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Healthcare during emergency events

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Healthcare during emergency events

Health districts and most health and disability service providers have legal responsibilities to plan for and respond to emergencies. This includes providing health care to their communities during emergency events.

About health emergency management

The programme builds national, regional, and local capability so the health system can:

- protect public health
- maintain essential services
- reduce inequities
- meet legislative and Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations during emergencies.

About health emergencies

Emergencies may be caused by:

- severe weather
- infectious diseases
- industrial accidents
- intentional acts.

They can threaten:

- public safety
- the environment
- critical infrastructure
- the economy
- the health and wellbeing of communities.

Emergency management team

The emergency management team leads and coordinates national health emergency readiness, response, and recovery activities for the health and disability system.

They maintain the capability and capacity of the system to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies that affect the health and wellbeing of people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The team's role

- Coordinating national health emergency readiness, including planning, assurance, training, and exercising.
- Leading and coordinating the national health response to emergencies, including activation of national and regional arrangements.
- Providing strategic direction and operational oversight across national, regional, and district response structures.
- Supporting regions and districts with guidance, coordination, and escalation where required.
- Ensuring alignment with legislative requirements, equity commitments, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations.
- Representing the health sector within the National Security System during national emergencies.
- This work makes sure the health system can deliver timely, coordinated responses while maintaining essential health services.

How the health and disability sector prepares and responds

The health and disability sector has coordinated plans and processes in place to support an effective response to emergencies of any type and scale. These operate at:

- national
- regional
- district levels.

National health emergency plan (NHEP)

The National Health Emergency Plan (NHEP) provides the overarching framework for health and disability sector emergency response. It:

- sets a consistent, nationally coordinated approach to responding to disasters and emergencies
- supports collaboration across the health and disability system during large-scale events
- describes strategic relationships and responsibilities aligned to the 4 Rs (reduction, readiness, response and recovery).

National Health Emergency Plan – Ministry of Health NZexternal link (<https://www.health.govt.nz/strategies-initiatives/programmes-and-initiatives/emergency-management/national-health-emergency-plan>)

Regional health emergency plans

Regional health emergency plans support coordinated responses across multiple districts. Their objectives include:

- helping provide a collaborative and coordinated response to regional health incidents
- providing mutual aid between districts within the region
- supporting other regions during emergency responses when required
- helping restore population health following emergencies
- strengthening resilience across the health care sector at regional and district levels.

District health emergency plans

Each health district maintains a health emergency plan for a wide range of emergency events, including:

- natural disasters
- infectious disease outbreaks.

District plans cover all major health services, including:

- ambulance services
- primary, secondary, and tertiary care
- mental health services
- disability support services
- aged residential care
- public health services.

District plans describe:

- relationships with local civil defence emergency management groups
- activities to reduce risk, prepare for, manage, and recover from emergencies
- strategies to identify and support vulnerable populations, and to address inequities in access to health services (including Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled people, and lower socioeconomic groups)
- communication, education, training, and response processes during and after emergencies.

More information on emergency management

National Emergency Management Agency

- [National civil defence emergency management plan 2015 and guide to the plan](https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/cdem-sector/plans-and-strategies/national-civil-defence-emergency-management-plan-and-guide/)^{external link} (<https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/cdem-sector/plans-and-strategies/national-civil-defence-emergency-management-plan-and-guide/>).
- [Emergency management 4Rs](https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/cdem-sector/the-4rs/)^{external link} (<https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/cdem-sector/the-4rs/>).

Ministry of Health

- [Emergency management](https://www.health.govt.nz/strategies-initiatives/programmes-and-initiatives/emergency-management)^{external link} (<https://www.health.govt.nz/strategies-initiatives/programmes-and-initiatives/emergency-management>).

Legislative and policy framework

Key legislation, regulations, and national guidance include:

- [Health Act 1956](https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1956/65/en/latest/#DLM305840)^{external link} (<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1956/65/en/latest/#DLM305840>).
- [International Health Regulations 2005](https://www.who.int/health-topics/international-health-regulations/)^{external link} (<https://www.who.int/health-topics/international-health-regulations/>).
- [Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002](https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2002/0033/latest/whole.html)^{external link} (<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2002/0033/latest/whole.html>).
- [National Civil Defence Emergency Plan Order 2015](https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2015/0140/latest/whole.html#DLM6486463)^(external link) (<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2015/0140/latest/whole.html#DLM6486463>).
- [Health and Disability Services \(Safety\) Act 2001](https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2001/0093/latest/DLM120564.html?search=sw_096be8ed81c570b0_incident_25_se&p=1&sr=0)^{external link} (https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2001/0093/latest/DLM120564.html?search=sw_096be8ed81c570b0_incident_25_se&p=1&sr=0).

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