

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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HHS Secretary Azar Declares Public Health Emergency for North Carolina Due to Hurricane Dorian

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar today declared a [public health emergency](#) (PHE) for North Carolina in preparation for Hurricane Dorian, following President Trump's declaration of an emergency for the state. The declaration gives the HHS Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) beneficiaries and their healthcare providers and suppliers greater flexibility in meeting emergency health needs in disasters.

"Whether Hurricane Dorian stays offshore or makes landfall, this storm continues to pose a significant threat to health and safety," Secretary Azar said. "With the declaration and waivers we are announcing today, we can help ensure that our fellow Americans who rely on Medicare and Medicaid have continuous access to the care they need in the face of this storm."

In declaring the PHE and [authorizing flexibilities](#) for CMS beneficiaries, Secretary Azar acted within his authority under the Public Health Service Act and Social Security Act. These actions and flexibilities are retroactive to Sept. 1, 2019, for North Carolina.

HHS continues to have approximately 200 personnel staged from the [National Disaster Medical System](#) (NDMS) and an Incident Management Team along with approximately 100 tons of medical equipment and supplies for these teams to use. These assets will be available quickly to help health authorities and healthcare facilities respond to medical needs anywhere they are needed. HHS has additional personnel on alert from the NDMS and the [U.S. Public Health Commissioned Corps](#) and additional equipment and supplies for these teams, if needed.

To help meet the needs of vulnerable populations, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response and CMS are collaborating with state health authorities to provide [data](#) that the health departments can use to assist Medicare beneficiaries who rely on electrically powered medical equipment, such as oxygen concentrators or wheelchairs, and home health services.

CMS also activated the Kidney Community Emergency Response Program to monitor dialysis access and needs of these facilities as the hurricane makes its way along the southeastern coast. Through a CMS contract, this program provides technical assistance to End Stage Renal Disease Networks, kidney organizations, and other groups to ensure timely and efficient disaster preparedness, response and recovery for the kidney community.

To assist residents in the impacted area in coping with the stress of the disasters, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration activated the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#). The helpline provides immediate 24/7, 365-days-a-year crisis counseling and support to people

experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service is available to all residents in the United States and its territories. Stress, anxiety, and other depression-like symptoms are common reactions after a disaster. Residents in affected areas can call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 (for Spanish, press 2 or text Hablanos to 66746) to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) continues to monitor FDA-regulated industries across all regulated product areas that could be impacted by this storm. FDA has begun outreach to firms that produce critical medical products to help prevent any shortages resulting from the hurricane and will continue to do so as the storm's projected path continues to develop. Additionally, FDA recently updated its resources for [food](#) and [animal food](#) producers in states in the storm's path.



HHS divisions continue to monitor weather conditions arising from Hurricane Dorian and are making detailed, practical information available to help the public protect themselves from threats before, during, and after the storm. This information [includes preventing carbon monoxide poisoning](#) and other [power outage safety risks](#); [avoiding driving or walking through flood water](#); ensuring [safe food, water](#) and [medications](#); and addressing [mold and other health risks](#).

Guidance and other resources to assist in addressing such health hazards and risks are available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) online and through CDC's information service, [CDC-INFO](#). Live agents provide up-to-date science-based health information. CDC-INFO can be reached Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) or by submitting a web-based form. Services are available in English and Spanish.

Public health and safety information for Hurricane Dorian can be found on the HHS emergency website, <https://www.phe.gov/dorian>.

NOTE TO EDITORS AND PRODUCERS: Public service announcements in multiple formats and languages are <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/psa/index.html> for broadcast or website use and provide tips on protecting health and safety before, during and immediately after hurricanes.

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other news materials are available at <https://www.hhs.gov/news>. Like [HHS on Facebook](#) , follow HHS on Twitter [@HHSgov](#) , and sign up for [HHS Email Updates](#).
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