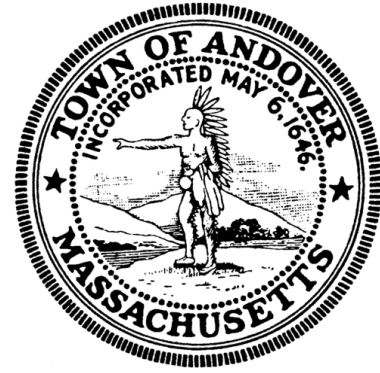


Town of Andover  
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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Andover Public Health Division Talks Emergency Preparedness and Public Health

ANDOVER -- For the third installment of its National Public Health Week campaign, the Andover Public Health Division is providing the community with information about emergency preparedness and how it has become part of the public health field.

According to the National Safety Council, emergency preparedness refers to the steps people can take to ensure they are safe before, during and after an emergency, natural or manmade disaster.

Historically, the public health field has not been considered as an emergency preparedness profession, as people generally consider local police and fire departments to be responsible for handling emergencies. However, over the past 15 years, the federal government has funded local public health initiatives in an effort to bring those agencies into emergency planning as well.

Many of these efforts have revolved around the planning of emergency dispensing sites in communities, where medications can be distributed quickly to thousands of people over a one to two day period in the event of an emergency. These plans are scalable and can be implemented in many types of emergencies.

"Emergency preparedness is now a significant part of our jobs as local public health officials," said Andover Director of Public Health Thomas Carbone. "Much of what we do is preparing for scenarios, but over the last several years we have also assisted emergency personnel with handling various types of health emergencies."

It takes cooperation to manage an emergency situation and keep first responders and the community safe. For years, the Andover Health Division has assisted Andover Fire Rescue at hazardous material incidents, serving as a technical resource, and in some cases, a liaison with state and federal environmental agencies.

Andover Health has also handled a large scale foodborne illness at a facility several years ago. While the fire department managed the initial response, the health department was responsible for conducting an investigation into the incident and developing an action plan, including patient and employee interviews and food service inspections to pinpoint a possible cause for the outbreak.

In many communities, the health department is now also involved in emergency shelter planning. In the event that an emergency shelter must be established, the local health department is responsible for ensuring that sleeping, bathroom and cooking facilities are maintained in a sanitary manner. Health staff also monitors the general health of those staying in that shelter, identifying any possible communicable diseases.

The public health sector's involvement in emergency preparedness is not limited to a department's individual community, but can also expand across multiple towns and cities. In 2006, Andover became one of the first communities in Massachusetts to enter into a Public Health Mutual Aid Agreement, which allows member communities to share health staff across municipal lines during an emergency.

There are also certain types of emergency situations that would require volunteers to staff shelters or to distribute medications. Andover hosts the Greater River Valley Medical Reserve Corps, a branch of the National Citizen Corps, to organize volunteers.

"You don't have to be a medical professional to become a Medical Reserve Corps volunteer," Carbone said. "New members are always welcome and we encourage anyone who may be looking for ways to help, to consider working with the MRC. Our volunteers are truly dedicated, kind individuals, and we appreciate them very much."

Members of the GRVMRC come from various backgrounds and hail from several local communities. They assist in both emergency and routine operations in communities in the area. Some have medical experience, such as nurses and pharmacists, and others may be health educators or may have only a desire to help people in time of need.

For more information on how to become an MRC volunteer, call the GRVMRC at 978-490-6671 or visit the website.

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## **A message from the Andover Department of Public Health distributed by:**

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