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## **HHS INITIATES IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM STEPS TO ADDRESS EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF TERRORIST AIR ATTACKS**

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson today announced steps the department is taking to respond to the immediate and long-term emotional and psychological impact of the loss of life and damage caused by terrorists in New York, Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania and throughout the nation. The Secretary, in New York today to tour health and emergency facilities, acted in response to concerns about mental health consequences expressed by local and state officials.

HHS personnel have already begun to help coordinate crisis counseling programs for victims, their families, and the thousands of professional and volunteer rescue workers. Today's actions include immediate release of \$1 million in funding for New York to support mental health services and strategic planning for comprehensive and long-term support.

"These devastating aerial attacks have shocked the nation into the realization that acts of massive, random, criminal violence cannot be relegated to some place 'over there,'" the Secretary declared. "The emotional and psychological wounds from the human-caused tragedies of September 11, will be deeper and take much longer to heal than those from events of similar scope caused by natural forces."

Recognizing that early mental health intervention can help people recover sooner, HHS has joined with the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and other federal agencies, including the Department of Justice, to speed both the human and financial resources for crisis intervention and counseling requested by affected states.

The state of New York is already receiving HHS technical help to apply immediately for federal emergency services crisis counseling funds. Three departmental mental health and crisis response experts are headed to the disaster sites to support state and city-directed efforts, to provide mental health services and to assist in long-range planning efforts.

"Because the size and scope of this attack and the potential for serious traumatization is unprecedented in this country, the HHS commitment is long-term," Secretary Thompson said. The need for crisis mental health services will extend into the foreseeable future. The department is planning not only to supplement FEMA support, but also to make additional longer-term funding available to affected community mental health programs.

"Crisis counseling is all the more critical today," the Secretary said. "The fact that this was a human-caused disaster, not a natural one, affects the emotional healing of survivors. The fact that the targets were among the nation's landmarks, the perpetrators international terrorists, deeply affects every American. Everyone of every age may have unanticipated feelings and reactions over the coming days, weeks, months and even years."

The more devastating and terrifying the trauma is, the more vulnerable individuals are to develop emotional or psychological symptoms. The lack of warning, the extent of injuries and death, exposure to horrifying events, and the possibility of recurrence -- all hallmarks of the events of Tuesday and the days to follow -- make the likelihood of emotional repercussions all the more challenging for adults and, particularly, for children.

According to HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), parents can and must help their children understand; teachers must help their students do the same. Some children may have reactions very soon after the event. Others may seem to be doing fine for weeks or months, then begin to show worrisome behavior. Reassurance and honesty are key to helping children through the horrors of this week. Very young children can use cuddling, as well as verbal support. Help children understand that there are no bad emotions and that a wide range of reactions is normal. Encourage them to express their feelings.

Everyone should understand that physical and emotional reactions to a disaster are normal. SAMHSA emphasized, they can and do happen to everyone. In fact they can be part of the healing process itself. Acknowledging those feelings, focusing on strengths and abilities, and accepting help from family members, friends, and community programs are also part of the healing process.

Some people may experience only relatively short-lived problems -- intense worries and bad memories, for example -- that diminish with counseling, emotional support and time. Others may experience what can be long-term and debilitating problems including depression, anxiety, hopelessness, stress disorders, and even suicidal thoughts. Anniversaries of the event also can trigger symptoms and related problems in functioning.

In the wake of their immediate grief, survivors and others affected by this disaster are likely to be preoccupied with bringing the perpetrators to justice. They may find it hard to let go and rebuild their own lives. Rescue workers may face special emotional challenges. Usually they spend most of their time rescuing people who are alive; much of their professional identity is based on this fact. For them, this experience in which they have had to recover many dead victims may seem to be a personal failure.

For information about local mental health services or to obtain informational materials to help understand and talk about emotional effects of trauma, call 1-800-789-2647 (TDD: 301-443-9006) or connect to the Web at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov) (click on "crisis counseling"). Additional information is available from the National Institute of Mental Health on the Web [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov).

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at [www.hhs.gov/news](http://www.hhs.gov/news). Last revised: September 13, 2001

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