



Disaster Preparedness Plan

Administered by
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Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services
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MDCPS Disaster Preparedness Plan

Disasters can affect the way MDCPS operates and the services we provide for children and their families. The purpose of the Disaster Preparedness Plan is to establish certain operational procedures and guidelines to facilitate the execution of the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services staff's mission-critical functions during various emergencies. These may include natural disasters, accidents, technological emergencies, public health emergencies, military or terrorist-related incidents, and civil unrest or riots. This plan may be expanded and impacted by state and federal mandates during disasters that have wide-reaching implications that may be beyond our standard scope of operations.

The State of Mississippi is certainly no stranger to natural disasters. The most common natural disasters to impact our state include hurricanes, tropical storms, severe electrical storms, tornadoes, high winds, flooding, and winter storms. Other disasters are man-made, such as hazardous material incidents (chemical, biological, radiological), technological (electrical power blackouts, computer system and communication network disruptions, electronic/digital equipment breakdown), terrorist attacks, and civil unrest or riots. Most recently, the state and nation have been affected by the global pandemic, COVID-19. The global pandemic is a public health emergency. This unique circumstance requires MDCPS to adapt and respond as needed to support and protect our children and families under this plan

In the event of a man-made or a natural disaster, the Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services, is ultimately responsible for the execution of this plan, though many of its functions will be carried out by the Principal Deputy Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner of Administration, Deputy Commissioner of Child Welfare, and other executive leadership as designated by the Commissioner.

Disaster Impact

In this plan, we will examine three levels of disasters and the supporting plan for each. The disaster level and appropriate response under this plan will be determined by the Commissioner based on the facts and circumstances of each emergency and any state or federal disaster declaration or other guidance. In every instance, the ordinary proper chain of command will be utilized, e.g. County Supervisor, Area Manager, Assistant Deputy Commissioner Service Area's I-VIII.

Minor Disaster – Level 1

A minor disaster can be defined as a disaster that can be handled locally on a county level and carries no need for a formal disaster declaration by the State. This type of incident has a very limited geographical area with a limited number of victims who can be cared for by local medical facilities.

In such instances, the responsibility for response rests with local and regional MDCPS supervisory staff to:

- assess the need to alter any non-essential job functions to accommodate the essential MDCPS functions of intake, investigations, child safety, family preservation, and foster

care services.

- maintain ongoing communication with local/state law enforcement and the youth court as necessary.
- maintain ongoing communication with regional and state office leadership.

Major Disaster – Level 2

A major disaster is defined as a disaster that has a broader geographic area and a moderate number of victims. This level falls within a well-defined physical area. This type of disaster will require a formally declared state of emergency by the County/State and a request for federal assistance to supplement local response.

Catastrophic Disaster – Level 3

A catastrophic disaster is defined as a disaster that has widespread damage to many victims. A federal disaster declaration often accompanies this level of disaster. Catastrophic disasters will require significant state and federal resources and assistance.

The agency's response to major and catastrophic disasters will be activated by the Commissioner or her designee at the earliest possible time before and/or immediately after the disaster event. Dependent upon the nature of the event, the Commissioner, may designate agency staff as essential or non-essential in response. For either a Level 2 or Level 3 disaster, the responsibilities of the Commissioner or her designee include the following:

- Notify the impacted counties as quickly as possible prior to the disaster or as soon as possible thereafter to initiate the plan. Notification will be accomplished utilizing the agency's emergency text messaging system, the agency website, agency eBulletins, agency email, and a cell phone "tree" through the formal chain of command.
- Assess any special needs not anticipated in the plan and take action to address them.
- Assess any additional staff needs.
- Assign any special staff who might be required to help during the disaster period and adjust their regular workload as needed.
- If shelters are required, ensure staff are aware of their location(s) and coordinate with the DHS Emergency Coordinator.

MDCPS Staff Responsibilities

For Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 disasters, all MDCPS staff should follow these guidelines.

