

SPECIAL INSERT: SAVE THIS SECTION!

SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS MONTH

Winter storms, power outages, gas leaks, flooding – all typical (yet extremely disruptive) events which can affect our lives at any moment, often striking quickly and without warning. Whether the event results in a significant disruption of daily life – for example last April’s Nor’easter in which thousands of local residents were moved to nearby shelters, or simply a minor inconvenience, such as a brief power outage, your ability to handle such an event can be greatly improved when simple plans and resources are in place. Being prepared for emergencies is essential at home, school, work and in your community. While it may seem like an overwhelming process, there are many simple, (and yes, inexpensive) items you can have on hand better prepare yourself and your family.

Local officials and relief workers will make every attempt to be on the scene during and after a disaster, to help all who may need assistance. But in a large scale event, especially one that affects a large geographic area, it may be very difficult to reach everyone in a timely way. The best way to help keep you and your family safer is to be prepared before an emergency strikes. This month especially, the Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission is encouraging everyone to get prepared by having basic supplies on hand for immediate access as needed. Here’s how:

In September, a special episode of MBRHC’s public access program “Public Health Matters” will air eight times during the month, in towns served by Piscataway Community Television (PCTV). The title



of the program is “Preparing Today for Emergencies Tomorrow” and it will air on Tuesday afternoons at 1:00 pm and Thursday evenings at 8:30 pm and on Warren Media, each morning at 8:30 am and each evening at 7:00 pm. The program is also available to view online on the department’s website at www.middlebrookhealth.org.

With guests Amy Sutton, Executive Director of The Greater Somerset Chapter of the American Red Cross and James Langenbach of the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services, viewers will learn about the many simple actions they can take to become better prepared. Check your local listings!

In addition, to make it easier for residents to quickly find the suggested items needed to prepare, MBRHC has partnered with the Somerset County Health Department and local grocery stores to set up visible ‘preparedness’ displays in their stores. Participating stores in the area include: BJ’s Wholesale Club, Super Stop and Shop and Shop Rite in Watchung, Kings,

A & P and Drug Fair in Warren, and Shop Rite in Bound Brook.

For all communities, preparedness must now account for natural disasters as well as man-made ones. Knowing what to do during an emergency is an essential part of being prepared and may make all the difference when seconds count. Learn more about what you can do. Page 2 offers a listing of some of the items that should be included in your emergency kit. But there’s more to it than stockpiling select items. A family communication plan is essential, as is an understanding of your workplace, school and community plans that already exist. Visit www.middlebrookhealth.org for more guidance, as well as links to important local, state and national resources.

What Should My Emergency Kit Include?



Everyone should have some basic supplies on hand to get by for at least three days if an emergency occurs. Following is a listing of some basic items that every emergency supply kit should include. However, it is essential that you consider the unique needs of your family in order to create a kit that will meet those needs. Individuals should also consider having two emergency supply kits, one full kit at home and smaller portable kits in their workplace, vehicle or other places they spend time. Here are just *some* of the items to consider for your emergency kit. A complete list can be found on our website at www.middlebrookhealth.org. When preparing for a possible emergency situation, think first about the most basic of needs: fresh

water, food, clean air and warmth. With these in mind, kits should include:

- Water, one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation
- Food, at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio (available for less than \$50.00) with tone alert and extra batteries for both
- Flashlight and extra batteries; First aid kit; whistle to signal for help
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities; Can opener for food (if kit contains canned food)

Additional Items to Consider:

- Prescription medications (or at least a photocopy of current prescriptions) and reading glasses
- Infant formula and diapers
- Pet food and extra water for your pet
- Important family documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records in a water proof, portable container; Cash or traveler's checks and change
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person
- Complete change of clothing including a long sleeved shirt, long pants and sturdy shoes
- Household chlorine bleach and medicine dropper (When diluted 9 parts water to 1 part bleach, it can be used as a disinfectant, or to treat water by using 16 drops of bleach per gallon of water)
- Fire Extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Feminine supplies and personal hygiene items
- Mess kits, paper cups, plates and plastic utensils, paper towels
- Paper and pencil; Books, games, puzzles or other activities for children

THE FLU PANDEMIC -- WHERE DID IT GO?

