

Head Start/Early Head Start Emergency Preparedness Survey: Informational Materials

The responses to large-scale emergencies such as hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, the attacks of September 11, 2001, and other more recent disasters, have focused attention upon emergency preparedness and response planning to an unprecedented degree. Head Start programs have been directly and indirectly impacted upon by these events and others both as providers of services and as members of communities. Currently, the Head Start Program Performance Standards 45 CFR 1304.22 include requirements for “Health Emergency Procedures”, including “posted emergency evacuation routes and other safety procedures for emergencies (e.g., fire or weather-related) which are practiced regularly”. However, at this time there is no Head Start requirement for emergency preparedness and response planning for large-scale emergencies. Nevertheless many Head Start programs have developed and implemented such plans, policies and procedures.

With the passage of Public Law 110-134 "Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007", Congress required in Sec.649 (m) Program Emergency Preparedness, that: “The Secretary shall evaluate the Federal, State, and local preparedness of Head Start programs, including Early Head Start programs, to respond appropriately in the event of a large-scale emergency, such as the hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, or other incidents where assistance may be warranted under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.).”

This evaluation is required for the development of a report to Congress:

(3) REPORT TO CONGRESS- Not later than 18 months after the date of the enactment of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, the Secretary shall prepare and submit to Committee on Education and Labor of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate a report containing the results of the evaluation required under paragraph (2), including--

(A) recommendations for improvements to Federal, State, and local preparedness and response capabilities to large-scale emergencies, including those that were developed in response to hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, as they relate to Head Start programs, including Early Head Start programs, and the Secretary's plan to implement such recommendations;

(B) an evaluation of the procedures for informing families of children in Head Start programs about the program protocols for response to a large-scale emergency, including procedures for communicating with such families in the event of a large-scale emergency;

(C) an evaluation of such procedures for staff training on State and local evacuation and emergency protocols; and

(D) an evaluation of procedures for Head Start agencies and the Secretary to coordinate with appropriate Federal, State, and local emergency management agencies in the event of a large scale emergency and recommendations to improve such procedures.

In order for the Office of Head Start (OHS) to meet the above requirement, OHS has launched the Head Start/Early Head Start Emergency Preparedness Survey to find out where grantees and delegates are in planning for large-scale emergency preparedness. The survey attempts to capture the full range of preparedness from grantees that do not have a plan to those that do. It is important to note that none of this information will be used for monitoring purposes.

There is no uniform information collected on how Head Start programs have or have not developed policies and procedures for such a situation. Such information is crucial to the Office of Head Start in responding to the Congressional requirements in the 2007 Act. The variation among Head Start/Early Head Start programs makes it necessary that we collect and analyze valid, reliable data that captures the scope of geographic, cultural, and demographic diversity of our programs.

The objective of this survey is to provide an overview of:

- How Head Start programs determined the need for emergency preparedness and response planning for large-scale emergencies
- The policies and procedures for emergency preparedness and response that programs developed
- How such policies and procedures are operationalized within the program

The Head Start/Early Head Start Emergency Preparedness Survey is comprised of the following sections:

Section A: Presence of a large-scale emergency plan and emergencies included

Section B: Drills of your emergency preparedness plan, policies and procedures

Section C: Communication of your emergency preparedness plan, policies and procedures for staff, parents, and others

Section D: Financial support of your emergency preparedness plan

Section E: Connecting your program with State and local (jurisdictions) evacuation and emergency protocols

Section F: Coordination with emergency management agencies and organizations

Section G: Preparing for response and recovery from large-scale emergencies

Section H: Emergency preparedness and response planning for localized emergencies

It is essential that this survey accurately represent your program's emergency preparedness and response activities. The Office of Head Start understands that programs are in various stages of planning and preparing for large-scale emergencies. This variation is important for the survey to capture.