

Board Policy Statement: Disaster Response

Adopted October 2006

The California State Board of Pharmacy wishes to ensure complete preparation for, and effective response to, any local, state, or national disaster, state of emergency, or other circumstance requiring expedited health system and/or public response. The skills, training, and capacities of board licensees, including wholesalers, pharmacies, pharmacists, intern pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians, will be an invaluable resource to those affected and responding. The Board also wishes to encourage an adequate response to any such circumstance affecting residents of California, by welcoming wholesalers, pharmacies, pharmacists, intern pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians licensed in good standing in other states to assist with health system and/or public response to residents of California.

The Board encourages its licensees to volunteer and become involved in local, state, and national emergency and disaster preparedness efforts. City or county health departments, fire departments, or other first responders can provide information on local opportunities. The Emergency Preparedness Office of the California Department of Health Services is a lead agency overseeing emergency preparedness and response in California, particularly regarding health system response, drug distribution and dispensing, and/or immunization and prophylaxis in the event of an emergency. At the federal level, lead contact agencies include the Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control, and/or the Department of Homeland Security and its Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Potential volunteers are encouraged to register and get information at www.medicalvolunteer.ca.gov (California) and www.medicalreservecorps.gov (federal).

The Board also continues to be actively involved in such planning efforts, at every level. The Board further encourages its licensees to assist in any way they can in any emergency circumstance or disaster. Under such conditions, the priority must be protection of public health and provision of essential patient care by the most expeditious and efficient means. Where declared emergency conditions exist, the Board recognizes that it may be difficult or impossible for licensees in affected areas to fully comply with regulatory requirements governing pharmacy practice or the distribution or dispensing of lifesaving medications.

In the event of a declared disaster or emergency, the Board expects to utilize its authority under the California Business and Professions Code, including section 4062, subdivision (b) thereof, to encourage and permit emergency provision of care to affected patients and areas, including by waiver of requirements that it may be implausible to meet under these circumstances, such as prescription requirements, record-keeping requirements, labeling requirements, employee ratio requirements, consultation requirements, or other standard pharmacy practices and duties that may interfere with the most efficient response to those affected. The Board encourages its licensees to assist, and follow directions from, local, state, and national health officials. The Board expects licensees to apply their judgment and training to providing medication to patients in the best interests of the patients, with circumstances on the ground dictating the extent to which regulatory requirements can be met in affected areas.

The Board further expects that during such emergency, the highest standard of care possible will be provided, and that once the emergency has dissipated, its licensees will return to practices conforming to state and federal requirements.

Furthermore, during a declared disaster or emergency affecting residents of California, the Board hopes that persons outside of California will assist the residents of California. To facilitate such assistance, in the event of a declared California disaster or emergency, the Board expects to use its powers under the California Business and Professions Code, including section 900 and section 4062, subdivision (b) thereof, to allow any pharmacists, intern pharmacists, or pharmacy technicians, who are not licensed in California but who are licensed in good standing in another state, including those presently serving military or civilian duty, to provide emergency pharmacy services in California. The Board also expects to allow nonresident pharmacies or wholesalers that are not licensed in California but that are licensed in good standing in another state to ship medications to pharmacies, health professionals or other wholesalers in California.

Finally, the Board also expects to allow use of temporary facilities to facilitate drug distribution during a declared disaster or state of emergency. The Board expects that its licensees will similarly respond outside of the state to disasters or emergencies affecting populations outside California and will pursue whatever steps may be necessary to encourage that sort of licensee response.

1. Expanded powers in the event of a disaster 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.

2. See also the Interstate Civil Defense and Disaster Compact [Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 177-178], the Emergency Management Assistance Compact [Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 179-179.5], and the California Disaster and Civil Defense Master Mutual Aid Agreement [executed 1950], regarding cooperation among the states.