

How does the Emergency Preparedness and Response Division support preparedness, response, and recovery across Minnesota?

The Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) Division coordinates preparedness activities and assists Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) staff, local public health agencies, hospitals, health care organizations, tribes, and public safety officials in their efforts to plan for, respond to, and recover from public health emergencies.



Vision

All public health and health care partners will have the knowledge, plans, and tools to respond to public health emergencies.

Mission

The mission of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Division is to strengthen response systems to minimize death, disability, and suffering from health emergencies.



Planning, response, and recovery

The Emergency Preparedness and Response Division develops and maintains Minnesota Department of Health's *All-Hazards Preparedness and Response Plan*, which outlines how MDH prepares for, responds to, and recovers from public health emergencies. The plan includes multiple annexes developed in coordination with divisions across MDH addressing specific emergency types such as radiological incidents, infectious disease outbreaks, burn patient care, and pediatric patient needs. These plans are reviewed and updated annually to ensure readiness.

EPR uses MDH's Incident Command System (ICS) to coordinate how the agency manages emergencies. EPR coordinates recruitment and training for MDH staff with response roles. This work ensures the structure is functional during real events, that new employees are trained for potential response roles, and that all MDH divisions are represented and understand how the agency operates during an activation.

Key resources that support both response and recovery include EPR's Disaster Behavioral Health Coordinator and the MN Responds volunteer system, which provides trained personnel to support affected communities.



Training and exercises

The Education and Exercise Team plans, conducts, and evaluates preparedness, training, exercises, and response initiatives across MDH, as well as supporting local public health and tribal health. The team enhances MDH's emergency response readiness by providing training, guidance, and coaching to staff, strengthening statewide response efficiency during complex public health emergencies.



Emotional health during and after disasters

The Disaster Behavioral Health Coordinator provides training and tools such as Psychological First Aid and Skills for Psychological Recovery to manage disaster stress and trauma. Through its Behavioral Health Medical Reserve Corps, MDH can deploy trained volunteer disaster behavioral health specialists to offer emotional support, crisis intervention, and referrals in disaster-affected areas.



Medicines and supplies for emergencies

The Medical Countermeasures (MCM) team at MDH is responsible for obtaining and storing medications, personal protective equipment, and antivirals in the event of a public health emergency. The team plans for biological, chemical and natural disaster incidents by training and exercising effective methods to distribute the necessary countermeasures.

