

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wolf Administration Urges Residents to Prepare for Hurricane Season Amidst COVID-19

Harrisburg, PA – As we near the peak of hurricane season, the Department of Health and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency today urged Pennsylvanians to have an emergency plan in place if a hurricane or tropical storm is forecasted to impact the state during COVID-19. Hurricane season, which runs from June 1 through November 30 in the Eastern United States, can bring dangerous storms that include threats such as flash flooding -- the leading cause of disaster-related deaths in Pennsylvania -- river flooding, storm surge, damaging winds and tornadoes.

“It is essential that everyone take proper steps to be prepared as we near the peak of hurricane season,” Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine said. “Any actions to protect yourself from immediate threats to life safety should take priority, such as evacuating before a hurricane or tropical storm. Additionally, all COVID-19 protective action guidance should be followed as long as it does not slow response or cause greater harm.”

Tropical storms are storms with winds between 39 and 73 miles per hour that can bring heavy rain, lightning and significant flooding to the commonwealth. Hurricanes are storms with winds at or above 74 miles per hour. Hurricanes can cause catastrophic damage from heavy rain, severe flooding, lightning, high winds, storm surge and tornadoes.

No matter where someone lives in Pennsylvania, it is important to prepare for the effects of a tropical storm. Everyone should have an emergency plan, including what they would do if they need to evacuate their home due to an approaching storm or severe flooding.

“Families should take the time now to plan how they would communicate with each other during an emergency and meet up once the danger has passed,” said PEMA Director Randy Padfield. “Very few of us memorize phone numbers anymore, so everyone should have a paper copy of important phone numbers so you can contact loved ones from any phone. Then, practice your family plan, so everyone knows what to do, and you can work out any problems you encounter.”

Padfield said PEMA routinely works with state and county partners to ensure they are ready for any emergency, including the effects of tropical storm systems.

Families should check to make sure their home emergency kits are fully stocked with essential items, as power can take days to restore after a tropical storm or hurricane. A home emergency kit should contain:

- non-perishable food;
- bottled water (one gallon per person per day. A family of 4 needs a minimum of 12 gallons);
- medications;
- flashlight with spare batteries;
- first aid kit;
- warm clothing; and
- any specialized items such as baby supplies or pet food.

In addition to traditional emergency kit items and as the pandemic continues, include an extra clean mask for each person in the household. As a reminder, on July 1, Secretary Dr. Levine signed an [order mandating universal mask-wearing](#). Research shows that mask-wearing reduces risk of infection from COVID-19, while not wearing a mask greatly increases a person's chances of being infected by this contagious and deadly virus.

Individuals must wear face coverings unless they pose a risk to one's health and safety. In general, though, face coverings must be worn, especially during an evacuation where this is high risk of exposure. Mere discomfort is not considered a risk to an individual's health or safety. Face shields are an acceptable alternative for individuals who are medically excused from wearing a mask.

In addition to wearing a mask, Pennsylvanians are encouraged to continue to practice social distancing and other preventive measures, including frequent hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, cleaning surfaces often, and staying home when sick to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. In the case of an evacuation, if soap and water are not available, hand sanitizer is an acceptable alternative to keep hands clean.

Additional information on how to stay safe during a tropical storm or hurricane can be found on the Department of Health's website at www.health.pa.gov or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).