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HHS EMERGENCY RESPONSE: MID-DAY REPORT

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson said today his department is on the ground and actively helping in recovery efforts in New York City and Washington, D.C. The Secretary spent much of the day briefing congressional leaders on what the department is doing in response to this crisis, as well as ensuring that resources were getting where they are needed.

Secretary Thompson began the day by greeting HHS employees in the lobby as they came to work and then delivered a morning address to all 63,000 HHS employees nationwide, pledging that HHS will "go the extra mile to help those in need" following the terrorist attacks.

The Secretary told employees that HHS will "go out of its way to make sure those who need help get it promptly and with the compassion that epitomizes the public servants of this great department."

HHS responsibilities include:

- Coordination of emergency medical relief assistance to affected areas through the Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP);
- Availability of health officers in the PHS Commissioned Corps for deployment as needed in emergencies;
- Technical assistance and medical supplies for state and local health departments from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC);
- Grief and mental health assistance from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA);
- Blood quality and availability oversight by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA);
- Uninterrupted services and reimbursement through the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS); and
- Services provided by other HHS operating divisions.

"America is counting on us. The Department of Health and Human Services has begun the healing process in America, and we must see it through," Secretary Thompson said. "By doing our jobs, we deprive the terrorists of victory. We show them that America's faith in itself cannot be destroyed by an attack against our institutions. We show them that America's compassion is as great as its courage."

The status of HHS responses at mid-day Wednesday included:

Personnel Assistance

The Office of Emergency Preparedness has deployed 328 medical personnel from disaster readiness teams to assist health providers in the New York and Washington, D.C., areas. In addition, OEP has deployed about 270 mortuary services personnel to assist in retrieval, identification and preparation of those killed. On Tuesday morning, Secretary Thompson had activated the National Disaster Medical System, the first time the system had ever been activated on a full nationwide basis. His action placed 80 disaster medical teams nationwide at the ready for deployment if needed.

New York -- Five Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs) have been deployed to the New York area (25 personnel from Lyons, N.J.; 44 from White Plains, N.Y.; 41 from Boston; 52 from Worcester, Mass.; and 49 from Providence, R.I.). Total medical personnel deployed: 211.

These DMATs are staging from the Stewart National Guard Base, Newburg, N.Y. From there, personnel are being assigned as needed throughout the New York area.

Four Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORTs) with a total of 169 personnel have been deployed to the New York area from throughout the East Coast. They are also staging at the Stewart base, to be deployed to the World Trade Center site.

Washington, D.C. -- Three DMATs have been deployed to the Washington area (46 medical personnel from the U.S. Commissioned Corps DMAT in Rockville, Md.; 35 from Winston-Salem, N.C.; and 36 from Atlanta, Ga.). Total medical personnel: 117.

Three DMORTs were assigned to the Washington area, with 102 personnel, likewise staging at Anacostia.

The PHS Commissioned Corps was put on readiness alert Tuesday, making some 5,700 corps personnel available for deployment. In particular, about 800 corps officers who make up the Commissioned Corps Readiness Force are on stand-by for immediate deployment if needed to meet local needs for specific medical skills.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention deployed four epidemiologists and two laboratory experts to New York to assist assessing medical needs and capacity planning for treating victims in the area's hospitals. In addition, CDC provided 11 technical assistance personnel to assist with distribution of medical materials sent to New York in a "Push Package" (see below), as well as other needs that may be identified; and an emergency response specialist to assist the city health department in coordinating the broadscale emergency medical efforts.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has also provided five staff members to assist at the response center established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in Edison, N.J. The CMS staff members will perform duties as needed at the FEMA center.

Medical Supplies

Secretary Thompson on Tuesday authorized the first emergency use of the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile, providing for delivery of supplies to support medical personnel caring for victims. The shipment arrived in New York at 9 p.m., within seven hours of deployment.

In addition, CDC worked with tetanus vaccine manufacturers and the public health departments of New York and Washington, D.C., and confirmed today that adequate supplies of tetanus vaccine are being sent directly to each location by manufacturers or related health departments. Vaccine manufacturer Aventis Pasteur has shipped 50,000 doses of tetanus-diphtheria vaccine to replenish the local supply in New York City.

Under the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile program, CDC's action on Tuesday released one of the eight "12-Hour Push Packages" that are maintained in pre-packaged, pre-positioned caches in secure storage facilities around the country. The packages are designed to be deliverable to any area of the continental United States within 12 hours of deployment, with substantial supplies to address a wide variety of potential needs.

"Push Packages" contain pharmaceuticals, intravenous supplies, airway supplies, emergency medication, bandages and dressings, and other materials to cover a spectrum of medical needs. Each "package" involves several truckloads of materials and is intended to be used in responding to an emergency involving mass casualties.

In addition to the "Push Packages," CDC is providing 84,000 bags of intravenous fluid and other intravenous supplies, as well as 400 ventilators. The IV and other materials are being provided in addition to the "Push Packages" to respond to the particular expected needs in New York.

Technical Assistance

The CDC activated its Health Alert Network, which provides rapid information to all health departments. CDC issued a precautionary advisory to state and local health department to be alert to any unusual disease symptoms. The alert was a standard emergency procedure to ensure that reports of any unusual diseases or symptoms would be reported quickly to CDC. No reports have resulted from this alert.

CDC also used the Health Alert Network to provide information on safe handling of bodies and ensuring against any possible spread of disease. In addition, CDC provided information to New York and other states regarding dust hazards arising from the collapse of the World Trade Towers.

Blood Supplies

Secretary Thompson has been in touch with the major blood suppliers to assist in bringing about maximum blood donation so that supplies will be adequate to treat victims.

The National Institutes of Health opened its blood center for donation by the public and by Wednesday had collected the maximum amount they could receive at present. NIH asked employees and the local public willing to donate to phone and schedule future donation: (301) 496-1048, or (301) 496-4506.

In addition, the Food and Drug Administration has been in close contact with key national and local blood suppliers to facilitate the availability of adequate blood supplies to meet urgent needs, particularly in the areas of New York City and Washington, D.C. Recognizing the need for rapid, high volume collections, the FDA provided guidance yesterday to help make more blood available for the emergency and to also insure the safest possible blood collections under these emergency circumstances.

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