BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

Victoria is one of the world's most fire prone areas. Warmer and drier temperatures across the region and extended fire danger periods increase the likelihood of an emergency event. Primary care providers can minimise the risk to their business and workforce by preparing early and implementing emergency response plans as required. This document has been created to support health services to be bushfire ready.

Consider the role of your practice in an emergency	To assist your clinic in an emergency see: • Heat Health Preparedness Guidance for primary health care services • Heat Health Preparedness Guidance for health and community services • Heat Health Preparedness Guidance for community service organisations • Heat Health Preparedness Guidance for mental health service
Update your emergency response documents	Complete an Emergency Response Plan using a document such as the Emergency Response Planning Tool. If using a paper system, store a copy off site. This will not only help you to stay focused and respond under pressure but get your business back up and running more quickly
Have emergency response kits ready	• Torches in event of power outages and spare batteries • Important documents • N95 Masks for bushfire smoke • Contact lists for all staff and contractors. • Burns kit • Practice mobile, which may provide temporary internet access through mobile data hotspot • Eye wash kit • Respiratory medications – e.g. bronchodilators, tools to deliver • Vulnerable population list of patients ready and handy • Hard copy radiology and pathology requests • Script pads • Water.
Consider a plan for staying and evacuation	The Preparing a General Practice for a Disaster HealthPathway has useful information on how to prepare before a disaster happens.
Plan staffing	In the event of no or reduced access to your site or staff absences, consider alternate models of work, alternate sites and equipment needs (ERPT can guide you through these considerations): • Is it safe for practitioners to work remotely from home? Explore if there are alternate health services or locations that they could work from. • Does the practice have a telehealth platform that practitioners can use remotely? • Are the practitioners set up with ePrescribing so patients can obtain scripts immediately and remotely? Ensure paper scripts/prescribing pads are also available in the event that no internet is available.

	• Does the practice have an alternate contact number, or can you temporarily divert your practice number, so patients can call if the building is closed, and the phone system is inaccessible? • Can admin and clinical staff access your practice management and clinical software systems off site to facilitate remote models of care? • Ensure clinicians are able to create pathology and imaging requests if working remotely.
Who is at-risk	Ensure the practice can pull at risk population group details and have a process to be able to prioritise access to services and support for them if needed. For example: set up of messages to cohort on how to prepare Use Pen CS and CAT Plus recipes to identify relevant patient groups and send an SMS message to those patients who have not opted out. You will need to set up your account and ensure you have enough credits in the system to send the messages. Vulnerable populations include: the elderly, infants and children, people with co-morbidities, those who live alone or who are socially isolated, people with a cognitive impairment, people who have an alcohol or other substance use issue and those populations who live in certain environmental settings that make them more at risk of heat stress e.g. no air conditioning or other cooling means or a home that is particularly hot.
Keep up to date with alerts and information	• Subscribe to heat health warnings • Subscribe to heat and thunderstorm asthma alerts • Learn more about bushfires and asthma here • Preparing patients for a disaster HealthPathway • Post-natural disaster health HealthPathway • Prepare for or report gas and electrical outages • Road closures VicRoads - VicTraffic or Live Traffic NSW | Incident List
Ensure emergency contact details are up-to-date	So that Murray PHN can assist in coordinating support with government agencies during an emergency, make sure to let us know who your emergency contacts are via your Quality Improvement Consultant or: primarycareresponse@murrayphn.org.au Victoria: CFA – warnings and restrictions NSW: Fires near me
Communicate service closures or impacts	Use social media and other platforms. Prepare a message or email to patients using appointment confirmation system or Pen CS if needed. Consider sending other important alerts, for example: to patients with asthma during epidemic thunderstorm asthma days. **Inform Murray PHN of service closures or impacts:** **primarycareresponse@murrayphn.org.au**
Encourage patients and staff to be fire ready	***In Victoria*** Fire Ready Kit Emergency app ***In NSW*** Bush fire survival plan Emergency app Advise patients to plan in advance, so they do not run out of medications during an emergency, particularly if they are unable to access the local pharmacy or cannot travel to an alternate location. Do they have an action plan for any conditions that may be exacerbated by extreme heat conditions and or fire?
Information for clinicians	• Extreme heat - information for clinicians • Extreme heat factsheet for clinicians

	• Heat-related Illness • Disaster Planning and Management
Do emergency exercise training	Undertake mock training incidents to ensure staff are competent and aware of their roles in the event of an emergency.
Safeguard your building	Prepare your site by removing excess rubbish, litter and leaves and keeping your grass short.
Protect your data	Ensure that your practice software is backed up, ideally to the cloud, to reduce the risk of data loss. Upload patient information to My Health Record. See our Digital Health Toolkit.
Plan for power outages, water supply, gas	Consider alternate power sources in the event of power outages for cold chain management, or clinical record access. Could you relocate vaccine / medicines or access a generator if needed?
Plan how to manage emergencies	See RACGP's managing emergencies in general practice: a guide for preparation, response and recovery
Join the emergency volunteer list	If you have capacity to support in an emergency event, register your interest using the online form.
Other useful links and resources to share with patients	• Extreme heat: supporting people by telephone • How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat - brochure • My Health Record • Alternative after hours and emergency care options • Heatwave Service for Australia • Extreme heat - Better Health Channel • Survive the heat - poster • Where to get information in an emergency in Victoria • Subscribe to Victorian heat health warnings • Guidelines for use of face masks • CFA Leaving early: Bushfire survival planning template • CFA Information and advice for your local area • Using air conditioners when it's smoky outside • After a fire: using your personal protective kit • After a fire: private drinking water and water tank safety • Service continuity and emergency events in aged care • Victoria emergency preparedness in residential aged care services

Contact us

For more information or support email primarycareresponse@murrayphn.org.au

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