



Get Connected to HCS

Communication is an essential component in readiness-to-respond. The state Department of Health's Health Commerce System (HCS) Communications Directory serves as a catch-all database of all health care providers throughout New York State, helping to keep the system connected and in touch with state preparedness officials.

For health care providers, both large and small, it is important to have your agency's contact information up to date within the communications directory so that the appropriate people in your agency can be reached whenever a crisis occurs. In the event of an emergency, or to disseminate important information, DOH readily uses contact information contained on the HCS to inform the appropriate individuals.

With the recent HCS portal update, many users have had technical difficulties. Help is available via the Commerce Unit Hotline. A live help feature is also accessible to HCS users during normal business hours.

There are several things you can do to get appropriate staff connected to HCS.

1. Make sure all staff who need an HCS account have applied to get one. Your agency's HCS Coordinator will be able to facilitate this process. New account requests usually take several days to receive DOH approval, and then the user will receive a unique log on and password.
2. When new accounts have been approved, your HCS Coordinator can then assign the user a contact role or roles that are appropriate.
3. All staff should be encouraged to read through the online orientation guide or view the slide show orientation to familiarize themselves with the portal and see how to customize their portal to support the HCS programs that they utilize.

For more assistance, log on to the HCS Portal; go to "Topics"; choose "Getting Started" Group; choose "Training" folder; choose "Read Me First! HCS Portal Orientation" or choose "SPL: Watch Me First! An HCS Portal Orientation."



CAMU Hotline
1-866-529-1890

The Commerce Accounts Management Unit is well staffed to assist you with any problems you may encounter logging onto the HCS Portal.

While on the Portal, "Live Help" is available to assist you. Simply click on the "Live Help" button. Both types of assistance are available during the hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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HCS Communications Directory Updates are Vital

There are several key contacts that should be kept up to date within the HCS Communications Directory. In many agencies, HCS compliance ends with the Coordinator. Being sure that the right people in your organization receive emergency updates is essential to emergency preparedness efforts. The following roles have been identified as critical to your agency's preparedness:

- The **Health Commerce System Coordinator** (formerly HPN coordinator) is your agency's first line of communication with the HCS. Coordinators are required, by state regulation, to have an active HCS account and have the authority within your agency to approve new accounts for staff, as well as manage and update key contact information including contact names, email addresses and phone numbers.
- The **Director of Home Care Patient Services** should be a licensed and currently registered nurse who is responsible for clinical direction and supervision of patient care services.
- The **Emergency Response Coordinator** should be the individual(s) who serves as the coordinator of your facility's emergency operations center.
- The **Infection Control Practitioner** should be an individual who oversees your agency's infection control practices and has an HCS account. While this role is linked to Nosocomial applications, CHHA and LHCSA users will not be required to use this application as it is not germane to our industry.
- **24/7 Facility Contact** is an emergency contact point, a phone number or email address that is monitored 24-hours-a-day.
- **Office of the Administrator** is an emergency contact point for your agency's administrator during business hours.

In addition to these emergency preparedness roles, all of the roles within the communications directory should be filled in with current contact information.

HCA Announces 2010 Award Winners

The Home Care Association of New York State (HCA) is pleased to announce the individuals who have been selected as our 2010 Award winners in observance of National Home Care Month and National Home Health Aide Week.

Home Health Aide Award

The Home Health Aide award recognizes a home health aide whose story provides a powerful example of the hard work, dedication and caring that we know and value in the profession. This year's winners are:



Beverly Massay, Home Health Aide, Partners In Care, New York, NY

Rafaela Soto, Home Health Aide, Dominican Sisters Family Health Service, Ossining, NY



Telehealth Champion of the Year Award

This award recognizes a nurse from an HCA member agency who was instrumental in implementing home care technology with proven results in improved quality of care and who has served as a role model for others in furthering telehealth. This year's winner is:



Debra Bobé, Jewish Home and Lifecare System, New York, NY

All of the awardees were honored at a special dinner held on Wednesday, November 3, 2010 at The Century House in Albany, as part of HCA's Clinical and Technology Conference.

