

Hurricane and other Natural Disasters: VITAS Is Prepared to Care

In emergencies, crises, or calm, we provide 24/7 care across the country.

During a hurricane or other natural disaster, VITAS® Healthcare remains fiercely dedicated to maintaining the quality care and safety of our patients, their families, and our community partners. Advanced planning, careful strategizing, and diversified communications enable VITAS to respond effectively. Our unwavering clinical services and expert resources have helped us weather numerous crises for 45 years.

What We Do for Patients

VITAS has an emergency plan in place, and once patients are admitted, they become part of this plan.



- Assign emergency priority level at admission. Patients receive individualized care plans and emergency preparedness education.
- Prioritize at-risk, home-based patients to receive a two-week supply of oxygen and medications via the VITAS fleet of home medical equipment (HME) trucks.
- Use Telecare to monitor patients 24/7/365 from multiple locations throughout the country.
- Relocate at-risk patients in evacuation areas to an inpatient unit or other safe location.
- Secure coastal freestanding inpatient units.

What We Do for Staff



- Activate employee support line with news/alerts posted on intranet. Additional operators support calls to the employee hotline. AlertMedia text messages ensure employee safety.
- Arrange help for team members who have sustained damage or need supplies.
- Provide enhanced communications with AT&T FirstNet broadband network access to prioritize emergency communications between first responders and healthcare workers across regions. VITAS was the first approved hospice provider to be connected to FirstNet.

What We Do for the Community and Partners



- Prepare and plan with community partners, staying updated on storm tracking and law enforcement news.
- Offer corporate support as needed for local offices and regional events, based on evolving information from federal, state, and local agencies.
- Serve as an extended primary user of FirstNet to potentially be called on during an emergency response to help support public safety.
- Place extra medical supplies and water at locations outside the storm's projected path for post-storm delivery to affected areas.

Hospice services in 15 states and the District of Columbia, VITAS can reposition and temporarily allocate team members to support VITAS locations throughout the country—both in person and remotely—so that our patients continue to receive high-quality care. Call 800.93.VITAS.

Step-By-Step: VITAS Enacts Disaster Plans for Patient and Team Member Safety

The process below details when and how VITAS implements disaster plans so you can be confident your patient will remain safe. Help ensure hospice-eligible patients can avoid the Emergency Department during a natural disaster by ensuring they receive hospice services.

When a Disaster Looms

VITAS activates an emergency plan focused on communication and coordination to ensure team members have the necessary information:



- Senior managers of impacted locations and executive leaders collaborate to implement the prepared plan.
- A VITAS “disaster commander” guides staff to speak with patients and families, assess patient needs, and make necessary plan changes. The commander oversees a detailed patient log, which may include the following:
 - Preparation steps when the location receives advance warning of a pending disaster
 - Whether a patient is evacuating
 - A patient’s location during the event
 - Any medical equipment delivered to a patient that needs service or repair
 - Whether a patient has enough medication, medical supplies, food, etc.
 - Visit needs before, during, and after a disaster



Once a Warning Is Issued

Channels of communication broaden among VITAS local leadership, senior management, and corporate leaders, with decision-making based on information from federal, state, and local agencies.



- VITAS team members ensure patients and their families are safely housed and equipped, and leadership monitors local/state guidelines about curfews and staying off the road to ensure employee safety.
- When field staff can no longer travel, VITAS stays in touch with patients by phone via our highly trained Telecare® call center staff, available 24/7/365.
- Phone and online updates keep patients, their families, and team members informed.

After the Disaster Passes

To address any post-disaster problems, VITAS has plans in place to ensure that patients and families are safe. Leaders then decide when to safely accept and transfer new patients. Once it is determined to be safe for our care team members to be on the road, recovery efforts begin quickly and efficiently.

As the nation’s leading hospice provider, VITAS has the resources to provide excellent care—even when disaster strikes. Physicians confidently choose VITAS as a hospice provider because of our history of delivering care under pressure and in difficult, crisis-mode situations.