



Community Emergency Preparedness

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You may view the Filipino version of this here.

Hello there!

This module will talk about **community emergency preparedness** and its relevance to our public health system. The lack of preparedness when it comes to health emergencies has been highlighted even more by the COVID-19 pandemic, which in turn, has overwhelmed our public health system.

Our health emergency preparedness as a nation is heavily dependent on the grassroots level of our society - and that is in our communities.

Continue reading the rest of the module to find more comprehensive information on community emergency preparedness, and what we can do to help!

What is community preparedness?

But before we talk about community preparedness, we must first understand the term **health risk assessment**, as we will be encountering this concept a couple of times in this module! Health Risk Assessment is a key component/element of preparedness. It identifies the hazards and vulnerabilities that will serve as the basis of planning.

Now that we know what health risk assessment is, we can talk about what community preparedness is. **Community preparedness** is the ability of communities to prepare for, withstand, and recover from public health incidents in both the short and long term by

assessing health risks within the jurisdiction of a community. It has a couple of roles in the discourse of public health, some of which are the following:

- Support the development of public health, health care, human services, mental/behavioral health, and environmental health systems that support community preparedness
- Participate in awareness training on how to prevent, respond to, and recover from incidents that adversely affect public health
- Identify at-risk individuals with access and functional needs that may be disproportionately impacted by an incident or event
- Promote awareness of and access to public health, health care, human services, mental/behavioral health, and environmental health resources that help protect the community's health and address the access and functional needs of at-risk individuals
- Engage in preparedness activities that address the access and functional needs of the whole community as well as cultural, socioeconomic, and demographic factors
- Convene or participate with community partners to identify and implement additional ways to strengthen community resilience
- Plan to address the health needs of populations that have been displaced because of incidents that have occurred in their own or distant communities, such as after a radiological or nuclear incident or natural disaster.

Functions of Community Preparedness

Now that we have a better understanding of what community preparedness is, it is important to understand what the functions of community preparedness are. Functions, in simple terms, **are what needs to be done for community preparedness to be as efficient and effective as possible.** Here are four functions of community preparedness:

1. Determine a public health risk assessment by **identifying and prioritizing jurisdictional risks, risk-reduction strategies, and risk-mitigation efforts** in coordination with community partners and stakeholders.
2. **Strengthen community partnerships in order to support public health preparedness.** Strengthening partnerships help identify and engage both the public and private community partners to assist with the mitigation of identified health risks and Integrate all-hazards emergency plans with identified community roles and responsibilities related to the provision of public health, health care, human services, mental/behavioral health, and environmental health services.

3. **Coordinating with partners who share information through community social networks.** Engaging with community organizations fosters better social connections that ensure the availability and community awareness of public health, health care, human, mental/behavioral health, and environmental health services.
4. **Coordinating training and providing guidance to support community involvement with preparedness efforts** by providing public health preparedness and response training and guidance to community partners and other stakeholders in order to address risks in those identified in the jurisdictional risk assessment.

Types of Emergencies

Now that we know what community preparedness is which is essentially just the preparation of a community for possible public health emergencies, let's look into what qualifies as public health emergencies. **Public health emergency**, according to the Republic Act No. 11332, also known as **the Mandatory Reporting of Notifiable Diseases and Health Events of Public Health Concern Act**, refers to an occurrence or imminent threat of an illness or health condition that is caused by any of the following:

- Bioterrorism;
- The appearance of a novel or previously controlled or eradicated infectious agent or biological toxin;
- A natural disaster;
- A chemical attack or accidental release;
- A nuclear attack or accident; or
- An attack or accidental release of radioactive materials.

Additionally, for something to qualify as a public health emergency, it must pose a high probability of any of the following:

- A large number of deaths in the affected population;
- A large number of serious injuries or long-term disabilities in the affected population;
- Widespread exposure to an infectious or toxic agent that poses a significant risk of substantial harm to a large number of people in the affected population;
- International exposure to an infectious or toxic agent that poses a significant risk to the health of citizens of other countries
- Trade and travel restrictions.

Action Items

But what needs to be done to make sure these functions happen? The US Centers for Disease Control has its suggested action items and initiatives per function that can serve as a guide in creating action plans for community preparedness. In this part of the module, we will list action items per function to give you a better understanding on what you and your communities can do in crafting plans.

Function 1: The following are some action items communities can do to ensure that jurisdictional risks, risk-reduction strategies, and risk-mitigations are identified and prioritized:

- Determine the risks to the health of the jurisdiction by **conducting a public health jurisdictional risk assessment**. Jurisdictional risk assessments include the following:
 - Setting a definition of risk, including a risk formula.
 - Identifying the size and characteristics of the jurisdiction's population
 - Identifying or locating populations with access and functional needs
 - Identification of potential hazards, such as geographic and physical hazards, vulnerabilities, risks that are related to population characteristics, and other risks in the community with the potential to adversely impact public health and related health care, human services, mental/behavioral health, and environmental health systems.
 - The relation between identified risks to human impact and the interruption of public health, healthcare, human, mental/behavioral health, and environmental health services, noting that certain responses may affect basic functions of society, including physical damage to infrastructure or a reduction in the critical workforce.
 - Estimating the plausibility or probability of risks and hazards for the jurisdiction. An example is the likelihood of natural disasters based on historical precedence.
 - Identifying populations with limited language proficiency and limited access to communication channels to receive timely and effective public health information.
 - Garnering information on vulnerabilities based on socioeconomic status, education, culture, and other factors.
 - Locating or mapping out populations using information sources, including geographic information systems (GIS), the Agency for

Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) Social Vulnerability Index, HHS emPOWER data and other similar sources.

