

Westchester County Shelter-In -Place Guidance for Local Jurisdictions

SHELTER IN PLACE

Sheltering-in-place is a response to an emergency that creates a situation in which it is safer to remain in the building rather than evacuate. It is generally a response to a relatively short duration situation, up to 72 hours and may indicate a hazardous situation such as a hazardous chemical release or a severe weather event. A shelter-in-place warning may be issued for several reasons, including but not limited to:

- A hazardous materials release for which actions such as sealing up windows and doors may be necessary;
- An active shooter or active threat situation (may also be known as lock down);
- Inclement weather such as a severe storm or tornado, which may require sheltering in place but away from windows.

Sheltering-in-place can provide immediate protection and limits exposure to a hazard. The advantages of sheltering-in-place to the whole community includes immediate implementation, allowing people to remain in familiar surroundings and access to everyday necessities such as the telephone, radio, television, food, and clothing, durable medical equipment, consumable medical supplies, medication, comfort items, home modification equipment (i.e. lifts, ramps, modified counters and showers, audible alarms, visual alarms, etc.) and in-home supports (i.e. screen reader software, back up batteries, in-family personal assistants, special diet foods, etc.).

However, the amount of time people can safely stay sheltered-in-place is dependent upon availability of necessary resources and supports such as their in-home supply of food, water, medications, medical care, the need for utilities, availability of a backup power source, the need for and access to assistance with activities of daily living, need for out of home services (i.e. dialysis, food services, in-home skilled nursing etc.) and access to accurate and reliable information. Individuals with access and functional needs should be a priority for restoration of services and safety checks, as they may be at greater risk throughout a prolonged shelter-in-place order.

Local jurisdictions should include the whole community in developing shelter-in place plans, including private and nonprofit sector stakeholders, faith-based organizations, organizations serving people with disabilities, organizations addressing access and functional needs

populations, and others that address individuals with limited English proficiency, limited access to transportation, and housing/shelter, and/or limited access to financial resources.

An extension of the shelter-in-place concept is the stay-at-home mandates that have occurred since the advent of the COVID 19 pandemic. The stay-at-home process is also to limit exposures to hazard and contains some of the same considerations as shelter-in-place plans.

SHELTER-IN-PLACE CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to recommending an evacuation order, local officials will evaluate the benefit of in-place sheltering or relocating the at-risk populations to an area of lesser risk. Considerations include:

- The nature of the disaster scenario
- The population at risk and its capability and resources to implement a recommended protective action. This includes accommodations for any unique risks the event poses to individuals with disability or access and functional needs.
- The time factors involved in the emergency and their effect on the selected protective action; inclusive of additional time that may be required for some individuals with disabilities and access and functional needs to prepare for and respond to a shelter in place notification.
- The capability to communicate with the population at risk, emergency response personnel and the County as needed before, during, and after the emergency to ensure all methods of emergency communications with the public are inclusionary and accessible, using auxiliary aids and services when necessary.
- The resources and readiness to facilitate and/or conduct community wellness checks to individuals who may need assistance.
- The capabilities and resources of the response organizations to implement, control, monitor and terminate the protective action.
- The ability for individuals who are self-quarantining or isolating to be evacuated to a location that offers the required medical care or isolation areas.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR WELLNESS CHECKS AND CANVASING

If the shelter-in-place warning is required for a period of 12-24 hours or more, it may become necessary to implement wellness checks for individuals who require daily assistance with activities of daily living or medical needs; inclusive of people who:

- receive daily meal service
- receive daily home health, skilled nursing, or personal assistance services

- are electricity dependent for life sustaining equipment
- participate on the County or local Registry and live alone
- are required to self-quarantine or isolate and have limited support systems

The municipality can facilitate this wellness check in cooperation with municipal departments such as Police, Fire and EMS and service providers/vendors, who provide these services daily and with the support of the County as needed and requested.

Wellness checks can be performed either in person (canvassing) or by phone calls. Coordination with municipal or county departments that provide services to the enumerated populations above will be critical to identifying contact information for specific individuals or at-risk communities. Canvassing can be performed by municipal departments in collaboration with volunteer, faith based or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Based upon identified needs of the individual or community, municipalities can develop post disaster recovery strategies that are realistic and reflect whole community inclusion.

Those in need of a wellness check may be identified by leveraging a local and/or County registry of people with disabilities who have self-identified as requiring assistance in a disaster, or through collaboration with local service providers and other stakeholders who provides services to people with disabilities, access or functional needs (i.e local senior center, local home delivery program, local school district, local first response agencies, etc).

