



**North Country
Regional Emergency Medical
Advisory Committee**

Policy Statement

Serving: St. Lawrence, Jefferson, and Lewis Counties

No. 23-01

Date: 10/16/2023

Re: EMS Response During
Severe Weather

Page 1 of 1

Purpose: To provide general operating guidelines for responses during inclement weather. The primary objective is to continue to provide essential EMS response while taking into consideration risks during adverse conditions. When severe weather may affect travel, it may be beneficial to utilize the Risk Assessment Tool (RAT) provided in the policy statement.

Storm Preparations:

Often there is enough notice of a pending weather event to prepare. Crews and leadership should take necessary actions to ensure vehicles, staff, and stations are prepared for such an event and consider the following:

- Monitor local media and websites for storm and road conditions
- Communicate with all staff to ensure they have proper clothing and supplies
- Prepare station and grounds for potentially adverse weather conditions
- Equip vehicles with any special equipment or supplies

Severe Thunderstorm Warning

Definition: This is issued when either a severe thunderstorm is indicated by radar or a spotter reports a thunderstorm producing hail one inch or larger in diameter and/or winds equal or exceed 58 miles an hour.

- Monitor local media and websites for storm and road conditions

Tornado Watch

Definition: This is issued by the National Weather Service when conditions are favorable for the development of tornadoes in and close to the watch area.

Actions:

- Ensure all crews are aware of pending watch
- Discuss potential tornado shelters in the community
- Contact those locations and ask permission to shelter at their facility if needed
- Discuss how communication regarding a change from a Tornado Watch to a Tornado Warning will be communicated to them

Tornado Warning

Definition: This is issued when a tornado is indicated by the WSR-88D radar or sighted by spotters; therefore, people in the affected area should seek safe shelter immediately.

Actions for POTENTIAL Tornado Strike:

- Ensure all crews are aware of the Tornado Warning
- Move to a sturdy shelter as needed
- If safe to move, consider separating assets to protect crews and vehicles
 - Example: place one ambulance in the local hospital garage, one at the fire station, and one at the ambulance base.
 - Consider safety of moving vs. sheltering in place
 - Consider the safety of the structure
- If safe, consider moving assets away from the tornado path
 - Example: If the tornado's path is from the southeast, would it make sense to move some assets to the west and further south of the tornado's path?

Actions for an IMMINENT Tornado Strike:

- Cease EMS response (seek leadership approval if time permits)
 - Notify dispatch you will be sheltering in place and responses will be held until it is safe to respond
 - Bring essential items with you such as EMS radio, cell phone, AM/FM radio, flashlight, etc.

Actions for Post Tornado Strike:

- Ensure all crew members are safe and vehicles able to respond
- Respond to any pending calls in order of acuity
- Be aware of hazards such as downed power lines, gas leaks, debris, etc.

Blizzard Watch

Definition: Conditions are right for a blizzard to occur

- Communicate weather information to all staff
- Monitor local media and websites for storm and road conditions
- Ensure that on-duty crews are prepared for an extended stay in case the next shift is unable to report
- Stations are prepared for snow removal, ice, and high winds
- Contact hospitals regarding any pending transfers and consider transporting them out early

Blizzard Warning

Definition: Falling and/or blowing snow frequently reducing visibility to less than 1/4 mile AND sustained winds or frequent gusts greater than 35 mph will last for at least 3 hours.

Actions:

- Communicate weather information to all staff
- Monitor local media and websites for storm and road conditions
- Ensure that on-duty crews are prepared for an extended stay in case the next shift is unable to report
- Stations are prepared for snow removal, ice, and high winds
- During times when it is unsafe to respond consider suspending EMS response

Suspension of EMS Response:

On rare occasions, it may be appropriate for the safety of responders, to suspend EMS 911 response. The decision to suspend response should be made by members of leadership from the region and the regional medical director. Even though EMS may not be able to respond, help may still be able to be rendered to the caller. If the 911 response is suspended:

