



The Role of Public Health Nurses in Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery

A Toolkit for PHNs and Partners

Association of Public Health Nurses Emergency Preparedness Committee

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Introduction

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Public health plays an integral role in preparing communities to respond to and recover from threats and emergencies” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2018). The pandemic demonstrated the current diminished capability of the public health system to respond to public health emergencies. [The Future of Nursing 2020-2030](#) has highlighted the importance of the role of nurses, including public health nurses (PHNs), as integral to national Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR), particularly as it relates to vulnerable populations and the impact of the social determinants of health (SDOH) on health outcomes (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021).

As the national voice for public health nurses, the [Association of Public Health Nurses](#) (APHN) recognizes that PHNs are an essential professional member of any interdisciplinary public health team. However, as health departments around the country embrace the concept of [Community Health Strategist](#) and shift from the direct provision of clinical care, PHNs have struggled to articulate their unique qualifications to serve as population health specialists in governmental public health. APHN has taken the lead in describing specific skills and competencies all public health nurses currently possess or can be trained to provide care to their communities before, during and after emergencies. Referencing both the American Nurses Association (ANA) Public Health Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice (ANA, 2022) the Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Capabilities (CDC, 2018) the APHN EPR toolkit provides an overview of the critical role of PHNs in EPR, as well as best practice guidance to new

and experienced PHNs, their supervisors, and emergency managers for staff planning, training, and deployment.

Purpose and Use of the APHN EPR toolkit

As the foundational set of public health nursing competencies, the ANA 3rd Edition of the [Public Health Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice \(2022\)](#) states that public health nursing is the nursing specialty focused on population level care, “bringing together nursing, public health, and social sciences to guide practice, always within the context of the community, whether at the individual, family/group, community, or system level” (ANA, 2022). While the updated Scope and Standards lists EPR as one of public health nursing’s core functions, EPR competencies are not explicitly outlined in those standards, contributing to a poor understanding of the public health nursing role in EPR among PHNs, their supervisors, and emergency managers. There are several other EPR related competencies, including the International Council of Nurses Core Competencies in Disaster Nursing, and the CDC Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Capabilities, but none of these addresses the unique skills and responsibilities PHNs bring to the preparedness space, including their ability to shift from direct provision of emergency services to policy and planning.

Multiple focus groups and workshops conducted by the APHN EPR committee indicate that PHNs have struggled to articulate their unique role in preparedness. The purpose of the toolkit is to provide best practice guidance on public health nursing capabilities to PHNs, their supervisors, and emergency managers through all phases of the EPR cycle. Public health nurses can and should apply the nursing process, the ecological model, and systems thinking to all facets of their practice, including EPR.

The “practical linkages between PHEP capabilities and PHN competencies” section provides a brief overview of each Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) domain

and capability, followed by a bulleted list of unique skills well-trained PHNs bring to each capability. While information from all the resource documents were considered during the toolkit development, the committee decided to center the recommendations on these two sources, as the most practical way to combine the unique PHN skillsets and PHEP deliverables. Examples of recommended trainings are provided for PHNs new to EPR as well as for experienced PHNs who plan to move into leadership positions. Most trainings are available through FEMA and/or CDC to all entities who receive funding, although changes in the current administration may have changed their availability. Public health nurses new to EPR can review this section as an introduction to EPR and identify how to apply their nursing perspective to function as part of a collaborative professional team. Supervisors can use the list of general training recommendations as a template for an EPR focused workforce development plan. Emergency managers can use the guidance to integrate PHNs into the planning, response, and recovery phases of the emergency management cycle.

Considerations for Scope of Nursing Practice during EPR

Nurses are well trained to understand the role of nursing ethics, scope of practice and meeting professional standards as cornerstones to protecting their nursing licensure (ANA, 2022). This is not limited to the nursing profession; acting in a manner consistent with licensure and limiting liability is in fact an issue for all licensed professionals, whether paid or volunteer.