PUBLIC WARNINGS

Fully inclusive and accessible emergency public warnings should be issued using multiple modalities and should provide incident specific information and instructions including supplemental information for individuals who may need additional assistance.

Once the incident is stabilized, the “all clear” message to the public should also be fully inclusive and accessible.

SCENARIO SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

SHELTER IN PLACE STORMS

Severe storms or other weather may require a shelter in place warning to the public. The length of time required to shelter in place is dependent on the nature of the weather event.

If the determination by the local Incident Commander is to order a Shelter in Place, the alert should be issued to warn citizens to shelter-in-place using multiple modalities. Alert information may include:

- Make sure all durable medical equipment and essential communication devices are fully charged
- Identify a small interior room or hallway with no windows if possible
- Stay away from windows, doors, and outside walls
- Stay in the center of the room
- Avoid large span rooms such as cafeterias and gymnasiums
- Identify alternative sources of power and battery backup
- Monitor local media and social media for updates
- Ensure an adequate stock of water, food, medicine, and other life sustaining medical supplies and equipment are on hand and someone is there to assist for personal assistance services as needed.

A severe storm is one of the most likely scenario to result in a shelter in place warning for an extended amount of time and the need for wellness checks.

Considerations and supplemental information should be provided for individuals who have medical conditions, or depend on life sustaining equipment, in addition to individuals who live alone and/or who may need assistance following the instructions. Supplemental information may include:

- Referral to 211 for additional information
- Contact service provider for information related to individual medical or physical needs
- Keep warm using any available resources
- Identify community supports who may provide assistance
- Reach out to personal contacts to perform your own wellness check
- Identify yourself to local first responders if you use life sustaining equipment
- Remain calm

SHELTER IN PLACE HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

A hazardous chemical spill or release may cause an immediate threat to life, health, and the environment. A shelter in place warning may be issued in the area of immediate danger to the public. Sheltering-in-place for a hazardous materials event is usually required for a short time period until the situation is mitigated.

If the determination by the local Incident Commander is to order a Shelter in Place, the alert should be issued to warn citizens to shelter-in-place using multiple modalities. Alert information may include:

- Immediately go indoors and bring family and pets
- Close all exterior windows and doors
- Turn off air conditioning or air handling systems
- Use tape to seal the windows and doors to prevent chemicals from entering the building
- Continue to monitor local and social media for additional information

Considerations and supplemental information should be provided for individuals who have medical conditions, and use oxygen, in addition to individuals with limited mobility or independence and who may need assistance following the instructions. Supplemental information may include:

- Contact a Public Inquiry Call Center or hotline if established for the incident
- Contact service provider for information related to individual medical or physical needs
- Reach out to personal contacts to perform your own wellness check
- Remain calm

SHELTER IN PLACE ACTIVE SHOOTER

The municipality may issue a warning about an active shooter threat. The alert should be issued to warn citizens to shelter-in-place using multiple modalities.

If the determination by the local Incident Commander is to order a Shelter in Place, the alert should be issued to warn citizens to shelter-in-place using multiple modalities. Alert information may include:

- Immediately go indoors and bring family and pets
- Close and lock all exterior windows and doors
- Choose an interior room without windows if possible
- Continue to monitor local and social media for additional information

Considerations and supplemental information should be provided for individuals with limited mobility or independence and who may need assistance following the instructions. Supplemental information may include:

- Contact a Public Inquiry Call Center or hotline if established for the incident
- Reach out to personal contacts to perform your own wellness check
- Remain calm

SELF-QUARANTINE OR ISOLATION STAY AT HOME

Individuals may be required/mandated to self-quarantine or self-isolate to prevent the spread of infectious diseases to others in a pandemic. For individuals with limited support systems, such as the elderly, stay at home mandates can impose substantial difficulty to access food, medications, social services, etc.

Municipalities should work closely with the County to coordinate wellness checks (by phone or internet if necessary) for individuals who are identified as being most vulnerable if isolated from services they need and work cooperatively with the individual to address unmet needs.

Consideration also needs to be given to unique populations, such as people who are homeless, and transient populations who may not have a specific location to shelter.

RESOURCES:

1. Planning Considerations: Evacuation and Shelter-in-Place Guidance for State, Local, Tribal and Territorial Partners, Department of Homeland Security, July 2019
2. Ready.gov, Sheltering-in-Place, Department of Homeland Security Website
3. Personal Preparedness for Individuals with Disabilities: Sheltering in Place and Evacuation, <https://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/planning/abc/Pages/shelterinplace.aspx>, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ASPR
4. Stay Put – Learn how to Shelter In Place – Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CDC) <https://emergency.cdc.gov/shelterinplace.asp>