

Mass Casualty

Allen County Public Health Preparations

Because of ongoing concerns about potential terrorist attacks, natural disasters, technological and accidental hazards; the U.S. government is working to improve overall preparation for them. One aspect of this preparation is to learn more about what to do during a mass casualty event. This document focuses on common sense principles that will be useful in a mass casualty event.

If a public health emergency happens in our community, Allen County Public Health will be the local agency responsible for preparing and guiding medical response and public information efforts. During such an emergency, a critical role of the Public Health Department will be to work with other local first responders, such as fire and police. The Public Health Department will also coordinate response activities with state and federal agencies.

Allen County Public Health is providing this information to help you understand what response you may be asked to take in the event of a mass casualty event.

What is a mass casualty event?

A mass casualty event is any incident in which emergency medical service resources, such as personnel and equipment, are overwhelmed by the number and severity of casualties. These events can range from a vehicle accident and bombing to a bus overturning and shooting incident.

How should I prepare for a mass casualty event?

- Know your work, school, and community disaster plans

- Identify alternative hospitals. During an event the nearest hospitals will be overtaxed; therefore, providing you with slower service.
- Have a back- up hospital transportation plan in case EMS cannot transport you.

What should I do during a mass casualty event?

- If possible, leave the area immediately and stay away until authorities have stated it is safe.
- Call 9-1-1 if EMS, fire, or police have not arrived.
- Follow instructions from those in authority
- Help others who are hurt or need assistance to leave the area if you are able. If you see someone who is seriously injured, seek help. Do not try to manage the situation alone.

Does my injury require immediate assistance?

Seek medical attention if you have any of the following problems:

- Excessive bleeding
- Trouble breathing
- Persistent cough
- Trouble walking or using an arm or leg
- Stomach, back or chest pains
- Headache
- Blurred vision or burning eyes
- Dry mouth
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Rash or burning skin

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- Hearing problems
- Injuries that increase in pain, redness or swelling
- Injuries that do not improve after 24 to 48 hours

Where do I go to cut down my wait time for medical attention?

Go to a hospital or clinic away from the event if you can. Most victims will go to the nearest hospital. Hospitals away from the event will be less busy.

What can I expect at the hospital?

- **Long waits.** To avoid long waits, choose a hospital farther away from the event. While this might increase your travel time, you might receive care sooner.
- **Triage.** Following a terrorist attack or other disasters, injuries are generally treated on a “worst first” basis, called “triage.” Triage is not “first come, first served”. If your injuries are not immediately life threatening, others might be treated before you. The goal of triage is to save as many lives as possible.
- **Limited information.** In a large-scale emergency such as a terrorist attack, police, fire, EMS, and even hospitals and clinics cannot track every individual by name. Keep in mind that it may be difficult for hospitals to provide information about loved ones following a terrorist attack. Be patient as you seek information.

What do I do after a mass casualty event?

- If you or others have life-threatening injuries, such as severe bleeding, difficulty breathing, chest pain, or burns, provide or

seek first aid and get help from officials or others at the scene.

- If you or someone else has minor injuries seek first aid as a first step until those more severely injured can be cared for first. If possible, go to a hospital that is not in the immediate area of the blast. Hospitals closest to the blast(s) will quickly become crowded.
- Listen to emergency officials at the scene. If no one is near you to give instructions and you are in the immediate area of the blast(s), leave as soon as you can.
- To keep safe, move away from the area. Avoid crowds, unattended cars and trucks, public transportation, and damaged buildings.
- Hospitals and roads will become crowded quickly, which can make it difficult for emergency workers to care for severely injured patients. If you have loved ones who are not with you, and who are not in the area of the blast(s), call and tell them to avoid driving to the area.
- Follow the instructions of local officials who are responding to this situation. Listen to the television news, radio, or Internet to stay informed.

How to cope with a mass casualty event

Even if the event does not cause physical injuries, it can cause fear, confusion, and uncertainty. It is normal to have strong feelings after such an event. You may feel sad, helpless, anxious, dazed, or even numb. These are all normal reactions to stress.

There is no simple fix to make things better right away. But there are actions that can help you, your family, and your community heal. Try to:

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- Follow a normal routine as much as possible.
- Eat healthy meals. Be careful not to skip meals or to overeat.
- Exercise and stay active.
- Help other people in your community as a volunteer. Stay busy.
- Accept help from family, friends, co-workers, or clergy. Talk about your feelings with them.
- Limit your time around the sights and sounds of what happened. Don't dwell on TV, radio, or newspaper reports on the tragedy.

If you or someone you know is having trouble dealing with the tragedy, ask for help. Asking for help is smart. Talk to a counselor, your doctor, or community organization, such as the suicide prevention hotline (1-800-273-TALK) or the American Red Cross (1-866-GET-INFO)

If you have any questions about mass casualty incidents please contact Allen County Public Health at 419-228-4457. Health Department staff members are available to answer your questions Monday to Friday from 8:00a.m. to 4:30 p.m. You can also visit www.allencountyhealthdepartment.org. For information about putting together an Emergency Preparation Plan, visit the FEMA site at www.ready.gov. Also, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at www.bt.cdc.gov for additional information.