Personal Responsibilities

Prior Preparation

1. Develop a family emergency plan for yourself and your family members. In case family members are separated from one another during a disaster (parents at

work child in school or day care), have a previously discussed plan for getting back together and for communicating your whereabouts to each other. Ask an out-of-state/county relative or friend to serve as your family contact. After the disaster it is often easier to telephone long distance than it is locally. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, email, and telephone number of the family contact and have it in their cell phone contacts list.

2. Maintain a supply of water and non-perishable food in air-tight plastic containers/bins. Include a manual can opener if canned items are included.
3. Keep a change of clothes for each family member, sturdy shoes, a battery-operated radio, flashlights, extra batteries (including a cell phone pre-charged battery booster), and a fully stocked First Aid Kit. Keep an adequate amount of cash on hand for emergency purchases due to debit/credit cards cannot work without electricity.
4. Fill your vehicles with gas.
5. Maintain an adequate supply of medication.
6. When forewarning is available, follow the directives of local public safety authorities concerning evacuation. If you must evacuate, notify your supervisor, and furnish your contact information along with your anticipated return date. Take your MDCPS cell phone/tablet/laptop with you if you evacuate to another location. Take a recharging device with you and keep your cell phone/tablet/computer charged whenever the opportunity is available to access power sources.

Following a Disaster

1. Staff should follow the directives of local public safety authorities regarding a return to the affected area.
2. Notify your supervisor if you will be away from work for more than two working days. If your supervisor is unreachable, contact the statewide Adoption Information line at 1-800-821-9157 to report your current circumstances, location, and anticipated return to work date. Continue to attempt to contact your supervisor by phone, text, or email until you receive a response.
3. Staff could be approved for use of Administrative Leave as determined by the Commissioner, Principal Deputy Commissioner, and Deputy Administrator for Human Capital depending on the magnitude of the disaster and guidance from the Governor and the State Personnel Board. Extended Leave with or without pay will be granted on a case-by-case basis depending on the extent of the damage to the geographic area, individual circumstances, and directives of local/state authorities. Decisions regarding Extended Leave will be made by the Commissioner or her designee. Use of Administrative Leave will comply with statewide Executive Orders that may be issued by the Governor.

Professional Responsibilities

Prior Preparation

1. Maintain an out-of-state emergency contact for each foster family. This should be updated quarterly. This information should be recorded in MACWIS as well as kept as a “hard copy” printout.
2. Maintain up-to-date files on all clients assigned to your caseload in MACWIS.
3. Maintain an updated “hard copy” printout of all cases including children/family names, locations, and contact information. This should be kept with you or easily accessible to you.
4. Area Managers and County Supervisors will be responsible for maintaining a current list of foster families with current placements along with the names of children placed in those homes. The “hard copy” list should be kept with the director/supervisors and be updated routinely to accommodate changes in placements. State Office will also maintain a list of foster families and current placements. Contact phone numbers, street addresses and email addresses should be maintained for each home/family and updated as information changes.
5. Each MDCPS County Office will develop a disaster team and a disaster plan. Each county will train county staff on the disaster plan and participate in drills. This plan will be updated annually, and staff informed of any changes to the plan. These plans are developed in conjunction with the local emergency management agencies/entities.
6. State Office and each MDCPS County Office will prepare a disaster supply kit that includes:
 - ❑ Laptop computer/Tablet with extra batteries and portable charging devices/cables, if available.
 - ❑ Hard copy phone lists, address book and email listing for all employees and management.
 - ❑ Extra cell phone with portable charger, if available.
 - ❑ Radio with extra batteries.
 - ❑ Hard copy of disaster plan.
 - ❑ Maps, driving directions to alternate facilities and approved shelters.
 - ❑ Listing of all MDCPS county offices with contact information and leadership contact information.
 - ❑ State Office personnel listing with contact information.
 - ❑ Flashlights/lanterns with extra batteries.

