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BERKSHIRE COUNTY BOARDS OF HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Emergency Dispensing Site (EDS) Frequently Asked Questions

What is an EDS? During a large-scale public health emergency, there may be the need to distribute medication or vaccinations to large groups of people. Emergency Dispensing Sites (EDS) are pre-determined locations in communities that can be used to dispense the vaccine or medication.

How will the EDS work? The State Department of Public Health will order the set-up of EDSs (communities can also decide to set up the EDS, though that scenario is less likely). A community will have 24 hours to set up the clinic, contact volunteers, etc. The Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) will then deliver the necessary supplies. The next 24 hours will be spent dispensing to the clinic/site staff and their families. THEN the clinic will be opened to the public. The goal in planning is to be able to dispense medication or vaccine to 90% of the population within 48 hours of the clinic being open to the public. The SNS will continue to deliver medication/supplies as the clinic needs them.

What kinds of things will be treated at the EDS? The two scenarios that the Department of Public Health talk about most in terms of the EDS are a smallpox outbreak and an aerosolized release of anthrax. Outbreaks of meningitis or other diseases and some pandemic flu scenarios may also warrant the opening of an EDS.

Who staffs the EDS? Volunteers! It takes a lot of people to staff an EDS. First Responders and town officials have a role to play in organizing and securing the site, in dealing with community-wide traffic patterns, talking to the media, etc. Beyond that, both medical and non-medical people will be needed inside the clinic to help with dispensing. Anyone working at the clinic AND their families get vaccinated or medicated FIRST.

Who is in charge of the EDS? This is a decision made at the community level. The most likely scenario is that the Town Emergency Management Director or his/her delegate will be the Incident Commander—the person running the entire emergency. Public Health—the Board of Health and its Agents—will likely be responsible for everything that happens inside the clinic.

What kind of location is necessary for an EDS? The location needs to be easy to find, have adequate parking, and have refrigeration available. Ideally, the location will not have been designated as an emergency shelter. Other things to consider: is there a generator that can supply back-up power? Are there food facilities to use to feed staff? Is it handicapped accessible, etc.

How will people know to go to the EDS? Letting people know where and when to go to the EDS is a part of the planning process. Radio will be a primary method of communication. Local TV stations, phone trees, reverse-911, word of mouth, etc., will likely come into play as well. The goal, in these communications, will be to keep people as calm as possible while giving them the information they need.