For about two years, around 2005 and 2006, it seemed the possibility of a pandemic influenza occurring once again (to make it the 4th time for such an occurrence in just over 100 years) was frequently highlighted in newspapers and on television. Concern about the H5N1 'bird flu' being the trigger for the next pandemic was high. But the fact is, those topics have all but vanished off the

The threat of a flu pandemic is real. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other leading public health experts agree that it is not a question of IF a pandemic will occur, but WHEN it will occur. Preparing now will make a difference to you and your family during a pandemic.

newspaper pages, leading many people to push the issue aside almost entirely. **But not public health officials.** Their eyes are still closely focused on the spread of the H5N1 virus, which has spread throughout 15 countries since 1997, infecting over 385 people (nearly two-thirds of whom died) and tens of thousands chickens and other poultry and fowl. Why do we continue to watch this virus? Because there is still a great concern that the current H5N1 virus may change – or mutate - just enough to allow the virus to spread more readily from 'person-to-person.' At the moment, the virus remains primarily transmitted to humans almost solely through contact with H5N1-infected poultry. Should disease transmission begin to occur via person-to-person, the risk of it triggering the next flu pandemic would increase dramatically.

The emergency preparedness article on pages one and two describes the many steps individuals and families can take to become better prepared for emergencies of all types. However, in the event of such a large scale communicable disease outbreak, there are a few other planning considerations to be made which go beyond those generally considered in emergency planning.

But first, some of the basic facts about a pandemic flu. To begin, a flu (influenza) pandemic is an outbreak of a new flu virus that spreads around the world. The virus would likely spread easily from person to person, mostly through coughing and sneezing. And because the virus is new to humans, everyone may be at risk of catching it. Although some of the symptoms may be similar to that of the seasonal flu, they will likely last longer and be more severe, ultimately resulting in more deaths than are caused by the seasonal flu. Further, because it would be caused by a 'new' virus, a vaccine would not be available for several months at best, and when it does become available, supplies would likely be limited to start.

There are other effects as well, particularly the larger impact on society. A pandemic would result in a large number of people falling ill, including children and young adults, with many deaths. It could require restrictions on travel (to help limit the spread of disease), changes to normal business operations, and dismissal of students from school (also to help slow the spread of infection). Clearly, the impact on all aspects of our infrastructure, from healthcare to education to business and beyond would be profound. *(Continued next page)*



Amy Sutton of the Greater Somerset Chapter of the American Red Cross displays preparedness items on Public Health Matters

We cannot predict - but we can prepare. *If we do not take steps to prepare before a pandemic, it will be much more difficult to protect ourselves and our families and apply important protective health measures when it occurs.*

Consider this. Literally all facets and levels of government and healthcare providers are working tirelessly to develop plans to manage and respond to a pandemic.

These plans address the rapid identification, surveillance and containment of new viruses; the development of national, state and local stockpiles of essential medications to treat people who may become ill; plans to implement large-scale vaccination and medication distribution clinics; as well as the development of numerous ‘checklists’ to help individuals, families, healthcare organizations, law enforcement, businesses, schools, local government, faith organizations and others prepare. However, because a pandemic could affect many areas of the country nearly simultaneously, it will be extremely difficult – if not impossible - for government leaders, response workers and healthcare providers to meet all the needs of every community. It therefore becomes even more essential that individuals and families do all they can to best manage during such an event. **Here’s how you can start.**

<p>Stocking Up: Develop a 2-3 week supply nonperishable foods, bottled water, over-the-counter medications, and other staple household supplies. In addition, basic supplies to help reduce the spread of infection, such as disposable gloves, face masks, tissues and waterless hand sanitizer should also be available.</p>	<p>Stopping the Spread of Infection: To help reduce the spread of most infections, including seasonal flu and even a flu pandemic, hands should be washed regularly with soap and water throughout the day. When soap and water are not available, waterless hand sanitizer, with at least a 60% alcohol content should be used. All coughs and sneezes should be covered with a tissue – or a sleeve -- and efforts made to avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes, as these are easy ‘entry points’ for germs. And finally, one of the best things we can all do to reduce the spread of illness is to stay home from work or school when we are sick. During a flu pandemic, it is possible that public health officials may even require those who are infected to remain home, to contain the spread of illness.</p>	<p>Planning Ahead: A family’s pandemic plan should also consider what will be done in the event schools are closed, workplaces must close or a family member becomes sick or needs care.</p>
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To help residents begin their personal and family pandemic preparedness efforts, MBRHC is offering a free copy of “How You Can Be Prepared for a Flu Pandemic”, (while supplies last)- call us for information. The booklet is also available in Spanish. In addition, are many online pandemic-related resources available, with links provided on our website.

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MIDDLE-BROOK REGIONAL HEALTH COMMISSION