- ☐ First Aid Kit.
 - ☐ Car charger for laptop/tablet and cell phone, if available.
 - ☐ Foster Home contact list.
 - ☐ Information for each foster child and each in-home case to include full name, Social Security number, Medicaid number, medical information, name and doses of medication, child's birth parent(s) names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and the assigned case worker and phone number for each child.
7. Electronic equipment in the State Office and County Offices located on the floor should be placed on desks to avoid water damage. If possible, cover with plastic sheeting. Unplug all electronic device and network cables from wall outlets and place on top of desks to prevent shortages. When forewarning is available:
- Area Managers and County Supervisors should maintain a hard copy listing of foster families currently with placements along with the names of children placed in those homes. The list should be kept with the Director/Supervisors and updated routinely to accommodate changes in placements. The State Office will also maintain a current list of all foster homes and current placements.
 - Contact all foster families in your caseload to ensure they follow directives of local/state public safety authorities regarding evacuation. Foster children may accompany the resource family out-of-county or out-of-state based on the directives and the family's emergency plan.
 - Obtain emergency relocation information for all foster families on your caseload and record email addresses and phone numbers where all children in your caseload can be contacted if their foster family intends to evacuate and relocate to another address. Ask the foster family to contact you via email and/or cell phone once they have settled into their temporary relocation site.
 - Confirm that all resource families have the 1-800-222-8000 number available to stay in contact with MDCPS and a copy of the "Disaster Preparedness Plan for Foster Families."

Following a disaster

The Area Manager will communicate with the appropriate Assistant Deputy Commissioner for their Service Area regarding plans for emergency operations within the area, including closing offices, staffing, and plans to cover emergency shelters, if required. Assistant Deputy Commissioners for Service Areas should report the need for office closures to the MDCPS Commissioner and his/her designee. Decisions to close offices will be made by the Commissioner and/or Executive Level Staff or the County EOC.

For staff in the field, Area Managers should make telephone and email contact with all County Supervisors under their supervision to confirm the safety, location and availability for work status of each employee. The County Supervisor should do the same for all staff they supervise.

For State Office Staff, Division Directors should make telephone, text, and/or email contact with staff in their chain of command to confirm the safety and location of each staff person. Division Directors should communicate this information to the appropriate Deputy Commissioner.

Communication

1-800-821-9157 will serve as the primary contact number for basic communication among MDCPS staff immediately prior to and following a disaster. This number normally serves as the statewide Adoption Information line. This phone number will be staffed during normal business hours (hours may be extended based on the severity and duration of the disaster period) and will be available for staff to report to and access information from the State Office.

MDCPS staff should report to their supervisor as soon as possible (or to the 1-800-821-9157 number if they are unable to reach their immediate supervisor) to provide their current physical location, contact information and estimated plan for being able to report to work. The supervisor will advise staff of current expectations.

The MCI Hotline number 1-800-222-8000 will be available 24/7 for foster families to report their whereabouts during a disaster and any related relocation. At this number, a master list of families who have called in will be maintained so that both foster families and the children placed with them can be easily located. Foster families and birth families may call the 1-800-222-8000 MCI hotline number to check on the status of family members during a disaster situation.

While the agency hopes all foster families will be safe and call the hotline to report their safety and whereabouts, we understand that may not be the case. MDCPS's first priority after a disaster is to locate all foster children and families. Each caseworker will be responsible for contacting each of the children and families on their caseload. If a child or family is not able to be reached, the caseworker will contact their supervisor immediately for guidance on the next steps.

Given a significant amount of preparation time prior to an event, the agency may establish specific email addresses for internal communication. This information will be widely distributed to all agency staff. These email addresses will be monitored by designated staff, such as the Office of Human Resources. Additionally, the Commissioner may designate a system of daily mass communication to all staff during an event.