The recent pandemic has revealed that PHNs should expect and prepare for involvement in public health emergencies. To promote ethical practice and protect their own licensure whether in a paid or volunteer capacity, PHNs need to clarify how their role is written into existing response plans for their organization and region. Ideally, PHNs should “assist with organizational logistics by developing operational response protocols and security measures” (NASEM, 2021). Both PHNs and clinical nurses who are employed or volunteer to provide disaster services should clarify the expectations for licensure and liability protection with the organization they plan to support. Prior to volunteering, all nurses must be familiar with their employer’s plans for staff who wish to respond and what their duty expectations are to their organization, both legally and ethically (ANA, 2002, 2017).

In addition to the employer, regional planning bodies or states may identify certain groups of nurses, including PHNs, and pre-define their use in response and recovery. Written policy should assure protections and make clear the expectations of the registered nurse, the employer, and the government response systems before the disaster occurs. Employers need to create, maintain, and constantly improve disaster plans that help meet the medical needs of the community within a system that protects

registered nurses and other employees or volunteers. This should include local and state health departments charged with response during emergencies.

Public health nurses should be familiar with statutes governing nursing practice in their state, particularly any statutes governing the practice of nursing in disasters. If a nurse is licensed by a [Nurse Licensure Compact](#) state, they can already practice across state lines in member states (National Council of State Boards of Nursing [[NCSBN](#)], 2023). During large-scale disasters that cross state borders, licensed nurses may be allowed by federal and/or state law or declarations to practice in other states. Many states have eliminated hard copy licenses and licensure is verified online at state boards of nursing sites, even during disasters. The NCSBN provides the capacity for bulk license verification through its [Nursys](#) database on behalf of response organizations.

As licensed professionals, PHNs are critical for the successful application of PHEP Capability 15: Volunteer Management. They provide perspective on the importance of assuring and communicating liability and licensure protection for licensed volunteers. (CDC, 2018). One of their strengths is the ability to leverage their existing relationships to facilitate bi-directional communication with clinical partners to outline licensed volunteers' duties within their scope of practice.

Practical Linkages between Emergency Preparedness Capabilities and PHN Competencies

PHEP Domain 1: Community Resilience

Capability 1: Community Preparedness

Capability 2: Community Recovery

Community preparedness is the ability of communities to prepare for, withstand, and recover from public health incidents in both the short and long term.

Community recovery is the ability of communities to identify critical assets, facilities, and other services within public health, emergency management, health care, human services, mental/behavioral health, and environmental health sectors that can guide and prioritize recovery operations.

PHN Specific skills

- Assessing access and functional needs of the whole community including identifying cultural, socioeconomic, and demographic factors impacting specific communities
- Building and leveraging deep connections with community and clinical partners in health care, human services, mental/behavioral health services, and environmental health
- Addressing health needs of displaced populations
- Contributing to mitigation strategies and supporting community preparedness and recovery
- Providing insights for after-action reports

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Community partnership development, community assessment, partner mapping, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

IS-00022 Are you Ready? In-depth guide to citizen preparedness

Training for advanced PHNs

Project planning, management, and evaluation; Geographic Information System (GIS); meeting facilitation; psychological first aid

IS-10.a Animals in Disasters: Awareness and Preparedness

IS-11.a Animals in Disasters: Community Planning

IS-36.a Preparedness for Child Care Providers

PHEP Domain 2: Incident Management

Capability 3: Emergency Operations Coordination

Emergency operations coordination is the ability to coordinate with emergency management and to direct and support an incident or event with public health or health care implications by establishing a standardized, scalable system of oversight, organization, and supervision that is consistent with jurisdictional standards and practices and the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

PHN Specific skills

- Identifying the safety implications of an incident
- Managing mass vaccination events
- Coordinating with community and clinical partners
- Developing a comprehensive plan to address staff and volunteer licensure liability issues
- Analyzing the lasting implications of major events on community health

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Incident Command System (FEMA ICS 100)

National Incident Management System (NIMS)

(FEMA IS-700) local Emergency Operations Plans and Continuity of Operations Plans

IS-120.c An Introduction to Exercises

IS-230.e Fundamentals of Emergency Management

Training for advanced PHNs

Advanced Incident Command System (FEMA ICS 200, 300, 400)

Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP)

Integrating Access and Functional Needs into Emergency Planning (Special Needs)

Family Assistance Center Training

IS-317.a Introduction to Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

PHEP Domain 3: Information Management

Capability 4: Emergency Public Information and Warning

Emergency public information and warning is the ability to develop, coordinate, and disseminate information, alerts, warnings, and notifications to the public and incident management personnel.