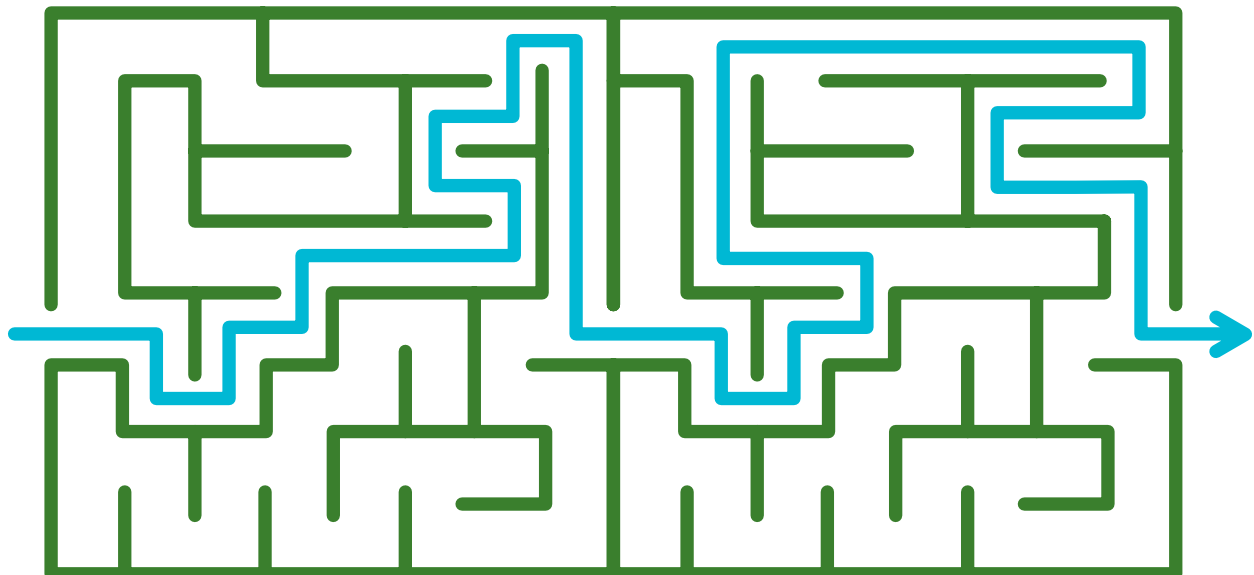


Hospital Preparedness Program

From storms to wildfires and IT disruptions, Minnesota's Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP) has worked hard to ensure coordinated response and readiness across Minnesota's health care system. One program that HPP conducted last year was the Emergency Preparedness Basics, which trained more than 470 hospital and long-term care staff across all eight health care coalitions. The training focused on the basics of preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. These trainings made a significant impact: 97% percent of participants reported learning new information, 98% said they felt confident applying what they learned, and 96% found the materials useful for real emergencies. Training recordings and resources are available statewide to support continued readiness.

EPR's 2025 training and exercises

- **MDH conducted six internal exercises** to strengthen readiness and improve coordination for a range of public health emergencies, from discussion-based scenarios to hands-on workshops.
- **MDH tested its response to antibiotic-resistant gonorrhea** as a large-scale infectious disease outbreak at a simulated mass gathering, strengthening the department's ability to coordinate across programs and with external partners.
- **MDH worked with the Minnesota Public Health Laboratory** to review continuity of operations during a severe winter storm, improving planning for facility safety, staffing, communications, and specimen transport.
- **MDH participated in a full-scale radiological emergency preparedness exercise**, strengthening integration between environmental health and public health preparedness staff.
- **The MDH ICS Planning Section and Fiscal/Administrative Section engaged in workshops and hands-on training**, gaining a better understanding of their sections, and increasing their readiness for future emergency activations.
- **MDH trained 30 local public health staff** in the South Central Region on using the Incident Command System, increasing confidence in standardized response roles, objectives, and planning processes, while also expanding collaboration to 25 members from Northern Minnesota, representatives of the Bois Fort Band of Chippewa and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.
- **EPR completed four 800 MHz radio trainings and supported eight communication drills in 2025.** EPR partners with the American Red Cross on monthly radio tests and provides them with annual refresher training.



Success stories



Emergency Preparedness Coordinator's Workshop

In the spring of 2025,

150 local public health, Tribal health, and MDH emergency preparedness professionals

met for a two-day workshop.

This meeting was hands on, allowing participants to focus on plan writing, learn how to develop and conduct exercises, and strengthen community engagement skills. There was also a session on understanding, using, and sharing data about emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. This in-person workshop encouraged networking and other key preparedness skill building activities.



Community of Practice

Since January 2025, EPR has hosted and facilitated

5 virtual Community of Practice meetings.

These bi-monthly workshops bring together local public health and Tribal health from across the state to share best practices and lessons learned. Holding the workshops on a consistent day and time has helped increase attendance, elevated partnership connections across regions, and complemented grant deliverables through resource sharing.



Ready Responders Program

The Education and Exercise Team (EET) revitalized the training for MDH response staff using lessons learned during COVID-19.

The program focuses on three goals:

1. Developing a response-ready workforce
2. Creating function-specific staff groups, and
3. Recruiting and retaining trained responders.

EET updated orientation trainings and a structured exercise schedule to strengthen readiness and sustain engagement.



Medicines and Supplies for Emergencies

The MDH EPR team participated in an exercise that tested communications and operational processes following a BioWatch notification.

The BioWatch program monitors air samples for potential public health threats.

The exercise also included participation from Environmental Health, Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Division, the Public Health Laboratory, local public health representatives, state partners including the 55th Civil Support Team, and federal partners including the Centers for Disease Control, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Discussions were focused on internal and external communication methods following a positive notification, as well as approaches for conducting environmental sampling, administering medical countermeasures, and investigating the environmental contaminant.



Communications

EPR and MDH Communications hosted an emergency preparedness training.

216 participants from around the state attended.

EPR, in partnership with the MDH Communications Office, provided a webinar series for local public health and Tribal health. The webinar focused on practical methods for emergency communication, including segmenting audiences, tailoring messages for specific populations, and strengthening coordination with partners during emergencies.



Hospital Preparedness Program

Last year, the EPR Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP) focused on Continuity of Care operations. They provided eight in-person workshops across the state attended by 113 health care staff and provided one-on-one technical assistance to 60 health care facilities, including:

33 hospitals

26 long-term care facilities

1 group home

This work helps ensure patients can continue to receive care during emergencies and that facilities can recover more quickly after a crisis. These tools are available on our website.