



Hurricane Season 2020

NCEM “Big 8” Sheltering Considerations and Recommendations for Local Emergency Managers

1. Recommendation: Move away from the use of cots for pre-landfall shelters.

While the historic norm for North Carolina has been to set up cots from the moment a shelter opens, the COVID-19 environment and accompanying space limitations have required us to step back and revisit best practices from around the nation in regards to the use of cots in pre-landfall shelters.

Current CDC guidance recommends the standard 6 ft of distance between individuals in any shelter. The American Red Cross has translated that to mean 110 sq. ft. per person with a cot or 60 sq. ft. without a cot, with families allowed to cluster closer together. Moving away from the use of cots reduces the footprint of shelter residents and will allow for nearly double the COVID-19 capacity in each shelter opened across the State, while also keeping in line with how surrounding States have traditionally operated. This need to expand capacity is critical as we plan for this hurricane season.

Attached is the American Red Cross guidance which is utilized by all Southeastern, hurricane impacted States and outlines pre-landfall sheltering. This includes information (pages 7-8) about considerations for the limited use of cots for access and functional needs populations. These planning percentages can be adjusted on a county-by-county basis based on the specific demographics of the sheltering populations. These pre-landfall shelters would operate from the time of opening to no more than 72-hours post landfall, when the shelter population typically decreases dramatically, before transitioning to long-term, post-landfall shelters that would issue each resident a cot and expand to 110 sq. ft. per person.

2. Recommendation: Start planning now with your local Red Cross chapter and/or DSS about the use of non-congregate shelters (NCS).

Non-congregate sheltering is the best option for this hurricane season to maximize social distancing and should be used to the greatest extent possible, but it will require significant coordination among all involved entities to determine how much it can be utilized County-by-County.

Please be sure these conversations are taking place among these local partners as soon as possible. Even if your local DSS is typically the lead agency, there may be confusion over their role because this is a FEMA-sponsored program. Please work with them to ensure everyone is aware of their responsibilities. Host Counties should also be engaging in these conversations with their partners to identify and coordinate non-congregate sheltering where possible.



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3. Recommendation: Maximize all County planning efforts and capacities.

The State continues to plan for State shelters and State non-congregate sheltering, but we will run into many of the same limitations as Counties. This year more than ever it is crucial that Counties expand their planning and capabilities to the greatest extent possible, both locally and then through CRES.

Should local and CRES capabilities be unable to meet the needs, the State will make every effort to fill in the gaps. However, this year may require far more creative solutions than in years past. Please attempt to develop these creative solutions locally as well in order to ensure we are all expanding our programs to the greatest extent possible.

4. Recommendation: Consider reducing shelter staffing ratios wherever possible.

Traditional staffing numbers developed for sheltering in North Carolina have been based on ideal numbers. This season is anything but ideal and this is a good time to reconsider those numbers. The attached American Red Cross guidance also addresses some reductions in staff ratios that you may find helpful, but please keep in mind that this is a decision that can be made locally based on staff training, skills, personalities, etc.

Extremely large shelters have been run by a very small handful of well-equipped people. These are good discussions to have with your partners to determine where reductions can be made. Please also keep in mind that some staff may be able to be cross-trained (law enforcement may be willing and able to help with registration, etc.). Shelter residents may also be asked to assist with some basic functions and can be incorporated into your planning.

5. Recommendation: Risk Counties should send any available DSS and/or Public Health staff to Host Counties to assist with shelter operations.

Staffing is a critical resource this hurricane season. Any County that is sending their residents to a CRES shelter should consider sending any and all available DSS and/or Public Health staff to the Host County with their people. These staff do not necessarily need to be previously trained.

Just-in-time training is available and can be offered upon arrival at a shelter. No sheltering operation this season (from local to CRES to State) will be successful without sharing as many staffing resources as possible.



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6. Recommendation: Preparedness messaging this year should focus around encouraging residents to find alternative places to stay.

Whenever possible, this year’s messaging should encourage residents to make alternative plans to staying at a shelter. This may be staying with family or friends, or at an out of area/state hotel. We also recognize that not everyone will have this option.

For those planning to come to a shelter, messaging about what to bring to a shelter should include the changes made to the sheltering program i.e. bedding for shelters without cots, PPE, etc.

7. Recommendation: Incorporate your COVID-19 County Feeding Coordinator into your hurricane feeding response plan.

Feeding will also be affected this hurricane season. While all traditional feeding partners are planning to be involved and engaged throughout the process, they will face limitations as with all other agencies. The County Feeding Coordinators that are currently in place to support COVID-19 feeding have done a phenomenal job in expanding the feeding capabilities across the State.

We recommend continuing with this model of having an individual assigned to oversee feeding and coordinate local feeding resources. The feeding needs brought on by COVID-19 will only be exacerbated by a hurricane event.

Utilizing the structure already in place for simultaneous events will continue to ensure feeding resources are maximized. If you have not selected a feeding coordinator for COVID-19 feeding, this is a good time to select someone to be ready to coordinate local feeding resources should the need arise during a hurricane event.

8. Recommendation: Consider using EMS in shelters if/when Public Health and other nurses are not available.

When planning for medical personnel to staff your shelters, consider using local EMS as medical staff. While there are some roles your local public health may determine can only be staffed by public health nurses (i.e. disease surveillance), other basic medical functions can be provided by other entities, like EMS. This is a common practice in other hurricane-prone states and also follows American Red Cross guidance for shelter medical staff.