PHN Specific skills

- Developing messages to address identified jurisdictional risks and vulnerabilities
- Coordinating with nurse triage lines and poison control centers
- Complying with legal guidelines, particularly regarding HIPAA protected information
- Creating health communication for disproportionately impacted populations to help them understand personal preparedness
- Informing populations about available services and guiding populations on where and how to obtain services

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Incident Command System (FEMA ICS 100)

National Incident Management System (NIMS)
(FEMA IS-700)

media literacy

PIO training

Training for advanced PHNs

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication training

Public Information Officer training

Capability 6: Information Sharing

Information Sharing is the ability to conduct multijurisdictional and multidisciplinary exchange of health-related information and situational awareness data among federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial levels of government and the private sector. This capability includes the routine sharing of information as well as issuing of public health alerts to all levels of government and the private sector in preparation for and in response to events or incidents of public health significance.

PHN Specific skills

- Identifying stakeholders that should be included in the information stream, creating a roster of identified stakeholders, and defining information sharing needs
- Coordinating and supporting bi-directional information exchange with healthcare systems
- Developing strategies for collaboration and system integration to support disease and syndromic surveillance, outbreak management, and exposure assessment

- Integrating HIPAA protections while sharing information regarding individuals undergoing health monitoring or in isolation and quarantine

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Awareness of laws and policies for information sharing

HIPAA for Emergency Preparedness training

Training for advanced PHNs

Public Information in an All-Hazards Incident (PIO training)

PHEP Domain 4: Countermeasures and Mitigation

Capability 8: Medical Countermeasure Dispensing and Administration

Medical countermeasure dispensing and administration is the ability to provide medical countermeasures to targeted population(s) to prevent, mitigate, or treat the adverse health effects of a public health incident, according to public health guidelines.

PHN Specific skills

- Providing content expertise at all levels of planning, including site selection, medical countermeasure storage and handling, dispensing supplies and logistics, screening and dispensing protocols, and documentation requirements
- Ensuring procedures align with current science, incident characteristics and public health guidance
- Ensuring that documentation captures required data and medical countermeasures are dispensed according to applicable state and federal laws
- Ensuring recipients receive information about the countermeasure provided, resources for follow up care and how to report adverse events
- Understanding licensing and certification requirements for countermeasure dispensing
- Implementing mechanisms to address legal and liability issues, including clinical standards of care, licensing, and civil liability for volunteers
- Establishing processes for countermeasure storage and handling to maintain product security and integrity
- Communicating the risks and benefits of the medical countermeasures and the eligible population with tailored messaging for healthcare providers and specific targeted populations
- Developing approaches for serving individuals with access and functional needs or other difficult to reach populations
- Developing safety protocols for personnel, including countermeasures and personal protective equipment (PPE) for critical workforce, health care providers and public health responders

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Introduction to the Strategic National Stockpile
Medical Countermeasures and Points of Dispensing (MGT 319)
Incident Command System (FEMA ICS 100)
National Incident Management System (NIMS)
(FEMA IS-700)
vaccine storage, handling, and tracking systems

Training for advanced PHNs

Disaster Epidemiology

Capability 9: Medical Materiel Management and Distribution

Medical materiel management and distribution is the ability to acquire, manage, transport, and track medical materiel during a public health incident or event and the ability to recover and account for unused medical materiel, such as pharmaceuticals, vaccines, gloves, masks, ventilators, or medical equipment after an incident.

