

Prevention of Communicable Disease in Community Evacuation Centers

People crowded together in places such as evacuation centers are vulnerable to disease outbreaks caused by respiratory illnesses and gastrointestinal (GI) diseases, as well as other communicable diseases. The germs that cause these illnesses can be spread from person to person when they are in close contact with one another, or by touching something with the germs on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Gastrointestinal illnesses can also be spread through contaminated food or water. Practicing good infection prevention measures can prevent many of these illnesses.

General Infection Prevention Guidance for Evacuation Centers

Use of infection prevention measures by all staff and evacuees can reduce the spread of infectious diseases.

- Staff and residents should wash their hands with soap and water frequently.
- Children should be assisted in washing their hands with soap and water frequently.
- Alcohol hand gels are an effective addition to handwashing, and a reasonable temporary substitute when soap and water are not readily available.
- Alcohol hand gel should be positioned throughout the evacuation center, especially at the beginning of food service lines and outside of toilet facilities.
- Encourage good personal hygiene practices, including the following:
 - Cover your cough or sneeze with tissues, disposing of tissues in the trash, or with your sleeve or hands. Wash your hands or use alcohol hand gel after coughing or sneezing. If possible, tissues should be provided in evacuation center living areas.
 - Follow good hygienic practices during food preparation.
 - Do not share eating utensils or drinking containers.
 - Do not share personal care items such as combs, razors, toothbrushes, or towels with anyone else.
- Facilities should be adequate to allow residents to bathe at least twice weekly.
- Laundry facilities should be available to allow appropriate laundering of clothes and bed linens.

Management of Persons with Infectious Diseases in Evacuation Centers

Before entering an evacuation center, all residents should be screened for the following conditions:

- Fever
- Cough
- Skin rash or sores
- Open wounds
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Persons with any of the above conditions should be evaluated and provided care. Residents of the center should be instructed to report any of the above conditions to the center staff. A separate area or room should be identified in advance to be used to house potentially infectious residents awaiting evaluation or transfer.

If multiple cases of gastrointestinal, respiratory or rash illness are identified in an evacuation center, please contact the Mississippi State Department of Health, Epidemiology Office, at (601)576-7725 (during business hours). After hours and holidays, please call 601 576-7400. Please be prepared to answer questions regarding symptoms, length of illness and number of ill.