The MDCPS Commissioner/State Office designee will be the liaison with other state agencies such as the Mississippi State Department of Health, Medicaid, MEMA, etc. The State Office will communicate via eBulletin, email, or through the MDCPS chain of command all necessary information from other state agencies to all MDCPS staff.

All agency staff should keep their supervisor informed of the status of their regularly scheduled duties.

Media

The MDCPS Commissioner, the Director of Constituent and Legislative Affairs, and the Director of Communications will be responsible for responding to all media inquiries and communications with media outlets statewide to ensure consistent messaging. If County Offices are contacted by local media outlets seeking information or comment, please refer them immediately to the Director of Communications at the State Office. The number is 662-528-8519. The Director of Communications will be responsible for coordination of communications with the Joint Information Center (JIC) in the event the State Emergency Operations Center is activated.

Child Abuse and Neglect Reports and Investigations

New reports and investigations into child abuse and neglect reports and the location and assurance of safety of children/youth in foster care will take precedence over special requests to assist in staffing emergency shelters. The timeliness of initiating and completing investigations remains a priority regardless of the disaster situation. If local communications are disrupted, the MCI 1-800-222-8000 hotline will remain available to take reports and pass that information back to the appropriate county staff at the local level or to local law enforcement. This process will continue until local communications are restored. Via mass media, the public will be informed of the MCI Hotline number and other electronic methods to report abuse or neglect as well as to contact local law enforcement or any MDCPS County Office if local phone lines are disrupted.

Relocation of Foster Children To Other States

All County Supervisors will coordinate with the Area Manager or designee and the ICPC Coordinator to ensure ongoing services for Mississippi foster children who have been relocated out-of-state because of a disaster and to assess the needs of both the foster children and the foster families with whom they are placed. All necessary information should be provided to the state where the child and family have relocated (medical, behavioral and education history, reasons the child came into care, family history, case plans and any other pertinent information) to ensure ongoing services for the foster children and foster families.

Relocation of Foster Children From Other States

In the event foster children from other states relocate to Mississippi following a disaster, the County Supervisor will coordinate with the Area Manager or designee and the ICPC Coordinator to contact the ICPC Administrator or other identified liaison from the sending state. The necessary information (medical, behavioral, and educational history, reasons the child came into care, family history, case plans, and any other pertinent information) should be gathered and maintained to ensure ongoing services for the foster children and foster families.

Tribal Clients

Following a disaster, MDCPS will follow all policies regarding Native American children. If a Native American child is displaced, the agency will contact immediately that child's tribal council. All Area Managers and County Supervisors will maintain a listing of Tribal Council contacts.

MDCPS Foster Family Responsibilities

Prior Preparation

1. Develop a family emergency plan for yourself, your family members, and your foster child(ren). In case family members are separated from one another during a disaster (parents at work child in school or daycare), have a previously discussed plan for getting back together and for communicating your whereabouts to each other. Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as your Family Contact. After the disaster, it is often easier to telephone long distance than it is locally. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, email, and telephone number of the Family Contact.
2. Maintain a supply of water and non-perishable food in air-tight plastic containers/bins. Include a manual can opener if canned items are included.
3. Keep a change of clothes for each family member, sturdy shoes, batter-operated radio, flashlights, extra batteries (including a cell phone pre-charged battery booster), and fully stocked First Aid Kit. Keep an adequate amount of cash on hand for emergency purchases due to debit and credit cards not working without electricity.
4. Fill your vehicles with gas.
5. Maintain an adequate supply of medication.
6. Be sure MDCPS/your caseworker(s) have updated information for an emergency contact located out-of-state who will be the person most likely to know the whereabouts of your family.
7. Maintain a “hard copy” information sheet for each foster child that includes:
 - Child’s full name
 - Social Security Number
 - Medicaid Number
 - Medical Information (include physician’s name and office address, major medical problems – especially those requiring medication, any allergies, medical equipment required, behavioral/health issues, etc.)
 - Names and dosage directions of all prescriptions and OTC medications
 - Ensure that you have an ample supply (at least a 7- to 10-day dosage) of any prescription or over-the-counter medication your foster child is taking
 - Caseworker’s name, phone number and email address
 - Supervisor’s name, phone number and email address
 - County Office phone number
 - 1-800-222-8000 MCI hotline number to call to provide or receive information related to the foster child/child’s birth family/siblings

