

# KIDS IN DISASTERS



# Types of Disasters

- Natural, Technologic, Intentional
  - Natural:
    - weather, geology
  - Techno:
    - failure of systems (plane crash, toxic spill, explosion, roof collapse)
  - Intentional:
    - deliberate actions (hijack, bombing, sniper, etc.)



# KIDS? WHAT KIDS?



Berkshire	23,675	(5770)
Franklin	13,240	(3300)
Hampden	106,218	(27,720)
Hampshire	25,115	(5700)
All	168,248	(42,490)



# Of Special Note...

## Children With Special Healthcare Needs

- In MA, 18.3% (261,475 children)
- In Western MA, 25-30,000 children
- “Children with special health care needs are those who have or are at increased risk for a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional condition and who also require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally.” (AAP & MCH definition)



# Common Myth



- The family unit will always be together when disaster strikes
  - If I'm not with my child, I'll just go pick him up, or I'll text her and meet her somewhere.
    - Over 70% surveyed reported they would go to the scene of a disaster to get their child.
  - We (responders) don't really have to worry about kids because their parents will look out for them



# WHERE ARE THEY?

- Schools, Daycare and Playgrounds
- School Bus
- Athletic Fields and Recreational Areas
- Camps
- Movie Theaters, Sports Arenas
- Shopping Malls
- Amusement Parks



# Kids In Disasters: What's Different?

- Anatomical and Physical differences
  - Skeleton
  - Organ systems
  - Thermoregulation
  - Immune system
  - Blood & fluid reserves



# Kids In Disasters: What's Different?

- Developmental:
  - pre-verbal
  - Limited mobility
  - immature processing/reasoning ability
- Rely on adults for food, shelter, clothing, care
- Infants/toddlers rapidly suffer the consequences of food-source contamination





# Risky Business

- Immediate aftermath of a disaster
  - Traffic issues
  - no power (heating/cooling/fire issues)
  - unstable buildings, displaced pets, civil unrest
- Environmental issues:
  - sunburn, dehydration, bee stings, hypothermia, carbon monoxide poisoning (generators)



- fires/smoke/mold = asthma triggers (delayed)
- URI, viral outbreaks from close contact in shelters or supply lines
  - Gastrointestinal episodes = increased risk of dehydration/shock
- May not have access to daily or as-needed medications



# Important Kid-Considerations

- Intact family units:
  - Separate area for families with children
    - Space for diaper-changing/nursing/feeding/bathroom/sleeping needs (safe crib/pack n play, safe sleep policies)
- Unaccompanied minors:
  - Separate space, continuously monitored per policy
  - Care provided by credentialed persons



# Be Pro-Active

- Ensure ready availability of safe, age-appropriate food and liquids
- Ensure availability of young-child bathroom assistance if no caregivers available
- Temporary space is safe/hazards reduced
- Toys=Age Appropriate, CLEAN
- Pre-Screen and train volunteers



# Special Kid Issues in Disasters

- Identification of the pre-verbal child
- Tracking the missing child or child sent to a distant hospital
- Supporting technology-dependent kids
- What if parents are killed or missing?



# Planning...



Recommend all families maintain duplicate sets of important papers, to include photos/contact # of all family members, close family friends/relatives

- Kids may not know names, but they can pick out their grandma in a photo



# Mental Health Needs

- Kids are more vulnerable to post-traumatic stress; important to address mental health
- What ELSE has been going on with kids?
- Psychological stress creates physical symptoms in kids
  - Sleep issues, tummy aches, headaches, diarrhea, etc.



# Mental Health Needs

- Effects of disaster trauma can impact a child's later life if poorly managed or not addressed
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder
  - Depression
  - Substance abuse
  - Chronic health issues





# Concrete Thinking...

- Kids worry about themselves...this is normal
  - Who's going to make my breakfast?
  - Where's my red jacket?
  - I'll miss my science test and get in trouble



# Mental health needs

- Need reassurance that they are safe
- Need honest age-appropriate answers to their questions
- Need return to 'normal' or near-normal as soon as possible
  - Back to school
  - Back home or settled into a new home



# Unhelpful

Unhelpful to try to ‘jolly’ or shame kids out of being fearful, sad or grief-stricken

These emotions need to be acknowledged and processed

Not: “Big boys don’t cry”, “You’re lucky, it could have been a lot worse”, “you’re not scared, are you?”



- “What you saw (or what happened to you) must have been really scary...you’re safe now”
- “I’m glad you’re here--it’s ok to cry if you want to...”
- Listening without judgment and providing neutral, supportive comments is extremely helpful



# Kids In Disasters

- Lots to think about
  - Understanding special vulnerabilities
  - Keeping kids safe during/after an event
  - Re-unification with family
  - Accommodating kids with complex needs
  - Supporting disaster mental health
  - Building partnerships to call upon during disasters



# Thanks!

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- Click on link to access the “Show Me’ tool and other useful communication templates/links

