



Disaster Preparedness: A Way of Life for California's Hospitals

California is vulnerable to a range of disasters. The state's size, varied geography, and exposure to natural hazards — such as wildfires, floods, and earthquakes — make disaster readiness and emergency management complex, so preparedness is a way of life for hospitals.



Effective Response Demands Flexibility

As hospitals comply with myriad state and federal regulations to plan, prepare, and train for disasters of all stripes, including earthquakes, their first priority is safety and well-being. Disaster response, by its nature, necessitates in-the-moment decision-making and extreme flexibility in determining the best way to keep people safe.

Hospital Disaster Preparedness Requirements are Governed by:

- The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- The National Fire Protection Association Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs
- The Joint Commission and other accreditation organizations
- Title 22 of the California Code of Regulations

Seismic Safety

Because earthquakes are inevitable in California, hospitals in the state comply with the nation's most stringent building requirements and are among the safest buildings during an earthquake. By 2025, 100% of hospital buildings in California will be able to withstand a major earthquake.

Additionally, current law requires — by 2030 — hospital buildings provide acute care services to remain fully operational after a major earthquake. If they don't meet this deadline, they will be forced to close.

It's important to remember, though, that in many situations an evacuation — rather than a shelter-in-place strategy — is necessary. If, for example, doctors, nurses, and other caregivers cannot get to a hospital because it isn't safe, as happened during the 2018 Camp Fire, patients may be better cared for if they can be transported elsewhere.



At the end of 2018, 94% of California hospitals were able to withstand a major earthquake. By 2025, all hospitals will be in compliance.

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What's Required of Hospitals

Through constant planning, training, coordination, and practice, California's hospitals stand ready when any disaster strikes to ensure medical care is uninterrupted and patients, staff, and visitors are safe. Subject to extensive state Title 22 regulations and federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) emergency preparedness regulations, California hospitals must:

- **Have a comprehensive emergency operations plan that identifies known potential risks and mitigation strategies, and is reviewed and updated every two years, as required by CMS.**
- **Provide training on emergency preparedness policies and procedures to all staff and volunteers at least every two years, and test their plans at least twice a year, as required by CMS.**
- **Conduct at least one full-scaled communities-based exercise annually, ensuring close coordination with local emergency response and health care partners in the region, as required by CMS.**
- **Have 24 hours of backup power (and a 96 hour-plan for acute care hospitals), as required by the California Department of Public Health and National Fire Protection Association.**
- **Have a detailed process for safely evacuating patients, including transportation and methods of tracking patients and sending medication and supplies, as required by CMS.**

Planning Never Stops

Hospitals' far-reaching emergency management programs ensure protection during and after every type of potential disaster, whether earthquakes, man-made events such as bioterrorism, or public health emergencies. Every hospital must have a comprehensive plan that identifies known and potential risks and outlines appropriate mitigation strategies. Here's how they do it:

Vulnerability Analysis

All California hospitals conduct a hazards vulnerability analysis that identifies potential damage to physical structures and resulting illness or injury. Based on that analysis, hospitals establish an emergency operations plan that's continuously examined, updated, and communicated.

Emergency Operations Plan

The cornerstone to hospitals' disaster preparedness, the emergency operations plan incorporates analysis, planning, and detailed processes for responding to and recovering from an event, with these key elements:

- **Identifying resources and assets, as well as needs for communications, safety and security, staff responsibilities, utilities, and clinical support activities**
- **Establishing procedures for times when a hospital cannot be supported by the community**
- **Strategizing for recovery phases**
- **Integrating the Hospital Incident Command System into all plans — a system based on principles of the National Incident Management System**

Rigorous Training

Hospitals train their personnel extensively multiple times a year to prepare for any type of disaster, understanding and embracing the critical role they play during and after a crisis. They also dedicate staff to working year-round on coordinating their preparedness plans with those of first responders and other local, state, and federal officials.

California's Hospitals Work Hard Every Day to Be Ready

Disasters are the "new normal" for California, and preparedness is a way of life for hospitals. Regulations, standard practices, and hospitals' own commitment to their work help ensure a constant state of readiness for patients and caregivers who work at hospitals. When disasters strike, hospitals — alongside other first responders — stand ready for all in need.