



Emergency Preparation for Primary Care

Bushfire

Victoria is one of the world’s most fire-prone areas. Warmer and drier temperatures across the region and extended fire danger periods increase the likelihood of an emergency event.

Primary care providers can minimise risks to their business and workforce by preparing early and implementing emergency response plans. This document has been created to support health services to be bushfire-ready.

Who is at risk?	Vulnerable populations include the elderly, infants and children, people with co-morbidities, those who live alone or who are socially isolated, people with cognitive impairment, people who have an alcohol or other substance use issue and those who live in housing settings that make them vulnerable to heat stress.
Extreme heat information for clinicians	The Victorian Department of Health (DoH) also provides these information sheets: • Heat Health Preparedness Guidance for primary health care services • Heat Health Preparedness Guidance for community service organisations • Heat Health Preparedness Guidance for mental health services
Keep up to date with alerts and information	• Subscribe to DOH alerts, advisories and newsletters • Monitor Country Fire Authority total fire ban and fire danger ratings in Victoria • Monitor Vic Emergency combined emergency services warnings and incidents • Monitor outage information for your gas and electricity providers. • Check for road closures at VicRoads - VicTraffic • Monitor your local ABC radio station for situation updates.
Have emergency response kits ready	If you and your staff have to evacuate, or if you need to deliver emergency care at short notice offsite, a prepacked emergency response kit can save time and lives. It should contain: • Torches and spare batteries • Important documents • Battery-powered portable radio • N95 Masks for bushfire smoke • Contact lists for all staff and contractors • Burns kit • Practice mobile, which may provide temporary internet access through mobile data hotspot • Eye wash kit

	• Respiratory medications such as bronchodilators and the tools to deliver them • Lists of at-risk patients • Hard copy radiology and pathology requests • Script pads • Water
Encourage patients and staff to be fire ready	Advise patients to plan, so they do not run out of medications during an emergency, particularly if they are unable to access the local pharmacy or cannot travel to an alternative location. Do they have an action plan for any conditions that may be exacerbated by extreme heat conditions and or fire? Useful resources here include: • the CFA's Fire Ready Kit – CFA • the VicEmergency app • the Environmental Protection Agency's air quality monitor.
Safeguard your building	Prepare your site by removing excess rubbish, litter and leaves and keeping your grass short. For more information, see this Country Fire Authority (CFA) advice.
Other useful links and resources	Bushfire • Leaving early: Bushfire survival planning template - CFA • Information and advice for your local area – CFA • Where to get information in an emergency in Victoria - VicEmergency • Learn more about bushfires and asthma - National Asthma Council Australia • Evacuation centre resources - RACGP • After a fire: using your personal protective kit - Australian Department of Health and Aged Care (DoHAC) • After a fire: private drinking water and water tank safety - DoHAC Extreme heat • Extreme heat: supporting people by telephone - DOH • How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat - brochure - DOH • Subscribe to Victorian heat health warnings - DOH • Guidelines for use of face masks - DOH • Survive the heat - poster - DOH • Extreme heat - Better Health Channel • Using air conditioners when it's smoky outside – Better Health Channel • Survive the heat partner kit - Better Health Channel • Heatwave Service for Australia - Bureau of Meteorology • Heat Related Illnesses – HealthPathways Melbourne • Smoke Inhalation -HealthPathways Melbourne Service continuity • My Health Record – Australian Digital Health Agency • Service Finder – healthdirect • Service continuity and emergency events in aged care - DoHAC • Victoria emergency preparedness in residential aged care services - DoHAC

General emergency planning and preparation	
Update your emergency response documents	The RACGP - Emergency Response Planning Tool (ERPT) is a cloud based, practical online tool that assists general practices to better prepare for, respond to and recover from the impacts of emergencies and pandemics. It guides users through a series of planning templates where critical information about the practice can be entered and saved. The information is used to create an emergency response plan which is individually tailored to the general practice. The customised plan is then saved and stored in the cloud and can also be printed as a hard copy resource at any time. This will not only help you to stay focused and respond under pressure but get your business back up and running more quickly. Access to the ERPT requires an annual subscription. There are a number of alternative options available to assist users to develop an Emergency Response Plan. Listed are just a few: • Check with your accreditation provider or on your accreditation portal for general practice specific templates. • Emergency plan template – Safe Work Australia • Develop an emergency plan – Business.gov.au
Consider the role of your practice in an emergency	RACGP's emergency response in general practice document includes tips for practices to consider. HealthPathways Melbourne has useful information on how to prepare for disasters: • Preparing Patients for a Disaster • Preparing a General Practice for a Disaster • General Practice Management During a Disaster • Post Natural Disaster Health
Plan staffing	In the event of no or reduced access to your site -- or if significant numbers of staff are absent -- consider alternative models of work, including sites and equipment needs. For more information, see the ERPT. Key questions: • Is it safe for practitioners to work from home? Are there other health services or locations from which they work? • Does the practice have a telehealth platform that practitioners can use from remote locations? • Are the practitioners set up with ePrescribing so patients can obtain scripts immediately? Do they all have paper scripts and prescribing pads for use if no internet is available? • Does the practice have an alternative contact number, or can you temporarily divert your practice number, so patients can call if the building is closed, and the phone system is inaccessible? • Can admin and clinical staff access your practice management and clinical software systems offsite to facilitate remote models of care? • Are clinicians able to create pathology and imaging requests if working remotely? • Have information available for the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department (VVED) to share with patients.

Communicate service closures or impacts	Use social media and other platforms. Prepare a message or email to patients using your usual channels, appointment confirmation system or POLAR data extraction tool.
Protect your data	• Ensure that your practice software is backed up, ideally to the cloud, to reduce the risk of data loss. • Upload patient information to My Health Record.
Plan for power outages, water supply, gas	To ensure cold chain management and clinical record access in the event of outages, consider alternative power sources. Could you relocate vaccines and medicines, or access a generator if needed?
Join the emergency volunteer list	If you have capacity to support in an emergency event, record your interest using the Emergency Response Register .

Contact us

For more information or support email primarycare@nwmpnh.org.au

We acknowledge the peoples of the Kulin nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our work in the community takes place. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

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