More information about the award winners will soon be posted to HCA's website at www.hcanys.org.



"Fall Back" Offers a Reminder of Safety Tasks

Local fire departments often remind us to change the batteries in our carbon monoxide and smoke detectors to be sure that they will work when needed. One helpful method for remembering is to refresh the batteries at the same time that you set your clocks back an hour in November. As emergency planners, we can take this method to heart when considering many other tasks as well.

For our patients, we can use "fall back" time to encourage or assist them in updating their emergency plans, including lists of emergency contacts, doctors and medicines. This is also a good time to be sure that each patient's list of priority needs for emergency purposes accurately reflects their current condition.



Patients and staff should also check the condition of home emergency supplies. Any water and non-perishable food should be examined and swapped out. It is also important to check the expiration dates on any over-the-counter medicine that may be kept with your emergency supplies.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors

A new law, enacted in February and called Amanda's Law, requires all single and multi-family dwellings in New York State to have a working carbon monoxide detector located near the sleeping areas within a home or apartment. For older dwellings, battery operated units are acceptable and the batteries should be changed bi-annually.

Do your staff and patients have working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in their homes?

For more information on carbon monoxide detectors, including in-home placement, visit the NYS Office of Fire Prevention:

<http://tinyurl.com/z6amzgw>

According to the New York State Office of Fire Prevention, most house fire deaths occur in cases where the occupants are asleep. Without an alarm sensor, carbon monoxide, a colorless and odorless gas, goes undetected, causing a deeper sleep that decreases the likelihood of escape during a house fire.

Carbon monoxide poisoning has been the cause of many deaths unassociated with fire. Any fuel burning appliances emit carbon monoxide. While the emissions of household appliances are com-

monly low, should a defect occur, the detector will alert inhabitants within the home. Amanda's Law was named after a young woman who died from carbon monoxide poisoning due to a defective boiler.

Staff Preparedness Means Patient Safety During a Crisis

During an emergency, your agency is responsible for serving the needs of patients and ensuring their safety. To meet this obligation in times of crisis, essential home care staff must be readily available, assisting in outreach and helping patients who may require sheltering. This is why it is vital for home care staff to develop family emergency plans of their own, so that the needs of their own households are secure.

Check out the "Ready Responder" document at Ready.gov. Designed for first responders, this guide is applicable to home care workers as well. "Ready Responder" specifically provides information to assist your Emergency Preparedness Coordinator in walking staff through the planning process so that they can create their own preparedness plans, ensuring peace of mind during an emergency.

http://www.ready.gov/america/_downloads/responder/RRToolkit.pdf



Winter Hazards Planning: Will your Staff be Ready?

From Buffalo to Riverhead, every corner of New York State has to contend with harsh winter conditions. Heavy snow, ice storms and freezing rain make travel during the winter season difficult. For home care employees who are on the road during hazardous weather conditions, it is important to be aware of potential hazards. In most areas outside of New York City, home care workers rely on their automobiles to get to patients' homes. Encourage your staff to have their cars winterized and suggest that they keep an emergency kit in their automobile. You should also have your staff sign up for **NY-Alert**. This free service enables users to get an email or text message whenever there is an accident or inclement weather. Sign up at <https://users.nyalert.gov/>. Home care workers in New York City, who walk or rely on public transportation to visit patients, should be reminded to wear insulated boots with rubber tread, dress in layers and remember to carry sunglasses for walking outside on bright days. In addition to NY-Alert, New York City home care workers should sign up for **Notify NYC** to receive e-mail and text message alerts on local hazards.

