

Dispensing Partner FAQ's

Q: When would organizations be asked to dispense medications?

A: The only time the Health Department would ask businesses to dispense medications to clients, employees and their families without medical oversight would be in the very rare event that there is a great risk to the whole population and preventive medications (prophylaxis) need to be taken immediately. Examples of this situation would be a bioterrorist release of anthrax or other infectious particles in the air. In such a situation, the whole region or state would be affected and sufficient licensed medical personnel to help us dispense medications quickly would not be available.

Q: Are the Health Department staff going to run the PUSH PARTNER clinic to dispense medications?

A: No. We will provide orientation and training to you ahead of time, as well as materials to reference during a response. When you pick up the medication, you will also receive the necessary forms and protocols to dispense medications. You will have an opportunity to ask questions at this time and receive further instruction.

Q: Are we required to recruit medical staff to dispense medications to our employees?

A: No. During a declared public health emergency when a life-threatening event has occurred and the whole county, region or state population need to receive preventive medications (prophylaxis) in a very brief period of time, the Governor is expected to waive dispensing regulations to allow non-medical staff to help dispense medications. Sufficient licensed medical personnel to do this dispensing would not be available.

Q: Where do we refer employees if they have medical problems or medical questions about the medications we are handing out?

A: We will provide you with scripted questions and answers and procedures to follow (you will be educated on this process in more detail). Those who are “iffy” about whether or not they should take the medication will be given the life-saving medications to take home with them and told to consult with their own doctor. They are also able to come to a Public POD to discuss their medical issues with medical personnel.

Q: Will people be allowed to pick up packets for their family?

A: Yes. However, there is a limit of 10 packets per pick-up person.

Q: Are the medications in unit dosages?

A: Yes. You will be given the medications already packaged with clear instructions and precautions just like any other medication received at a local pharmacy.

Q: Do you provide any kind of injectables?

A: No. We would only call on our Dispensing Partners in an extremely widespread event where we have emergency medications available in the form of pills or tablets. Using the accompanying forms and instructions provided by the health department, your staff will be able to reasonably dispense the medications to other employees and their families.

Q: Could someone be turned down for medication during the dispensing process?

A: No. Each Dispensing Partner would receive guidance about the medications developed by Marin County Public Health, the California Department of Public Health and/or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dispensing staff would provide pre-prepared written information about the reason for the emergency medications, benefits and possible side effects of taking the medication to all employees. Even in an emergency, each person can make the decision whether or not to take the medication. However, if the person could potentially contaminate or transmit the disease to someone else by not taking the preventive medications, they may need to separate (quarantine) themselves for a period of time.

Q: Are there multiple drugs in case I know that I am allergic to one of the medications being dispensed?

A: Yes. Depending on the situation (example: in the case of an aerosolized anthrax release) we will provide more than one type of antibiotic. Protocols distributed with the medications will have flowcharts directing the dispenser on how to handle allergies.

Q: If I have employees with Medical or nursing licenses who will help oversee the dispensing of emergency medication, how will they be protected from medical liability?

A: Currently, there is no blanket of protection established by the State of California for medically licensed personnel. In a declared emergency, the Governor can waive certain scopes of practice that would affect those with medical licenses which may allow for lay people to dispense medications without a license in a public health emergency where large populations would be placed at risk of death or serious illness if medications or vaccines are delayed. The law currently reads:

“Expanded powers are also granted to the Governor and/or other chief executives or governing bodies within California by the California Emergency Services Act [Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 8550-8668] and the California Disaster Assistance Act [Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 8680-8690.7], among others. Section 8571 of the Government Code, for instance, permits the Governor to suspend any regulatory statute during a state of war or emergency where strict compliance therewith would prevent, hinder, or delay mitigation.”

Q: When would the Health Department provide prophylaxis (preventative medications) to everyone?

A: The decision of whether or not to offer medications will depend upon the situation at the time and the level of immediate risk to the population. Currently our planning efforts are based on a worst case scenario where we will need to dispense medications immediately to the entire county for a high level of threat. We will follow the guidance of the CDC and the California Department of Public Health. However, the Marin County Health Officer can also declare a local emergency and make the decision to offer preventive medication for our county.

Q: What happens if someone overdoses on the medication because “if one is good more must be better”?

A: That is always a possibility when someone leaves a pharmacy or dispensing site with their medication. You will be given instructions on how much medication to take and when you should take them (this will be provided by the health department). It is up to the person to follow the directions. Persons who experience side effects, either from taking the proper or a high dose, can consult with their providers or go to an emergency department.

Q: Does the County Public Health Department have a plan to include what to do if electricity and/or phones are out?

A: Yes. The All Hazards Plan for every county in the State covers electrical and telephone outages. It is clearly a challenge but the Health Department is also required to address these issues if life-threatening events should occur and we must respond to save lives.

Q: How much time is expected for training for Dispensing Partner planning and time needed to set up a dispensing site at our facility?

A: The online training to be done ahead of an event takes about 3 hours. A basic workshop that includes a functional drill takes about 4 hours.

Q: We are only open Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm at our company. Are we expected to get medications to clients or employees if something happens after hours even if many employees live out of town?

A: Our goal is get the medications to the public as quickly as possible. Our PUSH PARTNER model is primarily to provide emergency medications on-site during normal business hours. However, if an emergency of this scale were to happen after hours, you would have the option of opening your site or having staff and their families go to the public Points of Dispensing (POD) closest to their homes.

Q: What is a quarantine and when might it be implemented? What is isolation?

A: To quarantine means to separate people who have been exposed but not yet ill, in order to prevent them from infecting others who have not been exposed. To isolate means to separate people who are already ill to prevent them from infecting others. The Health Department will focus on isolating small numbers of individuals who are ill with a life-threatening contagious illness. Their close contacts might be quarantined, or separated, for a limited period of time to ensure they don't infect others if they also become ill. If more than one person is ill in a facility with a life-threatening contagious illness for which there is no treatment or prophylaxis, then the facility might be closed to others for a limited period of time. In almost all cases, persons can be quarantined or isolated at home or at other comfortable locations.