:** MRC approved volunteers who completed all previous requirements. MRC volunteers are given the opportunity to train with Emergency Support Function (ESF) 8 health and medical strike teams. Volunteers can choose team(s) based on interest/experience. The list of teams will likely expand over time.

Upon the decision to activate volunteers, the K HELPS system has the ability to alert volunteers by e-mail and telephone. MRC volunteers should only respond after ensuring the safety of their home and family.

Kentucky's goal is to have 5,000 volunteers credentialed, trained and ready to respond to any public health emergency or disaster. All health workers are invited to register. During Hurricane Gustav, K HELPS called upon MRC units across the state to help staff the shelter set up in Louisville at the Fair and Expo Center where 1,500 evacuees from the New Orleans area were sheltered. In total, 47 volunteers from 18 different units across the state gave over 500 hours. More recently, during the 2009 winter ice storm that affected 102 counties in Kentucky, MRC volunteers were used in a variety of ways. MRC units across the state used 204 volunteers for a total of 2,436 hours. Because local communities can subtract volunteer time from the match necessary for FEMA reimbursement, the estimated \$40,466 in time given by MRC volunteers will have a positive impact on Kentucky's recovery process.

Visit www.chfs.ky.gov/dph/epi/preparedness/KHELPS.htm or contact your local health department to learn more about the K HELPS program. Registration will soon be available for MRC Summer 2009 Workshop to be held July 2009 at the Lexington Center. This training will give an orientation to the K HELPS/MRC program, summarize the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) program which allows for quick delivery of critical medical interventions to the public during an emergency, and allow volunteers to train for discipline specific role in a Point of Distribution (POD).

In times of need, Kentucky helps.

Current Emphasis

The current emphasis at KHELPS is on recruiting physicians, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, counselors, EMT/paramedics, respiratory therapists and clinical laboratory technicians.

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