

After the Storm: Oklahoma State Department of Health Public Health Response to May 2013 Tornadoes

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) activated its emergency preparedness and response during May's violent storms. A tally of services rendered by state and local county health department staff follows.

Oklahoma hospitals reported more than 500 storm-related injuries. More than 7,400 tetanus vaccinations were administered by county health departments to storm victims and those volunteers and workers assisting in the recovery. These health departments used a combination of static clinic sites and mobile "strike teams" to provide preventive vaccinations in affected communities in Cleveland, Oklahoma, Lincoln, Pottawatomie, Canadian, and Okmulgee counties:

- Pottawatomie..... 960
- Canadian 363
- Cleveland 5,186
- Lincoln287
- Okmulgee 160
- Oklahoma 455
- TOTAL7,411



Oklahoma Medical Reserve Corps volunteers helped support county health department temporary clinics and vaccination strike teams.

Local county health department sanitarians worked the storm-damaged areas to assure public health and safety continued to be a priority, even in a time of natural disaster. The issue of food vendors who were on scene quickly in the storm-damaged areas offering free food and food for sale prompted these sanitarians to deploy to the storm sites. The sanitarians worked to ensure that products and services did not inadvertently harm or place risk on storm victims and clean-up volunteers. The sanitarians reviewed food storage and preparation processes in the field, trained food volunteers, and handed out food thermometers. Additionally, the sanitarians offered technical assistance and training to licensed food facilities which were attempting to return to business under difficult circumstances. In Cleveland, McClain, Pottawatomie, Lincoln, Canadian and Okmulgee counties, the following inspections were performed:

- Shelter inspections: 18
- Licensed food facility inspections: 236
- Temporary food vendor inspections: 29



The Metropolitan Medical Response System, administered through the OSDH, coordinated EMS unit requests.



Through June 30, the OSDH issued a temporary waiver of fees for birth and death certificates for those victims whose homes were located in the path of tornadoes in five counties.

Persons with health and medical experience, both in Oklahoma and out of state, who wanted to volunteer in the disaster relief response were urged not to self deploy, as health and medical staff resource needs were met quickly after the storms. Health and medical volunteers were urged to go to the Oklahoma Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) website at www.okmrc.org and register to become a health/medical volunteer. Since May 20, 1,912 persons have registered on the website, and nearly 4,800 personnel are now on the registry. About 200 MRC volunteers have been deployed thus far to support temporary clinics, vaccination strike teams, public health documentation, mental health support, debris removal, donations warehousing and distribution, veterinary triage and reunification, and first aid for volunteers. OKMRC volunteers continue to be utilized in support of American Red Cross long-term case management.



Oklahoma Medical Reserve Corps volunteers supported the American Red Cross disaster efforts.

The OSDH coordinated the dispatch of EMS agencies from throughout the state to provide ambulances for immediate patient transports, rescue operations, clinics, and hospital evacuation.

The Metropolitan Medical Response System, which is responsible for medical system planning, preparedness and response activities in preparation for a disaster or public health emergency in central Oklahoma, and is administered through the OSDH, handled numerous issues including the following:

- Dispatched ambulances to evacuate the Moore Medical Center.
- Coordinated EMS unit requests.
- Helped hospitals locate children separated from parents.
- Coordinated quick response ambulance strike teams.
- Coordinated access to temporary water supplies for area hospitals and dialysis units affected by the Draper station shut down.
- Coordinated emergency clinic operations.
- Coordinated response needs to affected nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.



Gov. Mary Fallin thanked public health staff and volunteers for their work in the storm-damaged areas.

