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Hurricanes Katrina and Rita – Transportation of Evacuees with Medical Needs

Key Words

SE0579, Hurricane, Rita, Katrina, DHHS, Travel, Center, Evacuees, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi

Provider Types Affected

Physicians, suppliers, and providers billing Medicare carriers, including durable medical equipment regional carriers (DMERCs) and/or fiscal intermediaries (FIs), including regional home health intermediaries (RHHIs), for transportation services provided to evacuees of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

Key Points

- The Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) created a Fact Sheet to provide information and answer frequently asked questions regarding certain issues resulting from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Hurricane Evacuation

- The DHHS Fact Sheet provides instructions and answers questions pertaining to the provision of transportation for evacuees from Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi who:
 - Are currently patients in health care facilities;
 - Have outpatient/on-going medical needs; or
 - Were evacuated by air lift out of their home state.
- The DHHS Fact Sheet may be viewed at <http://www.hhs.gov/katrina/factsheet.html> on the DHHS web site.
- In many counties and parishes in Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, the healthcare infrastructure will not support the return of evacuees with medical needs. Evacuees may need to continue to shelter in their host state, or travel to an interim location to be closer to friends and family until Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana can support their return.
- **Texas** is currently accepting the return of patients and those evacuees with ongoing medical needs to select counties in Texas.
- **Mississippi** is currently accepting the return of patients and those evacuees with ongoing medical needs to select counties in Mississippi.

- **Louisiana is:**
 - Accepting the return of evacuees who are currently patients in healthcare facilities on a case-by-case basis only. All healthcare facilities in Louisiana are responsible for gaining approval from the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals before accepting the transfer of evacuees into the state. If there is not a receiving facility available, the evacuee may access transportation to an interim location in another state where family and friends may reside;
 - NOT accepting the return of evacuees with medical needs who are not patients at healthcare facilities. When Louisiana determines it is able to support the return of evacuees with out-patient/on-going medical needs, additional guidance will be disseminated.

HHS Medical Travel Center

- The HHS Medical Travel Center is a transportation program established by the DHHS to support the return of evacuees with medical needs from Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana.
- It is under contract with HHS to arrange transportation for evacuees who require enroute medical care and/or medical transport to include a non-medical attendant to an institution or a private residence, as appropriate.
- If the evacuee's originating medical facility is not available in their home state or if their residence and community medical infrastructure is not suitable, evacuees will be allowed to travel to an interim location in the continental U.S.
- The HHS Medical Travel Center will then return the evacuee to their home of record when a medical facility there is available, or they can return to a safe community/home environment.
- The HHS Medical Travel Center provides transportation services without cost to providers. Providers (and patients) who use the HHS Medical Travel Center services will not incur any charge, and they should not bill Medicare. The HHS Medical Travel Center will be paid directly by HHS per its contract.
- Before the affected provider contacts the HHS Medical Travel Center or their home state, all medical evacuees must register with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and obtain a Disaster Registration Number from the FEMA Registration Center at 1-800-621-FEMA. This phone line is operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- The HHS Medical Travel Center can be reached at 1-866-753-9344. The phone lines are open everyday 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Central Daylight Time (CDT).

Important Information for Discharge Planners

For evacuees in health care facilities or special needs shelters with a discharge planner, the discharge planners are responsible for:

- Determining if an evacuee needs to be transferred to a receiving facility or can be discharged to a private residence;
- Identifying a receiving facility/residence in the evacuee's home state or an interim state if necessary;
- Determining the evacuee's medical requirements during transport; and
- Arranging for a FEMA registration number for the evacuee and any non-medical assistants.

Facility-to-Facility Transfer

In order to complete the transportation process, discharge planners will need to contact the HHS Medical Travel Center and complete and submit a Documentation of Medical Necessity form provided by the Travel Center. This form will be provided when affected providers call the HHS Medical Travel Center and is available at the following HHS web site: <http://www.hhs.gov/katrina>.

Facility to Non-Facility Transfer

If the discharge planner determines that the evacuee can be discharged to a residence, the discharge planner must call the evacuee's home state, which will be acting as a receiving point of contact. Please see below for information on how to contact the evacuee's home state.

Evacuees in a Shelter, Hotel, or Private Home

Evacuees should call their home state to access transportation if they:

- Have medical needs; and
- Are sheltering in a hotel, private residence or other facility that **cannot provide discharge planning**.

Guidance from the Home State

The evacuee's home state will determine if the evacuee can ride commercial transportation and if their state medical system can support their ongoing medical needs. If the state medical system cannot support the evacuee's ongoing medical needs, the home state will help the evacuee find an interim location in another state, if appropriate.

- **Texas:** Texas evacuees with medical needs may contact Texas at 211 (if calling within Texas) or 1-888-312-4567 (if out of State) to initiate access to appropriate transportation and receive an evaluation of the community medical infrastructure to support the return. The Texas phone lines are open everyday 8:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. Central Daylight Time (CDT).
- **Mississippi Department of Health:** Mississippi evacuees with medical needs may contact the Mississippi State Health Department at 601-576-7300 to initiate access to appropriate transportation. The Mississippi phone lines are open Monday to Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. Central Daylight Time (CDT).
- **Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals:** Louisiana is not currently accepting the return of evacuees with outpatient and/or ongoing medical needs. Evacuee's from Louisiana with medical needs sheltering in a hotel, residence or other facility that cannot provide discharge planning must have their current medical attendant or family member contact the HHS Medical Travel Center to initiate access to appropriate transportation.

The evacuee's medical attendant will need to complete and submit a Documentation of Medical Necessity form provided by the HHS Medical Travel Center in order to complete the transportation process. This form will be provided for the evacuee's medical attendant when they call the HHS Medical Travel Center or is available online at <http://www.hhs.gov/katrina>. If a family member is completing this form for the patient, it must be signed by the patient's current local healthcare provider.

Questions and Answers (Q&As)

Frequently asked questions and answers containing excellent information about the transportation of Hurricane Katrina and Rita evacuees can be found at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/hki> on the CMS web site.

Important Links

<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MLNMattersArticles/downloads/SE0579.pdf>

<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MLN/drugcoverage.asp>

<http://www.hhs.gov/news/>

<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/emergency/>

<http://www.cms.gov>

<http://www.hhs.gov/katrina>