- Garnering data on the size and type of animal populations within the jurisdiction.
 - Moreover, jurisdictional risk assessments may be conducted by obtaining information from **consulting subject matter experts, gathering data** that help prioritize jurisdictional hazards and public health vulnerabilities, **identifying factors that influence community resilience**, and **estimating the impact of the risk on public health, environmental health, and health care system functioning** (i.e. the potential loss or disruption of essential services, such as water, sanitation, vector control, electricity, or other utilities).
5. Determine the risks to the health of the jurisdiction by **supporting jurisdictional partners and stakeholders to identify services in order to reduce and mitigate identified jurisdictional public health risks**.

Function 2: The following are some action items communities can do to ensure that community partnerships are strengthened:

- Engage community partners and other stakeholders to support risk mitigation by **defining and implementing strategies for ongoing collaboration with community partners and stakeholders capable of providing services** to mitigate pre-identified general and incident-specific public health hazards and controlling risks for targeted populations.
- Coordination within communities to ensure **the delivery of essential public health services** by partnering with organizations responsible for essential health care and human services to ensure those services are provided as early as possible.
- **Partner feedback must be continuously taken into account in order to continuously improve emergency operations plans** by establishing and implementing continuous quality improvement methods to collect and incorporate feedback from the community and faith-based partners into emergency operations plans.
- **Engagement with trusted community representatives** in order to develop, test, and deliver public health messages to targeted populations.

Function 3: The following are some action items that will help in coordinating with partners who share information through community social networks:

- **Coordinate with community partners** to ensure they understand how to access and connect their stakeholders and populations they serve to public health resources during an incident.
- **Provide opportunities for community health services to participate** in jurisdictional public health emergency preparedness activities by involving them in the development, implementation, and review of jurisdictional public health emergency preparedness efforts.
- **Utilize community networks** such as local businesses, community and faith-based organizations, radio and other broadcast media, social media, text messaging, and other channels in order to disseminate timely, relevant, accessible, and culturally appropriate information during an incident.

Function 4: The following are some action items in coordinating training for community involvement with preparedness efforts:

- **Leverage existing disaster preparedness and response training and educational programs** that **incorporate community-based approaches** to preparedness and recovery with community partners and stakeholders to build community resilience.
- **Promote training initiatives and guidance for community partners** within public health, health care, human services, mental/behavioral health, and environmental health sectors.
- **Provide guidance to groups representing at-risk populations by** promoting training and education of community partners and stakeholders to support preparedness and recovery for populations that may be disproportionately impacted by an incident or event based on the jurisdiction's identified risks. Additionally, these training initiatives should aim to increase awareness of and access to services that may be needed during and after the incident.

Now that we've discussed mostly everything, we see that community preparedness is not meant to be done alone or by one governing agency, but rather by all stakeholders in order to make it as efficient and effective as possible. A good and inclusive program can only be done by listening to science alongside the collective efforts of all community members through conducting training rooted in scientific evidence and listening to the community who are most affected by the plans being made.

Related organizations

To know more, you can look at the website and resources provided by the following organizations or government agencies:

- **Department of Health**
 - holds the overall technical authority on health as it is a national health policy-maker and regulatory institution
- **Red Cross Philippines**
 - the premier humanitarian organization in the country committed to providing quality life-saving services that protect the life and dignity especially of indigent Filipinos in vulnerable situations
- **National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council**
 - a working group of various government, non-government, civil sector, and private sector organizations of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines
- **Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases**
 - created under Executive Order No. 168 in 2014 for the management of emerging infectious diseases in the Philippines such as the emergence of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Avian Influenza, Ebola, and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infections.

Here are some hotlines of organizations and government agencies you can also contact to know more:

- **NATIONAL DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND MANAGEMENT COUNCIL (NDRRMC)**
 - Trunk lines: (02) 8911-5061 to 65 local 100
- **DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT (DSWS)**
 - Text Hotline: 0918-912-2813
 - Trunkline: (02) 8931-8101 to 07
 - Disaster Response Unit:
 - (02) 8856-3665
 - (02) 8852-8081
- **RED CROSS PHILIPPINES**
 - Hotline:
 - 143
 - (02) 8527-8385 to 95
 - Trunk line: (02) 8790-2300
 - Disaster Management Office: 134 (Staff), 132 (Manager), 133 (Radio Room)
 - Emergency Response Unit: (02) 8790-2300 local 604

- Telefax: (02) 8527-0864
- **DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DILG)**
 - Trunk line: (02) 8876 3454

References

You can view our references here: <http://bit.ly/HEPReferences>