

Emergency Preparedness and Response Tip Sheet:

How Do I Become the Emergency Preparedness/Response Team's Nutrition Expert?

The events of September 11, 2001, plus floods, wild fires and other disasters or emergencies have changed how we live and how we operate at work. Planning for disasters and emergencies is about the same, whether it is a natural disaster (hurricanes, earthquakes, severe storms, tornados), an act of bio-terrorism, (chemical terrorism), or a flu pandemic. ADA members are a necessary part of a multi-disciplinary preparedness, emergency response team. ADA members can work collaboratively with other health professionals, law enforcement officials, and persons in the food, water, and hospitality industries to help ensure food and water safety.

As a result, the American Dietetic Association is urging its members to consider emergency preparedness planning for their personal and professional lives...by being:

- Aware of what professional partnerships and networks are available at the community, state and national levels,
- Knowing their community, state and federal resources,
- Being personally and professionally prepared in the event of a disaster, and
- Participating in the planning, coordination and delivery of relief to those affected.

In what ways can ADA members participate in emergency preparedness pre- and post- event planning and response?

All members, including those with food service, clinical, and public health backgrounds, are highly qualified to aid in pre- and post-event planning and disaster response. For example ADA members have been involved in:

- Planning nutritious meals for individuals or masses of people given a limited food and water supply during emergencies.
- Preventing people with chronic illnesses (diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory, AIDS and/or food allergies) from skipping or delaying the consumption of meals. Typically, the majority of people affected by disasters need help with health problems that existed before the disaster.
- Coordinating and participating in the delivery of relief to those affected, especially individuals with special needs (i.e., elderly, children, disabled).
- Assisting the media in communicating accurate, comprehensive, and timely information about general nutrition needs and food and water safety issues during emergency events.
- Preventing the spread of food-and-water-borne diseases by working with local restaurants and other food service establishments and the hospitality industries to ensure food and water safety throughout all stages of a disaster.
- Getting involved with disaster planning at the community, state, and federal levels. Participate in conducting state level needs assessments to determine disparate populations. Determine if any federal waivers are needed for federal food programs (e.g., WIC or Food Stamps).
- Working with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to determine who is living in their home, but using an enteral medical product. Local shelter coordinators could use this data.
- Volunteering to work in a temporary emergency response shelter. Nutrition is one discipline that is often missing at shelters and ADA members are desperately needed.
- Registering to become a volunteer by becoming a member of a local Medical Reserves Corps Team. The Emergency Management Agency contact in the Office of Homeland Security also work to obtain volunteers.

ADA members working in an office, agency, or institutional setting have assisted by:

- Ensuring that their office/agency/institution has an Emergency Management Plan to serve their patients or clients
- Developing a plan to contact employees.
- Creating backups to all nutrition therapy and food service resources that are only available via a computer and are thus susceptible to power outages.
- Identifying what additional resources that existing vendors can supply in an emergency.
- Assuring that state preparedness plans address food systems and nutrition sheltering needs of those with special needs.
- Sharing data on Temporary and Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and other emergency food program information with local preparedness coordinators. Assist to procure food, cleaning supplies, etc. for disaster-affected communities, as well as, disaster responders.
- Becoming a liaison officer by communicating activities of your organizations with other response agencies/institutions.

Summary of the next steps to becoming involved in emergency preparedness planning and response.

- Step 1:** Become knowledgeable. Learn the terms and sources of preparedness training programs.
- Step 2:** Network with other ADA members working in various practice settings to maintain on-going communications for pre-, during, and post emergency planning.
- Step 3:** Learn the federal, state and local emergency preparedness and response systems related to health, medical and food assistance programs.
- Step 4:** Be aware of the terminology and sources of training programs to better distribute food and water in an emergency.
- Step 2:** Identify local, state and federal sources for information, financial assistance and human resources long before an emergency occurs.

Steps 1 and 2 above Are Further Addressed in other ADA's Emergency Preparedness and Response Tip Sheets:

- Volunteering...Where Do I Fit In?
- Where Do I Go for Information and Training?
- What Role Does Defense Play in Food Safety?

To improve your practice, this ADA Emergency Preparedness and Response Tip Sheet is one in a series produced by the ADA Emergency Preparedness Task Force to help members in the event of a disaster.

Other ADA Tip Sheets are:

- Volunteering...Where Do I Fit In?
- Becoming a Member of the Preparedness Team... Where Do I Go for Information and Training?
- What Role Does Food Defense Play in Food Safety?