PHN Specific skills

- Providing knowledge of storage, security, and access requirements for controlled substances
- Providing expertise in vaccine cold chain management
- Sharing knowledge of medical materiel needs based on type and severity of incident
- Understanding infection prevention and control during the disposal of biomedical waste including the use of PPE

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Introduction to the Strategic National Stockpile
regulated waste training
PPE standards and donning/doffing (can be review or Just in Time training)

Training for advanced PHNs

Inventory management
HSEEP
Infection Prevention and Control training
IS-26 Guides to points of Distribution

Capability 11: Nonpharmaceutical Interventions

Nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPI) are actions that people and communities can take to help slow the spread of illness or reduce the adverse impact of public health emergencies.

PHN Specific skills

- Developing NPI recommendations specific to the incident and based on science, risks, resource availability, and legal authorities

- Identifying the most effective NPI that impose the least restrictions on individual rights
- Monitoring indications of effectiveness and compliance with NPIs
- Participating in surveillance to monitor rates of transmission, including contact investigations and monitoring of exposed persons
- Identifying the criteria for initiating and ceasing use of NPIs, active monitoring, and restriction of movement for individuals and groups, facilities, safe housing, and shelters
- Supporting operation of emergency community reception centers
- Supporting the development of written agreements with healthcare providers to establish a common operating picture, including case definitions, rapid reporting of cases, and assessment of functional needs of at-risk individuals
- Applying HIPAA policies when sharing information with clinical and community partners

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Nonpharmaceutical Interventions
case investigation/contact tracing

Training for advanced PHNs

Public Health Emergency Law
Infection Prevention and Control

Capability 14: Responder Safety and Health

Responder safety and health is the ability to protect public health and other emergency responders during pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment.

PHN Specific skills

- Understanding safety and health risk scenarios using knowledge of communicable disease and environmental hazards
- Considering medical and mental/behavioral health during and after the event
- Developing and implementing hazard mitigation plans for identified safety and health risk scenarios including medical waste management
- Assessing the need for immunization, PPE, and other protective actions
- Developing procedures for exposure assessment and monitoring, including the development of long-term support for responders

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Infection Prevention and Control
PPE standards and donning/doffing, respiratory protection

Training for advanced PHNs

Psychological First Aid
Critical Incident Stress Management
Decontamination

PHEP Domain 5: Surge Management

Capability 5: Fatality Management

Fatality management is the ability to coordinate with partner organizations and agencies to provide fatality management services.

PHN Specific skills

- Coordinating with partner organizations and agencies, including hospitals, health care facilities and morgues
- Providing guidance to the public on health and safety issues, including measures to prevent responder morbidity and mortality
- Providing training on the use of appropriate PPE
- Supporting the organization of family assistance centers, including family, cultural, religious, and bereavement needs, mental/behavioral health services, and health and safety plans for facilities
- Ensuring accurate antemortem data collection, including cause of death, while ensuring HIPAA compliant data management

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

HIPAA, Infection Prevention and Control

PPE standards and donning/doffing, respiratory protection

Training for advanced PHNs

Psychological first aid

Mass Fatalities Planning and Response

Disaster Family Assistance

Capability 7: Mass Care

Mass care is the ability of public health agencies to coordinate with and support partner agencies to address within a congregate location (excluding shelter-in-place locations), the public health, health care, mental/behavioral health, and human services needs of those impacted by an incident.

PHN Specific skills

- Coordinating public health assessments to ensure that health needs are met as the incident evolves, with a focus on individuals with access and functional needs
- Coordinating access to medications needed for pre-existing conditions as well as medical countermeasures, including immunization services, if appropriate, for populations being sheltered
- Coordinating ongoing infectious disease surveillance and infection prevention and control measures
- Developing and implementing procedures to support isolation and quarantine

- Coordinating with medical and non-medical transportation partners to ensure safe transfer of shelter residents to higher level of care if needed, including HIPAA compliant information sharing

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Infection Prevention and Control

PPE standards and donning/doffing, respiratory protection

Training for advanced PHNs

Environmental Health

Disaster Epidemiology

GIS mapping

IS-808 Emergency Support Function (ESF) #8 Public Health and Medical Services

IS-405 Mass care/Emergency Assistance Overview

Capability 10: Medical Surge

Medical surge is the ability to provide adequate medical evaluation and care during events that exceed the limits of the normal medical infrastructure of an affected community.

