

## Christie Administration Offers Assistance to Public, Communities During Hurricane Recovery

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**Trenton, NJ** – The New Jersey Departments of Health and Human Services have made a variety of resources available to aid both the public and communities during the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. "New Jersey residents are incredibly resilient, however dealing with the aftermath of a hurricane can be difficult," said Mary E. O'Dowd, New Jersey Health Commissioner. "It is important for residents and communities to take advantage of the resources available during these challenging times."

The Department of Health has public health experts available through the state's 2-1-1 system to answer questions about food and water safety and mold removal to assist New Jersey residents as they cleanup their homes and businesses after Hurricane Sandy. Health experts can answer questions about personal health and safety concerns; cleaning and mold removal; carbon monoxide concerns and food and drinking water safety. Residents can reach health experts by calling 2-1-1 or 1-866-234-0964 to reach Public Health officials, who are available to take calls 8 am to 8 pm on weekdays and 10 am to 5 pm on weekends. The 2-1-1 human services hotline is open 24/7.

There are also resources available to help residents cope with the stress during this challenging time. The New Jersey Department of Human Services' Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services - Disaster and Terrorism Branch is coordinating statewide efforts to help individuals and communities manage the emotional impact of the storm. The Disaster and Terrorism Branch partners with the Mental Health Association in New Jersey to offer assistance through a toll-free Disaster Mental Health Helpline: 1-877-294-HELP (4357). A TTY line is available for persons who are deaf and hearing impaired at 1-877-294-4356. The federal government also has a Disaster Distress website and provides 24/7 crisis counseling and support resources available at 1-800-985-5990 or Text TalkWithUS to 66746. The federal Helpline is staffed by trained counselors from a network of crisis call centers located across the United States, all of whom provide crisis counseling for those who are in emotional distress.

"As residents begin the recovery process, they're going to have a lot of questions about state and federal assistance," said Jennifer Velez, Commissioner of the state Department of Human Services. "During these stressful times, NJ 2-1-1 is a critical resource because it provides individuals with one website they can go to and one number they can call for answers."

While resources that are offered through NJ 2-1-1 vary from community-to-community, call specialists will provide information and referral services to callers about a variety of concerns, including: food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency or homeless shelters, rental assistance and utility assistance.

The call center operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is staffed with over 50 referral specialists trained to guide callers to the most appropriate services in their area. Particularly in times of disaster, 2-1-1 plays a vital role in keeping residents connected to factual, up-to-date information. NJ 2-1-1 does not process applications or provide funding or benefits.

In additions, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has approved the Department of Health's request to ensure access to prescription medications to uninsured residents affected by the storm. The HHS' Emergency Prescription Assistance Program (EPAP) provides access, at any enrolled pharmacy, to necessary prescription drugs and limited durable medical equipment (DME) for individuals in a federally-identified disaster area and without health insurance. This program provides an efficient way for pharmacies to process claims for prescription medications and DME to individuals in a federally-identified disaster area and without health insurance. The Department also can assist local and county health departments as municipalities recover from the storm. Many local health departments are overwhelmed by flooding, power outages, water shortages, wastewater issues and communication difficulties. The Department's field staff is available to assist with shelter inspections for sanitary conditions, food safety and education in their respective areas. In addition, the Department's staff is available to help local health departments to inspect retail food establishments or assist with other environmental health-related activities.

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