

Medical Surge and the Role of Urgent Care Centers: Questions and Answers



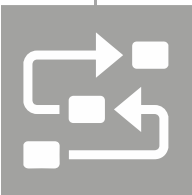
Urgent care centers are a growing presence in the healthcare marketplace, with more than 8,100 locations nationwide. Yet, limited information is available about ongoing preparedness activities among urgent care centers or their readiness to contribute to the healthcare system response to emergencies and disasters. ASPR TRACIE conducted 18 interviews with urgent care center leaders associated with centers in 44 states to capture a snapshot of current activities and perceptions. A key finding from the interviews was that urgent care centers are willing to participate in emergency preparedness and response efforts and have personnel skilled in providing the types of services that may be needed during a disaster. However, many have not been engaged in such efforts and lack knowledge of how to get involved or sustain their efforts. The following questions and answers may assist urgent care centers and health care coalitions and other partners to engage with and support each other's activities.

Resources for Urgent Care Centers



Who should I contact to express interest in contributing to my community's healthcare system emergency preparedness and response activities?

- Your local health care coalition
- An affiliated hospital if you are part of a health system or nearby hospitals if you are independent
- Your local public health department
- Your local emergency management agency



What are some basic steps I can take to boost my readiness?

- Develop and maintain a contact list for all personnel accompanied by a procedure to contact them during off hours
- Identify roles and responsibilities for your personnel
- Know who to contact to request or offer support during an emergency
- Sign up on emergency notification systems managed by your local emergency management or public safety agency
- Train all personnel to identify and isolate potentially infectious patients
- Test the ability of personnel to follow infection control procedures
- Know mass casualty patient triage guidelines
- Develop a back-up system to manage patient records if your electronic medical records system becomes inaccessible
- Establish emergency facility shutdown procedures and an accompanying process to return to operations
- Maintain a disaster kit with basic personal protective equipment and medical supplies
- Review existing protocols, policies, and procedures for your normal operations and assess their applicability to emergency operations
- Assess known risks in your community (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes, close proximity to chemical facility, etc.) and consider what threats they may pose to your facility and employees
- Determine vulnerabilities of basic utilities and potential sources of back-up (e.g., electricity, gas, and water)



How do I develop an emergency plan?

- Build on the existing plan of an affiliated healthcare facility if you are part of an integrated system
- Seek guidance from community partners
- Enhance existing or develop new protocols, checklists, or guidelines for your staff to refer to during more likely to occur incidents, such as how to:
 - Implement site and personnel safety actions
 - Switch from electronic to paper medical records
 - Safely don and doff personal protective equipment
 - Secure pharmaceuticals and other temperature-sensitive supplies during a power outage
- Review resources included in ASPR TRACIE's [Emergency Operations Plans/Emergency Management Program](#) and [Continuity of Operations \(COOP\)/Failure Plan Topic Collections](#)



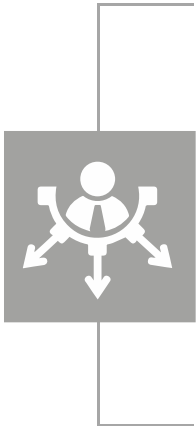
What training is available for my employees?

- Identify training offered by affiliated healthcare facilities if you are part of an integrated system
- Ask community partners to include you in training opportunities
- Access free online training on the [incident command system and other emergency management topics](#) through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Management Institute
- Review resources included in ASPR TRACIE's [Training and Workforce Development Topic Collection](#)



What opportunities are available to test my urgent care center's emergency readiness?

- Participate in drills and exercises developed by affiliated healthcare facilities if you are part of an integrated network
- Ask community partners to include you in their drills and exercises
- Review resources included in ASPR TRACIE's [Exercise Program](#) Topic Collection



What can I gain through my participation in preparedness activities?

- Access to information and expertise
- Awareness of community needs
- Opportunity to make a difference in the community
- Recognition and respect for your capabilities
- Opportunities for networking and professional development
- Access to resources, possibly to include supplies, training, and funding



Where can I find information about health care coalitions and the nation's healthcare system preparedness and response framework?

- ASPR [Hospital Preparedness Program \(HPP\)](#) Information
- ASPR [2017-2022 Healthcare Preparedness and Response Capabilities](#)
- Select ASPR TRACIE [Health Care Coalition Resources](#)

Resources for Health Care Coalition and Other Partners

What capabilities can urgent care centers contribute to healthcare system emergency preparedness and response activities in my community?

- Treatment of low (and in some cases moderate) acuity illnesses and injuries by licensed physicians and other providers
- Additional surge capacity to decompress emergency departments and other treatment locations
- Patient triage
- Risk communication to patients
- Mass prophylaxis or vaccination – at the urgent care center or by its personnel at an alternate site in the community
- Public health surveillance and patient monitoring
- Staffing support to a medical shelter or alternate care site
- Space to set up a temporary field hospital or triage site
- Responder or occupational follow-up care or monitoring

What is the best way to reach out to urgent care centers?

- Direct contact
- Through hospitals or other existing partners that are affiliated with urgent care centers
- Through [national](#) and [state](#) urgent care associations or [professional](#) organizations



How can I engage urgent care centers in my readiness activities?

- Invite urgent care centers to participate in:
 - Planning meetings and conferences
 - Emergency preparedness training opportunities
 - Drills and exercises
- Collect contact information for key urgent care center personnel and include them in emergency notification messages
- Add urgent care center contacts to newsletters, list serves, and other outreach tools
- Ask urgent care centers what they are willing and able to contribute
- Offer access to community-wide resources, such as supply caches, radio networks, or emergency operations centers
- Consider the feasibility of establishing protocols or formal agreements with urgent care centers for patient referrals and transfers



What support do urgent care centers need to participate in and sustain an emergency response?

- Guidance and subject matter expertise to inform their activities
- Funding for preparedness and reimbursement for response activities
- Inclusion in notification and information sharing activities
- Access to supplies and equipment
- Access to additional personnel
- Legal protections for personnel and facilities

What obstacles might challenge or prevent urgent care centers from participating in emergency preparedness and response activities?

- Variation among urgent care centers – they have a wide range of capacities and capabilities
- Limited knowledge or understanding of potential roles for their centers
- Limited knowledge or understanding of emergency management principles
- Lack of personnel with emergency management expertise
- No requirement or mandate to participate
- No incentives or funding to participate
- Competitiveness within the healthcare industry
- Lack of time to participate on top of patient care priorities and administrative burdens
- Lean business model that may be unable to support increased staffing and service delivery, particularly over an extended time period
- Adequate numbers of personnel may not be available due to illness or injury resulting from the incident
- Facility may be closed or operations interrupted due to infrastructure damage
- Operations may not be able to be sustained due to disruptions to supply chain
- Concerns about reimbursement for services provided during an emergency
- Concerns about legal implications of participation on personnel or the facility

Additional Information

Medical Surge and the Role of Urgent Care Centers – [Report](#)

Medical Surge and the Role of Urgent Care Centers – [Fact Sheet](#)