

Questions to Ask a Loved One's Care Facility About Disaster Planning

Ask About: Staffing During the Pandemic

- How many caregivers are available to your loved one, and how many residents or patients does the care home have?
- How many people are on duty at night?
- Many facilities are using temporary, transitional or newly hired staff due to the pandemic. How well trained are these staff members to carry out the emergency preparedness plan?
- If your loved one can't walk on their own, how many people would need to help them out of the building, and how many other residents are in a similar situation?

Ask About: Their Emergency Plans

- Does the care home have an emergency plan? Ask to see it. And do staffers train on it? "A plan that sits in a binder in a cabinet is very different from staff that's trained and practiced on it," says ombudsman Nelson.
- How often do staffers train on the plan?
- Is an emergency preparedness plan posted prominently in the facility, or on the website (so that loved ones can access it during the current lockdown)? How else does the facility tell residents and their representatives about it?
- Are there identified, trained leaders available around the clock to immediately take action on the plan?
- Have the facility's administrator and other leaders updated emergency preparedness plans to account for the risk of outbreak and need for isolation from the pandemic - and do staffers know about the updates?

Ask About: Their Inspection Record Around Emergencies

- What did state officials find the last time they inspected the facility for emergency preparedness and life safety codes? When was that?
- How has the facility corrected the problems found?

Ask About: How They Prevent Evacuations

Evacuation raises health risks for many residents, including from COVID-19. And federal rules require nursing homes to provide at least 96 hours of backup power in an outage.

- What have facility managers done to make sure they can shelter-in-place during blackouts or outages?
- How will the facility generate backup power in an emergency?
- If extreme weather causes a power outage, how long can the facility keep safe temperatures, protect oxygen and life support systems and refrigerate medication?

Ask About: Their Emergency Evacuation Plans

- If the facility must evacuate from wildfire where would residents go? How would the facility keep the residents safe from COVID-19 during an evacuation?
- Long-term care homes often have arrangements with “sister facilities,” in the event there’s a threat to the building itself. If an entire region is threatened, by a wildfire or a flood, is there a plan to go further away?
- Are there buses, truck, or cars on site, or do care home operators plan to get transportation support from somewhere else?