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HHS PROVIDES MEDICAL TEAMS, OTHER RELIEF TO ASSIST RESCUE, RECOVERY WORKERS AT ATTACK SITES

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson today announced that about 100 doctors, nurses and other health care professionals are staffing two treatment stations to provide round-the-clock medical care to rescue and recovery workers toiling in the aftermath of the attack in New York City.

"What these men and women have given to the people of New York and the rest of our country is inspirational, and we will do everything in our power to make their jobs easier. They are true American heroes," Secretary Thompson said. "As we learn more about what is needed, local officials should know more resources from the federal government are always just a phone call away."

The medical stations for rescue workers are part of a series of actions taken by HHS to provide needed services to the rescue workers, including providing equipment and occupational health experts to ensure their safety and making grant money available to meet child care needs.

The medical teams caring for rescue workers are part of HHS' National Disaster Medical System, a volunteer network of doctors, nurses and other health and support personnel that Secretary Thompson put on alert Tuesday. HHS has a total of 238 medical professionals on site in New York from five Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs) around the country. HHS also has dispatched about 200 morticians, medical examiners, pathologists and other specialists from four Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORTs) to aid in the recovery.

Secretary Thompson also is sending a specialized mental health team to provide counseling and other assistance to the DMAT and DMORT teams already on the ground in New York. Rescue and recovery workers often face special emotional challenges.

HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers a toll-free hotline, 1-800-789-2647, to connect people across the country -- including rescue workers -- with local resources to obtain appropriate grief counseling and other mental health services. In addition, SAMHSA has sent experts to New York City to develop long-range plans to address the mental health needs of rescue workers, survivors and others in the city.

Other HHS actions to assist rescue workers include:

- HHS' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has dispatched occupational health specialists to New York City to assess rescue worker safety needs and ensure appropriate precautions are taken to minimize risks. The team is helping to determine what protective equipment workers need, including various types of respirators, hard hats and goggles, and is assisting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which is measuring for chemical contaminants at the disaster site.
- HHS' Administration for Children and Families has provided grant money to New York City to provide emergency child care to relief workers and victims. The grant money also can fund a wide array of other immediate social and community services, including temporary food and shelter and other needs of emergency and relief workers.

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