



Preparing for the Worst:
How Senior Living Communities
Can Preserve Medication Access
During a Natural Disaster





Overview

A record 28 natural disasters struck the United States last year, each resulting in at least \$1 billion in damages.¹ With total damages exceeding \$92 billion, 2023 is the fourth consecutive year in which 18 or more separate billion-dollar disasters have impacted the U.S., marking an alarming pattern that has become the new normal. To make matters worse, all U.S. communities are at risk as a variety of weather and climate events—hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes, droughts, floods, and snowstorms—become more frequent and extreme.

**Over the last 7 years,
137 separate natural disasters
have killed 5,500 people
and cost > \$1 trillion in damage**

Long-term care (LTC) and senior living communities cannot treat the threat of natural disasters lightly. Faced with the possibility of forced evacuation, staff must be ready to make quick decisions about where to house residents and how to contact their loved ones. They need to be prepared to lead residents to safety without disruption in essential medication therapy.

With natural disasters occurring year-round, it's important that providers develop plans now. Your LTC pharmacy should be an integral part of this planning process to guarantee residents' medication needs are met if an incident arises.

In this guide, you will discover steps you should take before, during, and after an evacuation to preserve medication access.

| Steps Prior to a Natural Disaster or Forced Evacuation

Once the threat of a natural disaster is identified, providers should be proactive and start discussions with staff, their LTC pharmacy partner, and other key stakeholders such as residents' family members or responsible parties about the possibility of evacuation. Other actions include:

1 | Establish communication with the local Emergency Management Agency (EMA)

By obtaining ongoing updates from the EMA, providers and staff can use accurate, up-to-date information to assess the situation and options. This open communication may lead to a quicker decision to evacuate and allow families, friends, caregivers and the partner pharmacy ample time to prepare.

2 | Share the contingency plan

Providers should keep their staff and pharmacy partner informed of all plans. The pharmacy will need to know what will happen if providers are sheltering in place or evacuating so that medication contingency plans can be discussed.

- If sheltering in place, preparations should be made in the event of the loss of essential services such as power, heating, air, plumbing, and fresh water.
- If evacuating, the pharmacy will need to be prepared and equipped with extra medications and the addresses for each resident's temporary location.

3 | Select an ongoing point person to communicate with the pharmacy

Delegating one staff member to regularly correspond with a pharmacy representative via text or phone will guarantee an organized response and that medication orders arrive on time.

4 | Emergency Refill Too Soon Procedure

Under normal circumstances, insurance plans do not allow pharmacists to refill medication prescriptions early. But during emergency disasters, most states implement an override often known as an Emergency Early Refill Procedure. This permits insurance companies to authorize early refills before the current medication supply is depleted. The supply amount varies by state, and the pharmacy partner is the best source for this information. When a State of Emergency is issued and other legal requirements are fulfilled, pharmacists can dispense an extended supply of medication for the evacuation.



Actions to Take When an Evacuation is Mandated

When it becomes clear an evacuation is imminent, staff should work with their pharmacy directly to ensure residents have access to their medications while displaced so they can adhere to their prescribed medication regimen. Follow these steps to achieve this goal:

1 | Develop a master contact list

To keep track of all residents, immediately begin updating a document listing the name of each resident, the address where they are staying during the evacuation, and any other significant contact information necessary. This document will help the pharmacy deliver medications and assist staff in sharing the resident's location with family members and responsible parties who may want to take them to their homes. With advance notice, LTC pharmacies can deliver prescriptions to residents wherever they are. For example, if a community is evacuated beyond a service area, an LTC pharmacy partner can transfer medications to another local pharmacy or ship medications directly to residents.

2 | Package medications in individual units

It's doubtful that an entire community will evacuate to the same location. That's why it is important for each resident to have their own self-contained unit filled with medications and their Medication Administration Record (MAR). An easy solution – put the resident's medications in a brown paper bag and staple the MAR to the outside. This allows residents, whether they're staying with the community or with a loved one, to travel with medication and the MAR in hand. Have plenty of frozen packs and coolers available to protect medications requiring refrigeration. This will maintain the temperature during travel or in the event of a power outage.

3 | Share medication dispensing instructions with loved ones and caregivers

When available, allowing residents to stay with a family member or caregiver during an evacuation is preferred because they are in a familiar setting and can have more 1-on-1 care. If families choose this option, make sure to communicate any drug allergies or special needs.

Provide them with a complete list of medications with the dates and times of administration clearly marked. Fortunately, this information should be listed on the MAR.

4 | Remain transparent throughout the process

When transporting residents during an evacuation, always remember to communicate the destination and time of arrival to families and the pharmacy. This will reassure loved ones and help the pharmacy make necessary plans for shipping or delivering medications and supplies.

5 | Request onsite pharmacy support

Don't hesitate to let your LTC pharmacy partner know if onsite help is needed. Their staff can be of great assistance during an evacuation as they are often a familiar face to residents and know their medical history and current medication regimens.

Finally, remember to keep a calm and thoughtful demeanor throughout this process. Residents will follow the staff's lead, and it is important they can maintain their peace of mind during this difficult time.





| Returning After the Evacuation

When it's safe to resume normal operations, staff should come back to the property to help evaluate the conditions prior to residents returning. They should concentrate on the following:

1| Conduct a comprehensive walk-through

Tour the entire property to assess any damage. With exception of exterior and interior damage, the focus should be on restoring water and power. It's essential to have a full picture of operations before telling family members and caregivers when residents should return.

2| Enlist the pharmacy to prepare the medication supply

Pharmacy staff understand the importance of an organized medication storage system to safe medication administration, and reduced staff burden. Following an evacuation, connect with pharmacy staff and let them audit, organize, and restock medications and supplies.

3| Develop a resident arrival plan

Before announcing an arrival time, providers and staff should consider how residents will return. Will guests in

memory care units, for example, be allowed to arrive earlier than those in the general population? Decide if bringing back residents in phases makes logistical sense.

4| Plan a debrief and annual drills

In the months following the evacuation, to help all parties learn from this experience, it's important to meet with pharmacy staff to debrief about the incident, review the emergency preparedness and evacuation plans, and recommend changes to improve response efforts. Also hold annual drills to keep everyone prepared for the next crisis.

When senior living providers and their LTC pharmacy partners work together as a team and follow these protocols, residents will be in the best position to have their medication needs met during a forced evacuation from any type of emergency or natural disaster.

Partnering with an LTC Pharmacy for Peace of Mind

Developing emergency preparation plans well in advance ensures your senior living community is prepared for the worst. Partnering with an experienced LTC pharmacy that offers assistance before, during, and after a forced evacuation ensures your residents maintain access to necessary medications when disaster strikes.

¹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. 2023: A historic year of U.S. billion-dollar weather and climate disasters. January 8, 2023. Retrieved from www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/beyond-data/2023-historic-year-us-billion-dollar-weather-and-climate-disasters



Guardian Pharmacy Services is one of the nation's largest and most innovative long-term care pharmacy companies. We provide outstanding client service and patient care to long-term care communities including assisted living, skilled nursing, mental and behavioral health and those that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Visit guardianpharmacy.com to learn more.

