

RESPONDING TO MASS TRAUMA EVENTS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

A mass trauma event (MTE) is any large-scale natural disaster, conventional weapon attack (such as a terrorist bombing), or industrial explosion. An MTE causes widespread injuries, deaths, and disabilities. Little is known about the immediate or long-term medical needs of MTE survivors. Our current understanding of effective MTE response is limited, and more information is needed to effectively coordinate the resources and needs of first responders. More accurate information on the management of such events is also necessary. Standardized needs assessment tools and data collection instruments can help build this knowledge, but they must be readily available for immediate and comprehensive responses to MTEs.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC has developed a mass trauma preparedness and response website. It provides communities with information and tools that can help them prepare for and respond to injuries and mental health consequences of explosion-related MTEs (see www.cdc.gov/masstrauma).

In 2003, CDC developed partnerships with public health and mental health experts and advocates. These partnerships have helped CDC learn about and track psychosocial and behavioral consequences of MTEs and set priorities for dealing with the medical and psychiatric implications. CDC also is examining factors that might affect a community's ability to quickly recover from an MTE.

In April 2003, CDC hosted a meeting of experts from the fields of public health, emergency, medicine, and disaster recovery. The purpose of this meeting was to develop recommendations for data collection following an MTE. The experts recommended methods and materials needed to rapidly identify victims and pinpoint their needs. They also proposed ways in which data collection can improve MTE coordination and response efforts.

In 2002, CDC provided grants to four national organizations specializing in acute medical care, trauma, and emergency medical services (EMS). The purpose of these grants was to stimulate collaboration among the grantees, CDC, and the state and local public health programs so that they may effectively respond to terrorism MTEs. The grantees include the National Association of Emergency Medical Services Physicians (NAEMSP). In July 2003, NAEMSP, in partnership with CDC and other organizations, conducted a meeting addressing the need for better communication among responders who provide care to MTE victims. Findings from the meeting are intended to raise awareness and promote further discussion, and have been distributed to attendees and other professionals in acute care, trauma, EMS, and public health fields.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC continues to support partnerships and collaborative efforts among professionals in acute medical care, trauma, EMS, and state and local public health agencies. CDC is developing relationships with various federal and state agencies that will be vital in acute care, trauma, and EMS response operations during MTEs. At the same time, CDC is also strengthening its internal partnerships, to make better use of the various divisions that share expertise, research, and insights in this area. This combined expertise will strengthen planning related pre-event, response, and recovery efforts during an MTE.

For additional information on this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/program

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