Emergency Preparedness in Senior Care Organizations

With emergency situations including fires, natural disasters, severe weather, influenza and viruses, as well as homeland security threats, senior care facilities need emergency preparedness plans and safety measures in place to keep their residents safe. In fact, long-term care facilities that participate in Medicare and Medicaid must develop and maintain comprehensive emergency preparedness plans to comply with requirements from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

A U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study found that an estimated 77 percent of skilled nursing facilities located in higher-risk areas for natural disasters have encountered challenges with planning emergency preparedness activities to keep their residents safe.[1] Ensuring proper staffing during emergencies and transporting residents during evacuations were pinpointed as the most frequently mentioned concern.[2]

Effective emergency preparedness plans to ensure these and other concerns are addressed should include myriad elements of risk assessment, staff training and emergency simulation exercises, provisions for evacuation and shelter-in-place, fire safety, and more. The following checklist is intended to help senior care facility leaders and staff assess and strengthen their emergency preparedness plans to optimize resident and staff safety.[3]

	Yes	No
Risk Assessment and Planning		
Has your facility conducted a risk assessment to identify potential facility- and community-based hazards and prioritized which ones receive focus in its emergency plan?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan comply with federal, state, and local laws?	☐	☐

	Yes	No
Risk Assessment and Planning (continued)		
Are clear communication protocols and backup procedures specified in your facility's plan?	☐	☐
Is a command post and management specified for your facility in the plan?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan designate key personnel in emergencies and specify assignments?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan specify emergency staffing, including volunteers?	☐	☐
Have emergency accountabilities been written into staff members' job descriptions, and are they reviewed at least annually?	☐	☐
Has a system been created to track the location of on-duty staff and sheltered residents in your facility's care both during and after an emergency?	☐	☐
Are your facility's emergency and standby power systems routinely inventoried, tested, and maintained?	☐	☐
Are procedures in place for collaborating with community partners such as local emergency managers, local emergency responders, fire departments, and hospitals across the city, region, and state?	☐	☐
Have local emergency managers reviewed your facility's emergency plan?	☐	☐
Does your facility maintain a contact list and related information for federal, state, tribal, regional, and local emergency management agencies?	☐	☐
• Is this list routinely updated and validated?	☐	☐
• Is this list readily available and easily accessible?	☐	☐
Does your facility's emergency plan include factors to consider when deciding whether to evacuate or shelter in place?	☐	☐
• Does your facility have contingency plans if the designated evacuation destination is unavailable or becomes vulnerable to environmental or natural disaster events?	☐	☐

	Yes	No
Risk Assessment and Planning (continued)		
Does your facility's plan specify contact information for relevant community partners, methods to share protected resident information, and primary and alternate means of communication?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan address resident populations, services required for continuity of operations, and succession plans?	☐	☐
Is your facility's plan reviewed and updated at least annually and as new emergency situations manifest?	☐	☐
Has your facility identified entry points for local fire departments along with the location of the Knox Box?	☐	☐
• Are these entry points indicated on an emergency services facilities map?	☐	☐
Has your facility designated a staff member, staff position, or department to specifically provide entry direction when contacting emergency services?	☐	☐
Has your facility designated a staff member, staff position, or department to be available to direct emergency services personnel when they arrive at your facility?	☐	☐
Staff Training and Emergency Exercises		
Is annual training on emergency preparedness policies and procedures provided for staff at your facility?	☐	☐
Do staff members participate in emergency preparedness exercises at least twice a year (one of which is a full-scale, community-based exercise)?	☐	☐
• Are staff training logs documented and maintained?	☐	☐
• Do local emergency services participate annually in at least one of your facility's emergency preparedness exercises?	☐	☐
Does your facility employ a variety of training techniques, such as tabletop exercises, mock drills or simulations, review of actual disaster response efforts, and equipment training?	☐	☐
Do staff members receive training if your facility design is altered, new equipment or processes are implemented, or evacuation routes change?	☐	☐

	Yes	No
Provisions for Sheltering in Place		
Does your facility's emergency plan detail measures to secure the building against damage and safe locations for sheltering in place?	☐	☐
Is backup power, including generators, and requirements for maintaining a fuel supply specified in the plan?	☐	☐
Are other staff besides the maintenance manager aware of the location of utility shut-off valves in your facility?	☐	☐
Does your facility maintain adequate amounts of food, water, and supplies for residents, staff members, families of staff, and visitors who may need to shelter in place?	☐	☐
• Are these items routinely checked for expiration?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan include provisions for keeping a schedule that enables staff members to rest while resident care is maintained?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan include provisions for sleeping areas for staff members, families of staff, and visitors?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan include provisions for staff members requesting to have their pets in your facility while sheltering in place?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan specify maintaining extra pharmacy stocks of common medications?	☐	☐
Does your facility have emergency supply orders in place (with vendors) that could be implemented under defined circumstances (such as a weather emergency warning)?	☐	☐
Provisions for Evacuation		
Do your facility's evacuation policies consider the care and treatment needs of evacuees (including residents who have special assistance needs), staff responsibilities, transportation, and identification of evacuation locations?	☐	☐

	Yes	No
Provisions for Evacuation (continued)		
Does your facility's emergency plan identify evacuation resources (including contracts with transportation vendors) and secondary routes?	☐	☐
• Are maps and expected travel times included in your facility's emergency plan?	☐	☐
Does your facility have current contract(s) or arrangements with facilities in various areas where residents may relocate?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan specify adequate food and water supplies and logistical support for transporting them if necessary?	☐	☐
Does your facility have protocols for moving residents' medications?	☐	☐
Does your facility have protocols for maintaining infection control and any quarantine requirements during an emergency?	☐	☐
Does your facility have provisions for managing/moving residents' health records and maintaining HIPAA compliance?	☐	☐
Does your facility maintain lists that contain residents' medical and personal needs as well as their belongings?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan specify how staff members will ensure each resident is identified and accounted for during an evacuation?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan indicate who is responsible for notifying residents' families and how that notification should occur?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan specify who authorizes re-entry to the building, procedures for inspecting your facility, and transportation of residents from the host facility?	☐	☐
Does your facility's plan have provisions for "fresh" staff members who have not been on a shift to be available for when residents (evacuees) return?	☐	☐

Fire Safety
For more information about fire safety in senior care facilities, see MedPro's *Checklist: Fire Response in Senior Care Facilities* and *Checklist: Fire Response in Senior Care Facilities: Infrastructure Aspects.*

Resources

For more information related to emergency preparedness, see MedPro's *Risk Resources: Emergency Preparedness and Response in Senior Care Organizations.*

Endnotes

[1] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General. (2023, September). *Nursing homes reported wide-ranging challenges preparing for public health emergencies and natural disasters*. Retrieved from https://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/OEI-06-22-00100.pdf

[2] Ibid.

[3] The information in this checklist is largely adapted from the following sources: 42 CFR § 483.73; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Technical Resources, Assistance Center, and Information Exchange (TRACIE). (2021, March 26 [last updated]). *Long term care requirements: CMS Emergency Preparedness Final Rule.* Retrieved from https://files.asprtracie.hhs.gov/documents/aspr-tracie-cms-ep-rule-long-term-care.pdf; American Health Care Association & National Center for Assisted Living. (n.d.). *Shelter in place: Planning resource guide for nursing homes.* Retrieved from www.ahcancal.org/Survey-Regulatory-Legal/Emergency-Preparedness/Documents/SIP_Guidebook_Final.pdf