

Emergency Readiness and Crisis Response

7 Critical Steps



Many health care organizations were not adequately prepared to respond to COVID-19 due to its uncertainty and unpredictability. Emergency preparedness depends heavily on the assessment of potential hazards and threats in advance.

If risk calculations aren't inclusive of all factors and lessons learned, emergency operations plans may not adequately address the needs associated with future pandemics.

1 Take a rigorous approach in preparing an emergency operations plan (EOP).

- Perform a Hazards Vulnerability Analysis (HVA) to assess the potential hazards and threats of future disasters.
- Maintain awareness of capacity and be prepared to execute plans for alternate care sites.
- Perform drills regularly so that you're ready for implementation of the EOP.
- Apply an “all hazards approach” in developing comprehensive response and recovery efforts that are relevant to a spectrum of emergency situations, including emerging infectious disease threats.
- Organize and leverage relevant subject matter experts for guidance in responding to changing requirements.
- Be nimble so that you can implement urgent changes quickly.

2 Maintain a list of changes during COVID-19 response and perform a thorough debrief.

- Document the review process to identify gaps and weaknesses.
- Modify the EOP according to lessons learned.

3 Plan for surge scenarios.

- Consider the four “S’s” of a surge—staffing, space, supplies, and systems.

 STAFFING Planning for, mobilizing, and maintaining sufficient staff levels throughout duration of the crisis scenario	 SPACE Building, converting, or acquiring space to accommodate surge capacity while maintaining standards of care	 SUPPLIES Acquiring, stockpiling, and tracking use of equipment and goods to ensure sufficient resource availability	 SYSTEMS Setting structures for command, control, and coordination to maintain continuity of operations
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- Understand the specific needs presented by COVID-19 (e.g., ICU beds, ventilators, PPE, medicines).
- Determine how routinely a hospital meets capacity and identify ways to shift intake to avoid capacity issues.

4 Maintain a current list of staffing needs and availability of staff members to meet demand.

- Implement a current and accurate contact database to assign and track staffing throughout the crisis.
- Anticipate possible telecommunications failures (e.g., unavailability of email and traditional information technology (IT) applications).
- Reallocate professionals from lower demand areas to areas experiencing a surge.
- Implement social distancing policies and talent sharing across your organization as much as possible.
- Cross-train staff to perform high-priority duties.
- Support the basic needs of staff through available community resources (e.g., accommodations at hotels) when on-site resources are limited or unavailable.
- Consider creating a registry of co-workers willing to help with transportation and child, elder, and pet care.
- Assess the type of staff and skills needed beyond the immediate response so that you can begin recruitment efforts as the needs of the community change.

5 Prepare resources to accommodate patient movement.

- Establish protocols to create cohorts and enforce isolation among infected and noninfected patients.
- Enlist the infection preventionists and facility staff to establish traffic flow patterns to reduce exposure.
- Create separated spaces and create open surge space for non-life-threatening injuries.
- Establish a method for tracking patients who are sent to alternate care sites.
- Provide additional assistance to vulnerable populations, such as patients who are physically handicapped, pediatric, pregnant, have behavioral health issues, or those who use English as a second language.
- Include patient use in PPE forecasting.

6 Recruit and educate disaster volunteers, while acknowledging volunteer restrictions imposed during COVID-19.

- Follow all existing medical staff bylaws and policies related to temporary employment.
- Consider data systems that track volunteer details, and designate staff members to attest to the credentials and competency of volunteers.
- Use a “buddy system” to acclimate and incorporate volunteers.

7 Communicate openly and effectively—internally and externally.

- Create a single source of truth for all communications to help alleviate confusion and misunderstandings caused by inaccurate information on social media and websites.
- Establish social media and information-sharing guidelines for staff.
- Designate a spokesperson to manage the release of information to the public and media.

LEARN MORE

For more insight, download the **whitepaper: COVID-19 Lessons Learned: A Resource for Recovery** by **Deloitte & Joint Commission Resources**



To learn more about how JCR can provide support and guidance to help your organization's leadership teams with their Emergency Readiness and Crisis Response, visit www.jcrinc.com/products-and-services/advisory-services/emergency-management.