PHN Specific skills

- Participating in incident assessments of needs and availability of resources
- Support bidirectional situational awareness between public health and healthcare organizations
- Developing and implementing plans to ensure safe and appropriate care for at-risk individuals
- Supporting mobilization of medical personnel and volunteers
- Understanding and integrating crisis standards of care in clinical and community settings
- Providing surge staffing (e.g., field triage, patient screening, care coordination, call center staffing)
- Supporting the development of wraparound services and effective discharge planning for patients
- Developing exit screening procedures for volunteers to assess illnesses and injuries incurred during the event

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Incident Command System (FEMA ICS 100)

National Incident Management System (NIMS) (FEMA IS-700)

Strategic National Stockpile

Training for advanced PHNs

Crisis Standards of Care

Federal Medical Station

Capability 15: Volunteer Management

Volunteer management is the ability to coordinate with emergency management and partner agencies to identify, recruit, register, verify, train, and engage volunteers to support the jurisdictional public health agency's preparedness, response, and recovery activities during pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment.

PHN Specific skills

- Recruiting medical and non-medical volunteers while considering the scope of practice for licensed professionals
- Understanding and complying with local, state, and federal laws for volunteers during declared emergencies
- Developing and supporting volunteer emergency response training programs, including clinical skills assessments
- Communicating incident-specific safety and health risks, including mitigation strategies
- Assessing volunteer risk profiles, including screening for required immunizations
- Conducting volunteer safety monitoring and surveillance
- Supporting the assessment of incident related long-term adverse health effects and the procedures to provide long-term support

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Incident Command System (FEMA ICS 100)

Just-in-Time Training/adult education methods

IS-244.b Developing and Managing Volunteers

Training for advanced PHNs

Public Health Emergency Law

Volunteer Reception Center Training

PHEP Domain 6: Bio surveillance

Capability 12: Public Health Laboratory Testing

Public health laboratory testing is the ability to implement and perform methods to detect, characterize, and confirm public health threats.

PHN Specific skills

- Collecting, preparing, and shipping specimens in accordance with public health laboratory instructions and specimen shipping regulations
- Collaborating with public health laboratories to ensure timely exchange of information with partner agencies as permitted by applicable laws, rules, and regulations
- Using laboratory testing data to coordinate public health investigations

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Infectious substances packaging and shipping

Training for advanced PHNs

Public Health Emergency Law

Capability 13: Public Health Surveillance and Epidemiological Investigation

Public health surveillance and epidemiological investigation is the ability to create, maintain, support, and strengthen routine surveillance and detection systems and epidemiological investigation processes. It also includes the ability to expand these systems and processes in response to incidents of public health significance.

PHN Specific skills

- Conducting or supporting routine and incident-specific surveillance and investigation, including case finding and contact tracing
- Supporting the development of case definitions and identify at-risk populations
- Sharing information with stakeholders including hospital systems and at-risk clients while maintaining HIPAA and Personally Identifiable Information (PII) protections
- Recommending, implementing, and supporting public health interventions and monitor intervention effectiveness
- Communicating and coordinating guidance and recommendations with community partners and the public, including prophylaxis and clinical management

Training for PHNs new to PHEP

Case investigation/contact tracing

Training for advanced PHNs

Public Health Emergency Law

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Appendix A: Preparedness PHN Trainings

There are a wide range of training and educational resources available to PHNs, including:

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

- [National Preparedness Goal](#)
The National Preparedness Goal describes five mission areas — prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery — and 32 activities, called [core capabilities](#), that address the greatest risks to the nation
- [National Response Framework \(NRF\)](#)
A guide to how the nation responds to all types of disasters and emergencies, including [Emergency Support Functions](#)
- [National Incident Management System \(NIMS\)](#)
Guides all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector to work together to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to and recover from incidents
- [Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program \(HSEEP\)](#)
A set of guiding principles for exercise and evaluation programs, as well as a common approach to exercise program management, design and development, conduct, evaluation, and improvement planning
 - [HSEEP Video Series](#)
A series of short videos that provide a brief overview of topics related to the design, development, conduct, and evaluation of exercises
 - [HSEEP Resources](#)
- [Continuity Resource Toolkit](#)
Resources for Continuity of Operations planning
- [Preparedness Toolkit](#)
The Preparedness Toolkit is an online portal that provides the whole community with tools to aid in implementing the National Preparedness System
- [Ready.gov](#)
Resources for preparing for any type of disaster

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[CDC Office of Readiness and Response \(ORR\)](#)

Advancing the nation's preparedness and response for public health emergencies and threats

- [Division of State and Local Readiness \(DSLRL\)](#)
Provides program support, technical assistance, guidance, technical integration, and capacity building for public health preparedness planning
 - [Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Capabilities: National Standards for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Public Health](#)
 - [DSLRL Friday Update](#)

- provides information and resources for PHEP recipients and other preparedness planners, [Subscribe Here](#)

CDC Emergency Preparedness and Response

Resources for Emergency Health Professionals, Planners & Responders, and the Public

- [Clinician Outreach and Communication Activity \(COCA\)](#)
COCA prepares clinicians to respond to emerging health threats and public health emergencies by communicating relevant, timely information related to disease outbreaks, disasters, terrorism events, and other health alerts. [Sign up for COCA Updates here.](#)
- [Health Alert Network \(HAN\)](#)
CDC's Health Alert Network (HAN) is CDC's primary method of sharing cleared information about urgent public health incidents with public information officers; federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local public health practitioners; clinicians; and public health laboratories. [Sign up for HAN Email Updates here.](#)

Public Health Emergency Preparedness Cooperative Agreement

A critical source of funding for state, local, and territorial public health departments since 2002. Preparedness activities funded by the PHEP cooperative agreement specifically target the development of emergency-ready public health departments that are flexible and adaptable. This grant is administered by the Section of Rural and Community Health Systems (RCHS).

Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Capabilities

A vital framework for state, local, tribal, and territorial preparedness programs as they plan, operationalize, and evaluate their ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from public health emergencies

Public Health Response Readiness Framework

Focuses on 10 priority areas that are essential to our ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from health threats

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (HHS/ASPR)

- Home of the [Strategic National Stockpile](#)
- [SNS SharePoint site](#)
This SNS Technical Assistance and Resources site serves as a communication resource and information repository for SNS to provide SNS MCM planning guidance and resources intended for target audiences in state, tribal, local, and territorial (SLTT) public health and hospital preparedness programs.
- [ASPR TRACIE](#)
The Technical Resources, Assistance Center, and Information Exchange.

Other Resources

[Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy \(CIDRAP\)](#)

CIDRAP works to prevent illness and death from targeted infectious disease threats through research and the translation of scientific information into real-world, practical applications, policies, and solutions. CIDRAP is part of the Research and Innovation Office at the University of Minnesota.

[National Association of County & City Health Officials \(NACCHO\)](#)

Mission: to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments. Hosts the annual Preparedness Summit.

[National Emerging Special Pathogens Training and Education Center \(NETEC\)](#)

Working together to increase the capability of the U.S. public health and health care systems to safely and effectively manage special pathogens.

[Northwest Center for Public Health Practice](#)

Mission: to promote excellence in public health through training, research, and evaluation. Offers institutes and certificate programs, online and in-person courses, webinars, toolkits, and custom trainings.

Appendix B: Supporting Resource Documents

American Nurses Association. (2008). *Adapting standards of care under extreme conditions: Guidance for professionals during disasters, pandemics, and other extreme emergencies*.

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