Sign up at:

<https://a858-nycnotify.nyc.gov/notifynyc/>



Winter Automobile Emergency Kit

- Windshield scraper
- Small shovel
- Reflector triangles, flares or flags
- Blanket
- Plastic bags (for sanitation)
- Extra mittens, socks, outerwear
- Tire chains or traction mats
- Kitty litter or sand to provide traction
- Small tools
- Battery powered radio
- Water and granola bars

Preparedness Tip: Have Meds Ready to Go

Patients should try to maintain a multiple-day supply of their medicines and should be encouraged to refill any prescriptions prior to running out. Having this supply on hand is an easy way to be prepared for an emergency that may require evacuation (grab your meds and go) or should patients be unreachable and are sheltering in their home.

Patients should also keep an empty bottle of each type of medicine in a zippered plastic bag together with their emergency plan. In an emergency, if they are unable to grab their medicine, but grab their "Go Bag" of emergency necessities, staff at the shelter can assist them in getting the medicine they need.





Seasonal Influenza and Patient Care

During the flu season, it is important for your staff to be aware of flu symptoms to ensure that patients are receiving proper treatment if they have influenza symptoms and so that your staff can protect themselves from contagious patients.

The box to the right lists common symptoms of the flu. It is important to note that not everyone with the flu will have a fever. People suffering from the flu may be infectious before they develop any symptoms and up to a week after becoming sick. Some people, such as children and adults with weak immune systems, may have a longer period of contagiousness.

For the elderly, young children and adults with certain medical conditions, the flu may lead to complications such as pneumonia and bronchitis and can also exacerbate chronic health problems such as asthma, congestive heart failure and diabetes.

Therefore, it is important to review your agency's protocol with regard to flu reporting and remind your staff to report to their supervisor should a patient exhibit any flu symptoms so that medical intervention can be sought.

Symptoms of Flu

- *Fever or feeling "chills"*
- *Cough*
- *Sore throat*
- *Runny or stuffy nose*
- *Muscle or body aches*
- *Headaches*
- *Fatigue*
- *Vomiting and/or diarrhea (more common in children)*

CDC Provides Updated Infection Control Strategies for the 2010-11 Influenza Season

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has updated its "Infection Control Guidance" for the current flu season to aid health care agencies in managing exposure of health care personnel and patients to seasonal influenza. These measures include many of the controls utilized last year to reduce the spread of seasonal and H1N1 influenza including: administration of the influenza vaccine to staff and patients; strategies to minimize potential exposure; monitoring and management of health care professionals who are ill; adherence to infection control precautions; and environmental and engineering controls.



One significant change in this year's guidelines is the recommendation that health care personnel use N95 respirators only when performing aerosol-generating procedures on patients with suspected or confirmed influenza. The CDC's guidance states that face masks should be used by health care personnel when in contact with a patient with suspected or confirmed influenza, suggesting that face masks provide adequate protection. Last year, the CDC and state Department of Health recommended the use of N95 respirators by health care personnel for all contact with patients who had suspected or confirmed H1N1.

To review the CDC's updated Infection Control Guidance in full, please visit:
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/healthcaresettings.htm>



"Gel In, Gel Out"

Used in hospital settings for years, alcohol-based hand sanitizer has become a routine step in hand hygiene protocols with excellent results.

Encouraging home health care workers to gel in when entering a patient's home and gel out after leaving, in addition to hand washing, is an effective means of infection control.

Home health care workers can spread the message by encouraging patients to keep hand sanitizer at their homes and ask family members and visitors to "gel in, gel out."



In support of the deliverables of a state Department of Health grant, HCA Education & Research makes this e-newsletter available, free of charge, to all NYS home care providers.

Questions or comments concerning the grant deliverables may be directed to Lexi Silver, HCA's Vice President of Policy and Clinical Affairs, at (518) 810-0658 or asilver@hcanys.org; or Mandy Fallon, HCA's Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, at (518) 810-0666 or mfallon@hcanys.org.

~ Clip and share with staff and patients ~



~ Before and after you provide direct patient care ~