Understanding the Public Response to a Potential Disaster: The Case of Hurricane Readiness in High-Risk Coastal Areas

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What Does Public Health Mean

- Improving overall health and quality of life: 58% (2008), 30% (1996)
- Government health care and welfare programs: 17% (2008), 36% (1996)
- Don’t know: 33% (1996), 17% (2008)
- Other: 1% (1996), 8% (2008)

Proportion of Americans Who Ever Had Contact with Their State or Local Health Department

% saying

Yes 31%

No 68%

Live in community damaged by hurricane last three years

46%

Harvard School of Public Health *Project on the Public and Biological Security*, May 27-June 23, 2008.
Evacuation for Hurricanes

Evacuation Compliance

Would not evacuate 2008\(^1\) 27%

Would not evacuate 2007\(^2\) 31%

Top reasons for not evacuating, 2007\(^2\)
(among those who said they would/might stay in the area)

- Home is well-built/will be safe at home 75%
- Think roads will be too crowded 56%
- Think evacuating would be dangerous 36%
- Worried possessions would be stolen/damaged 33%
- Would not want to leave pet 27%

\(^1\) Harvard School of Public Health *Project on the Public and Biological Security*, May 27-June 23, 2008.
\(^2\) Harvard School of Public Health *Project on the Public and Biological Security*, June 18-July 10, 2007.
Evacuation for Hurricanes, Among Those Affected by Hurricane Katrina

**Evacuation Compliance**

- Would not evacuate if told to do so: 23%

**Evacuation Challenges**

- Have not lined up the help you need to evacuate: 46%
- Do not know place to take pet: 25%

1 Among those who intend to evacuate and require help to do so (20%)
2 Among those who have pets (51%)

Problems Experienced in Last Major Hurricane

Among those whose communities had been damaged in a major hurricane in last three years

- Had problems getting gas to evacuate: 35%
- Didn’t have enough money: 20%
- Suffered from heat exhaustion: 19%
- Didn’t have enough fresh water: 14%
- Didn’t have enough food: 12%
- Didn’t have the prescription drugs or medicine you needed: 10%
- Had problems caring for disabled/chronically ill/elderly member of household: 8%
- Had problems because they were disabled/chronically ill: 6%
- Needed medical care & could not get it: 5%
- Were injured: 5%
- Threatened by violence: 3%

11% either of these

Concerns about conditions in an evacuation center or shelter

% saying very/somewhat worried

Overall, about conditions and safety 61%
Conditions unsanitary 68%
Exposed to sick people 62%

Challenges Facing Families with a Chronic Illness or Disability Who Need Help in Evacuating

**Hurricane Preparedness**

- Not prepared at all for major hurricane in next 6 months: 17% (Chronic Illness), 9% (Other Respondents)
- Do not have help needed to evacuate: 43% (Chronic Illness)
- Would go to evacuation shelter if had to evacuate: 22% (Chronic Illness), 10% (Other Respondents)

**Worries about Problems During Major Hurricane**

- Need medical care and not be able to get it: 50% (Chronic Illness), 28% (Other Respondents)
- Would suffer from heat exhaustion: 45% (Chronic Illness), 23% (Other Respondents)
- Wouldn’t have enough fresh water: 41% (Chronic Illness), 27% (Other Respondents)
- Wouldn’t have the prescription drugs or medicine you need: 41% (Chronic Illness), 19% (Other Respondents)

Residents of Mobile Homes

- Would Not Evacuate: 17%
- Think home could survive category 3 hurricane: 23%
- Not prepared at all for a major hurricane: 17%

Knowledge Issues: Food Safety

Amount of time you think perishable food like meat/milk in your refrigerator remains safe to eat in a power outage (*USDA recommends 4 hours maximum*)

- A few hours: 20%
- One day: 36%
- Two days or more: 41%