

“Is our Community Prepared for an Emergency?”

Nurse Essay – Joyce L Lee, RN MPA

It was the question we have been asking ourselves. Efforts to educate the public regarding emergency preparedness have been underway for almost 10 years; but are those efforts effective? Does the general public assume responsibility to care for themselves and have they taken steps to prepare for even a short emergency...an Ice Storm, for example?

So we asked the community...“How do you get emergency information?” “What do you have in place that will assist you during an emergency?” “Can you care for yourself for a few days while the local emergency system responds to immediate and dangerous situations?”

A survey was prepared on-line (via “Survey Monkey”) and sent it to a variety of email lists (college, large employer, Red Cross). This was not an accurate scientific study, but we got a glimpse into the preparedness of those who took the time to complete the survey. Of the 222 people who responded, 50% were over 50 years old, 31% were 30-49 and 12% were 18-29.

The following information was gathered:

- On average, 90% use the Internet, TV and a cell phone.
- To use the internet, 85% have high-speed internet access at home, 20% use a cell phone and 24% use a work computer.
- Almost 60% use Facebook
- 70-90% use Newspapers, TV, Radio and Internet as their primary source for news and other information.
- People currently get health-related Information from the news (37%), internet (28%), or school/work computers (23%)
- For emergency health-related information, people will check the Newspaper/TV (70%), or the Internet (40%).
- 30% have a Generator (50% of them have extra gas and check it regularly).
- Out of 13 itemized preparedness items, people said they have:
 - At least 1 week of prescription meds – 68%
 - 3 days worth of canned food – 75%
 - An “old-fashioned” can opener – 85%
 - Flash Light with extra batteries – 84%
 - Extra Toilet Paper – 77%
 - Half (50%) had a stocked First Aid Kit and a battery or wind-up radio
 - 30% have a generator (half had extra gas, half of those knew that gas was fresh).

I will share my thoughts for future planning:

- ⇒ When faced with a need for emergency information, people will turn on the TV and read the newspaper. We would be wise to use these venues for priority and early emergency health information. Enough of those responding use the internet, so website access information should be shared during the news reports and updated regularly.
- ⇒ Facebook has a significant number of users and would be useful in an emergency.

- ↩ I was pleasantly surprised by the number of people who have food and medication as well as other items that would be helpful during a short-term emergency. The reason for this is unknown; but it is reassuring.
- ↩ I do think, however, that it is important to look into the 32% of those who may run short of their meds in under a week. Pressure on the medical system by *non-emergency* needs could be decreased by addressing this need.

One last thought about a **very important result** of this survey! It has been our pleasure, over the past decade, to connect with our communities and to identify people who were willing and able to assist in our Public Health emergency response activities. There are currently about 200 volunteers registered, and we have worked with most of these wonderful volunteers. However, our planning has revealed that to effectively respond to a full scale health emergency, it is important to have over 1,500 registered/prepared volunteers. We were pleased to see that almost 30% of those completing the survey were interested in becoming a volunteer. We have 57 new volunteers!

We would love to have you on our team!

- ↩ For more information, check out our [Emergency Preparedness page](#).
- ↩ To hear more about volunteer opportunities...[contact us](#).
- ↩ To register as an Ontario County volunteer...follow the link to the ServOntario volunteer system, register, and you will be contacted.



