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To: Local Health Departments and Hospitals
State Emergency Operations Center Agencies

From: Eric E. Whitaker M.D., MPH
Director

Re: Special Needs Shelter Planning

Date: October 23, 2006

The Illinois Emergency Operations Plan (IEOP) designates the American Red Cross (ARC) as being responsible for the operation of shelters for displaced individuals. The American Red Cross (ARC) is responsible for setting up the shelters as well as providing food and water to all persons being sheltered. However, ARC does not have the capability to provide support of individuals that exceed shelter occupancy requirements. Per the Illinois Emergency Operations Plan (IEOP) the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is the lead state agency for the providing of medical care in Illinois during emergency events, as well as for the sheltering of individuals with special needs.

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) as part of its normal daily duties coordinates with Local Health Departments and Hospitals to provide health and medical care to the citizens of Illinois, as well as regulating long term care facilities. The Illinois Department of Public Health has the capability to secure medical expertise, staffing, supplies and equipment for emergency event response efforts. However, IDPH is not the lead agency for and does not in its normal, daily business provide mental health services or other unique health related services. The Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) is the lead state agency for mental health support in Illinois; as well as many other health and medical services. Furthermore, the Illinois Department of Human Services has offices in each county of the state; similar to the Illinois Department of Public Health's coordination with Local Health Departments to initiate local response efforts for public health.

Though a Local Health Department may receive the initial mission for providing assistance to those sheltered individuals with special needs, the health department cannot be expected to undertake this mission alone. The complexities of providing health and medical assistance in a potentially long term management situation to displaced and sheltered individuals, whether in a standard American Red Cross Shelter or in a Special Needs Shelter, demands a multi-agency approach at both the local and state level.

Special Needs Sheltering Missions will require emergency event procedural planning by local, state and federal government agencies, as well as non-government and private sector groups. The agencies of Emergency Management for site selection; Public Health for health and medical services coordination; Human Services for health and medical services support; and Red Cross for sheltering provisions support; should be considered partners in the planning and implementation for Special Needs Shelters. In addition numerous support agencies will need to be involved to ensure successful mission completion.

It is imperative when a Local Health Department is given a Special Needs Sheltering Mission, that it immediately reach out to its Local Emergency Management Agency to begin coordination with Local Hospitals, as well as the Lead Regional or POD Hospital; the County Department of Human Services Agency and the Local American Red Cross Chapter. Only by involving these key agencies from the beginning can the jurisdiction as a whole achieve the successful operation of a Special Needs Shelter.

Any questions regarding the aforementioned planning guidelines or information should be directed to

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