When forewarning is available

Foster families should follow the directives of local public safety authorities concerning evacuation and may take foster children out-of-county or out-of-state based on the directives and the family emergency plan.

IMPORTANT:

Immediately notify the caseworker assigned to you BEFORE leaving the area and furnish contact information, the location to which you are relocating, and the anticipated date you will return home. If you cannot reach your worker, please call 1-800-222-8000 and provide this information to the emergency hotline attendant.

If relocating to another county within Mississippi, families should also contact the local county office serving the area to which they are relocating from the county office list provided. Contact the local MDCPS office as soon as possible upon your arrival.

If medical attention is needed for a foster child while relocated to another state, foster families should call 1-800-222-8000 for assistance in using Mississippi Medicaid. Foster families will continue to receive reimbursement as usual.

If an evacuation order has been issued and you do not plan to evacuate contact your Social Worker immediately.

Following a disaster

Foster and adoptive families should follow the directives of local public safety authorities regarding a return to the affected area. Do not return home until officials say it is safe to do so.

Foster families should notify their caseworker as soon as possible when they return to their home address after relocating/evacuating because of a disaster. If they are unable to reach their caseworker to report their return, they should immediately call 1-800-222-8000 to provide the information.

If foster families need special assistance upon their return and are unable to contact their caseworker, please call 1-800-222-8000 to report your need. The person accepting the call will forward the concern, question, or request to the child's worker or another staff member who will return the foster family's call.

Communicating the MDCPS Disaster Plan

This statewide disaster plan will be forwarded to each State Office division, bureau, and department as well as to the Area Managers overseeing Field Operations staff by the MDCPS Commissioner or designee. Directors will review the plan with the supervisors they oversee; in turn, supervisors will review it with staff who report to them. The Disaster Plan will also be posted on the MDCPS website and available through Cornerstone.

Each county's local level plan will be developed by county staff under the direction of the

appropriate Area Manager and will be shared with the State Office/Office of the Commissioner prior to distribution/training of local staff. County plans will be explained in detail to all new and existing employees on the county level by the County Supervisor. All new foster homes and adoptive homes will be provided copies and trained on the statewide preparedness disaster plan in the standard pre-service training. Existing foster and adoptive homes will be trained and provided copies of the as part of their ongoing in-service training.

Foster home and adoptive home emergency preparedness plans will need to be updated annually by the family's Licensure worker and kept as part of the foster home case file.

All new MDCPS employees will be given the agency's statewide disaster plan at their new employee orientation session.

In addition to dispersing the agency's statewide disaster plan internally, it will also be shared with local, state, and federal departments and agencies that would assist MDCPS during a disaster. The agency has begun getting involved with state partners to share the details of this plan at the time of an emergency. The agency recognizes that at any level of disaster, it will need the help and support of its partners. This will be done with educating county emergency management teams and the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency and Federal Emergency Management Agency by the end of fiscal year 2025. The first step will be to provide a copy of the agency's disaster plan to its partners and attend local and statewide meetings, conferences, and conventions to further educate the needs of MDCPS during emergencies.

Updating the Plan

The Statewide MDCPS Disaster Plan will be evaluated annually – at a minimum – and immediately following any level of disaster. Reviews will include input from both internal and external stakeholders at the county and state levels. Any changes to the plan will be made and all agency staff will be notified via eBulletin of the most updated plan whenever changes are made. The revised/updated plan will also be posted to the agency website. Currently, there are no changes or additions to the plan.