- Notify dispatch of the suspension
 - Ambulance services will “acknowledge” the call and accept liability for that call. They will contact dispatch via landline or cell phone and obtain the caller’s name/number.
 - The ambulance service will then contact the patient to make a response strategy. Depending on weather conditions this may be done via snowmobile, four-wheel drive ambulance, or other means available to ensure crew and patient safety
- Consider a media release explaining the need for the action and what citizens should do
- Contact the hospital and inform them of the temporary suspension
 - Request online medical direction be available to speak to patients and/or EMS for pre-hospital advice
 - Document all delays and steps taken during the delay
- Rendering aid via telephone
 - It is best to put the patient directly in touch with a physician at the hospital emergency department. If that is not possible, EMS may contact the patient and attempt to render aid and triage the EMS response via phone

Resuming EMS Response:

- Notify dispatch, hospitals, and media (if notified) response has resumed
- Contact the caller and notify them that crews are responding
- Respond to calls based on acuity.
 - Triage the calls, most critical to least, and respond appropriately

Transfers Out of Hospitals During Inclement Weather:

Due to services not available at a local hospital or severe illness/injury in need of a higher level of care, some patients may need to be transferred to other hospitals in the region. During inclement weather, it is important to consider the dangers of putting the patient and crew members on the road versus waiting until conditions improve. Hospital personnel and EMS personnel should collaborate to determine the most beneficial course of action for all parties involved in the transfer. The following steps should be considered to facilitate the evaluation process:

- Prior to any foreseen adverse conditions, consider sending patients out prior to the event
- When an Interfacility Transport request is received during the potential for adverse conditions, staff and/or leadership should do a thorough evaluation of the hazards. This may include the following:
 - Monitor local media
 - Utilized established websites for evaluating road conditions and weather conditions
 - Contact other dispatch centers, EMS agencies, or law enforcement agencies to get real-time road/weather conditions
- To help assess the situation EMS leadership should consider going to the hospital to evaluate the patient and facilitate communication between the hospital staff and EMS
- Possible considerations may be:
 - Wait until the conditions improve
 - Evaluate the feasibility of air medical transports
 - Transfer to an alternate location, not affected by the adverse conditions

Note: Although this guideline is intended is for EMS operations, it is recommended for team members communicate with the patient's family to ensure their safety as well.

Risk Assessment Tool (RAT)

Potential Weather	Road Conditions	Visibility
Blizzard Warning: 20	Difficult, No Travel Advised: 15	Night Impaired: 10
Weather Warning: 15	Slippery, Snow Covered: 10	Day Impaired: 5
Weather Watch: 10		None: 0
Weather Advisory: 5	Travel Ban or Road Closed: 50	

Use www.noaa.gov and print the info

Hazard Total: _____

Patient Condition:

<p>Critical Patients: CVA or STEMI (non-responsive to thrombolytics), Severe GI Bleed, Hemorrhagic stroke, multi-system trauma, other critical patients 46</p>
<p>Potentially Critical: CVA or STEMI (+ thrombolytic response) Moderate GI Bleed, Status Epilepticus, Ventilated Patient, Severe Respiratory Failure, Severe Sepsis, Other Unstable Patient 40</p>
<p>Potentially Critical Patient who does not require time-sensitive treatment i.e. Sepsis, Minor GI Bleed, Unstable Small Bowel Orbs, OB/GYN Emergencies 35</p>
<p>Stable Patient who require transport to other facilities ALS i.e. Stable Small Bowel Ops, Isolated Traumatic Injuries 30</p>
<p>Stable Patient who require transport to other facilities BLS. 20</p>

Patient Total: _____

1. If declining a trip due to weather supporting documents are required, such as printouts from www.noaa.gov
2. Advise the sending facility to search for a receiving facility in a different direction. Consider CVPH or UVM.
3. Advise the sending facility of when the weather is expected to clear.
4. Additional time needs to be considered for oxygen consumption in poor weather

Hospital Requesting Transport: _____

Receiving Facility: _____

Patient Diagnosis/ Reason for Transport: _____

Reason for Decline: _____

Provider Name: _____ Date/Time: _____