



## Berkshire Medical Reserve Corps

Berkshire County Boards of Health Association

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### Overview

The **Medical Reserve Corps** (MRC) was founded after President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address, in which he asked all Americans to volunteer in support of their country. It is a specialized component of Citizen Corps, a national network of volunteers dedicated to ensuring hometown security. Citizen Corps, along with AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and the Peace Corps, are all part of the President's USA Freedom Corps, which promotes volunteerism and service throughout the nation.

**MRC** units are community-based and function as a way to organize locally and utilize volunteers who want to donate their time and expertise to prepare for and respond to emergencies and promote healthy living throughout the year. **MRC** volunteers supplement existing emergency and public health resources.

Any interested community member can be a part of the **MRC**. The MRC includes medical and public health professionals such as physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, veterinarians, and epidemiologists as well as non-medical volunteers such as interpreters, chaplains, office workers, legal advisors, and others.

The **Berkshire MRC**, originally the Southern Berkshire MRC, was one of the original MRC units in Massachusetts. In 2006, the Berkshire County Boards of Health Association took over the administration of the MRC and expanded it to include all of Berkshire County. In order to encourage as much local control as possible, the Berkshire MRC is organized in three teams covering North, Central, and South Berkshire County to allow volunteers to concentrate their efforts in the communities where they live.

For more information about the **Berkshire MRC** or to apply, we invite you to attend one of two upcoming informational sessions. The first will be held on July 25, 2007 at 6:00 PM at the Berkshire Medical Center in Classrooms 1 & 2 and the second will be held on July 26, 2007 at 5:00 PM at the North Adams Regional Hospital in the Clark Building Conference Room. Alternatively, please visit the Western Massachusetts MRC website at [www.wmmrc.org](http://www.wmmrc.org) or contact us by phone at (413) 441-9060 or by email at [info@bcboha.org](mailto:info@bcboha.org).

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Berkshire MRC**

### ***Why were Medical Reserve Corps created?***

There was an outpouring of support for emergency relief efforts after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Many Americans asked, "What can I do to help?" While many of these people had very necessary skills and knowledge, these volunteers could not be called up because there was no system in place to identify, credential, or train these people in advance.

The anthrax attacks in Fall 2001 reinforced the need for pre-qualified and trained supplemental personnel to assist with emergency operations. The anthrax missions immunized almost 40,000 people. If these events had been much larger, the Federal responders would have been overwhelmed and extra personnel would have been required.

To help meet these needs, the Medical Reserve Corps Program was formed in 2002, in cooperation with the White House's USA Freedom Corps. Recruiting, training, and organizing personnel to strengthen communities through volunteerism are at the core of the MRC concept. MRC volunteers offer their expertise throughout the year by supporting local public health initiatives, such as immunization and prevention activities. When an emergency community need occurs, MRC volunteers work in coordination with existing local emergency response programs. With an MRC in place, a formerly untapped community resource - volunteers - is functioning and available for the community to access in emergencies and for ongoing efforts in public health.

### ***Who becomes a volunteer?***

MRC units are designed to leverage the good will and desire to help that many people display in the wake of a disaster. They offer both medical and non-medical volunteers a chance to join a network of people who are trained and ready to respond to an emergency. Volunteers are provided valuable training free of charge, and they learn how to prepare themselves and their families during an emergency.

### ***What is the Role of the MRC?***

BCBOHA and the Local Boards of Health in Berkshire County have been working on Public Health Comprehensive Emergency Management Plans that include Infectious Disease Emergencies, Emergency Dispensing Sites, and Pandemic Flu Planning. Additionally, local hospitals have been drafting plans for Influenza Specialty Care Units (ISCU). MRC volunteers play key roles in these plans and others. Without an extensive group of pre-credentialed, pre-trained volunteers, local towns and hospitals have no practical way of providing medical surge and outreach during large scale public health emergencies. Massachusetts MRC volunteers played important roles in the Katrina evacuation as well as during recent regional flash flooding. MRC volunteers also assist the Boards of Health with activities such as educating the public about family emergency preparedness, outreach to special populations, and promoting healthy habits.

### ***What are the MRC requirements?***

Volunteers fill out an application, attend an introductory course that explains the MRC Core Competencies, and pass a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check. Beyond this, volunteers are able to customize their level of participation by choosing which training and response situations to be a part of. Some volunteers only want to be notified during an actual emergency surge situation—this emergency-only level of participation is also welcome.

### ***Are additional training opportunities available?***

Volunteers receive free training and the opportunity to network with other Berkshire residents to serve and protect. For a current list of available trainings, please visit the training page on [www.wmmrc.org](http://www.wmmrc.org). These courses are of no cost to volunteers and supply additional insight on topics such as the Incident Command System, Behavioral Health in Emergencies, and Hazardous Materials.

### ***As a volunteer what role might I play?***

The role you play in a response depends upon your unique skills. Possible emergency response roles are:

- Assisting in delivery of medical care within your level of expertise as an RN, LPN, CNA, MD, EMT, medical secretary, or other credentialed volunteer
- Providing mental health support
- Providing interpretation and translation services
- Assisting with set up and flow of people through a clinic
- Lending the community your special skills

### ***How do MRC units differ from the Massachusetts System for Advanced Registration (MSAR) program ?***

MRCs are local, community-based response organizations whereas MSAR is a statewide system to pre-credential healthcare volunteers, including MRC members. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health and numerous healthcare professional organizations have collaborated with the MRCs to develop and implement MSAR as a statewide emergency credentialing program. MSAR will identify healthcare professionals willing to offer their services in the community in addition to their principal place of employment.

MSAR works very closely with the state's MRCs. Representatives from the MRCs sit on the MSAR Advisory Committee and the MRCs utilize MSAR's database in order to identify pre-credentialed individuals offering services to the MRCs during times of crisis. MRC members are encouraged to consider registering with MSAR to ensure that locally-based resources are available in the event of a declared public health emergency. MSAR members are also encouraged to register with an MRC to assist in smaller, local events that do not initiate an MSAR activation. For more information, please visit [www.mass.gov/msar](http://www.mass.gov/msar).

### ***Why is it necessary for a licensed medical or mental health provider to register as a volunteer before a disaster?***

Following many disasters, large numbers of talented professionals show up to help, but many of them are turned away because their credentials cannot be quickly verified and they are without the safety training given to keep responders safe. An effective response requires that volunteers follow a pre-established protocol for activation and follow the incident command system.

### ***How do I volunteer?***

To volunteer for the Berkshire MRC, visit [www.wmmrc.org](http://www.wmmrc.org) and apply online or contact BCBOHA/Berkshire MRC by phone at (413) 441-9060 or by email at [info@bcboha.org](mailto:info@bcboha.org).