



Guest Column

Submitted for publication in the Galveston County Daily News

May 27, 2009

Getting "Hurricane-Ready" For Your Health!

Our community's experience with Hurricane Ike will be forever etched in history and in the memories of those who experienced it. Amid the physical destruction and economic losses, were numerous health threats, loss of public health and medical infrastructure, illnesses, injuries, and 18 reported deaths. With hurricane season once again upon us, it is important that residents prepare for evacuation, flooding, and many other hurricane-related consequences that may impact our communities.

Being prepared saves lives. Here's what you can do.

The first thing to do is have emergency supplies on hand and ready to go. If you wait until just before a storm, you may find many supplies out of stock in local markets. For a complete list of suggested items, see the Galveston County Health District website at www.gchd.org/bt/btnatural.htm; however, here are few commonly needed supplies:

- A 7 day supply of non-perishable food that needs no cooking
- A hand operated can opener
- Plenty of drinking water. A good rule of thumb is to have two gallons of water per day for each person
- A first aid kit with bandages, antibiotic ointment, etc.
- At least a two week supply of medications with backup prescriptions
- Plenty of hand sanitizer, toilet paper, and paper towels
- A battery powered radio and flashlight including with extra batteries for each
- Baby formula, bottles, powdered milk and diapers with wipes, as needed
- Cash, ATM's may not be working
- Copies of important family documents, birth certificates, insurance/bank account information, etc.
- Photo identification

Be ready to evacuate quickly by having plenty of gasoline in your vehicle at all times. In addition, obtain supplies to quickly secure your home, inform loved ones of your

evacuation plans and contact numbers, obtain a tetanus shot if you have not had one in ten years, and obtain additional supplies you may need to return to your home after a hurricane. Recommended supplies needed upon return to an area hit by a hurricane include: thick long-sleeved shirts and long pants, protective gloves, protective footwear such as work boots, bleach/cleaning supplies, face mask for potential exposure to odors, toxins and mold, mosquito spray, and any tools you may need such as a shovel.

For evacuations, residents with special medical needs should register for assistance by calling 2-1-1. City of Galveston residents should call 797-3710 to register for assistance. People with special medical needs should also heed warnings of local health authorities. For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane IKE, Galveston Island lost medical and public health infrastructure. For a period of time, it was unsafe for persons with special medical needs to return to the island due to the lack of an emergency room, very limited primary care, limited availability of medications and other medical supplies, as well as the lack of a local shelter that could care for persons with special needs.

Local officials will advise such residents when it is appropriate to return to an area impacted by a hurricane. Our goal is to first assure that the local community can adequately care for persons with special needs before advising a return to the area.

Keep in mind during the Hurricane Season the many health threats faced after Hurricane IKE and what you can do to protect the health and safety of you, your loved ones, and your neighbors. Some of the many threats include:

- **Food-borne illnesses.** Identify and throw away food that may not be safe to eat. Throw away food that may have come in contact with storm water. Throw away perishable foods that have been above 40°F for 2 hours or more.
- **Water-borne illnesses.** Do not use water until you receive word that it is safe. Local authorities will tell you if tap water is safe to drink or to use for cooking and bathing.
- **Carbon monoxide poisoning.** Don't use a generator, pressure washer, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline or charcoal-burning device inside your home, garage or near a window, door, or vent.
- **Animal bites.** Beware of wild or stray animals. After a hurricane stray animals and snakes may be frightened and dangerous. Take precautions to avoid animal bites.
- **Electrical and fire hazards.** NEVER touch a fallen power line. Call the power company to report fallen lines. Avoid contact with overhead lines during cleanup. Do not burn candles near flammable items or leave a candle unattended. If possible, use flashlights or other battery operated lights instead of candles.
- **Toxic chemical exposures.** Beware of hazardous materials. Wear protective clothing and gear. Wash skin that may have come in contact with hazardous chemicals.

- **Injuries and wounds.** Clean open wounds and cuts with soap and clean water. Apply an antibiotic ointment. Contact a doctor to find out whether more treatments, such as a tetanus shot, may be needed. If a wound gets red, swells, or drains, seek medical attention.
- **Physical and emotional stress.** Set priorities for cleanup tasks, and pace the work. If possible, do not work alone. Heat exhaustion can be serious and should be avoided with proper fluid intake and taking breaks.

At all times, being prepared, being aware of health and safety precautions, and practicing excellent hygiene will help protect your health. Remember always to frequently wash your hands. Use soap and water or if water isn't available, use alcohol-based products.

While we would certainly hope to not have another storm this season, a hurricane is a real threat annually for Gulf coast communities. Planning now, instead of later, will safeguard your most precious asset – your personal health.

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