



Scenario 6: Background

Across the world, rising global temperatures are having a catastrophic effect, driving changing weather patterns and causing more frequent and severe extreme weather events including heatwaves, bushfires, droughts, severe storms, floods and cyclones.

Extreme weather events often result in significant human, economic and environmental loss.

Amid these challenges, healthcare professionals and community members play a crucial role in emergency responses and broader health system adaptation to climate change.

Instructions

- This simulation will be conducted as a 'table-top' group-based simulation activity.
- Participants should form into six groups. Each group will have a pack of cards that profiles a different extreme weather event.
- **Read the first two cards in your pack only. The remaining cards are to be left upside down** until the facilitator calls 'start', at which time your group is to read and discuss how you would respond to the situation described on the **next card only**.
- At specific points in time, the facilitator will call 'next card' and your group will turn over the next card and discuss how you would respond to the unfolding situation described.
- When responding to the situations described in the scenarios, it is important to think broadly and consider more than the immediate healthcare concerns presented. Your focus should be on coordination of the emergency response, as well as prioritisation and communication.
- **While you may not feel that you have the experience to manage the situations presented, you may in fact be the most experienced person in a disaster situation and others will turn to you for advice – this simulation is about being resourceful and creative ... so do the best you can with the information at hand.**
- At the end of the simulation activity, the facilitator will lead a debrief and discussion with the whole group.

Scenario 6: The storm

Part 1

It is a hot summer evening in November and a severe thunderstorm is raging, with strong winds, lightning, and a sudden drop in temperature. You are working in a busy primary health care clinic located in one of the largest cities in Victoria. The clinic is busy with patients attending their usual appointments, and the atmosphere is tense as the weather outside becomes increasingly severe.

Suddenly, the phone lines become inundated with calls from distressed people experiencing respiratory distress. The waiting room begins to fill with people who are wheezing and struggling to breathe. News reports confirm that emergency departments around the city are being overwhelmed with people experiencing similar acute respiratory symptoms. This situation is unlike anything you or your colleagues have encountered before.

What are your immediate priorities?

Scenario 6: The storm

Part 2

As the evening progresses, the clinic becomes inundated with people experiencing respiratory distress. Many of these people have no history of asthma, but they are experiencing asthma-like symptoms. Resources are stretched to the limit as you and your team scramble to provide immediate care and medications to those in need. Supplies of salbutamol, corticosteroids, adrenaline and ipratropium bromide are almost exhausted.

One of nurses tells you that when trying to coordinate transfers to hospital emergency departments, the call centre operator put her on hold for 6 minutes before the call was suddenly disconnected. Local news reports are advising people to stay inside and not to attend hospital unless they have a life-threatening emergency.

How are you going to respond to these challenges?

Scenario 6: The storm

Part 3

It is now 9pm and the storm has passed. You have managed to secure some additional medication supplies, but they are limited. You've been asked to coordinate transfer of the sickest patients to emergency departments but ambulance services are still overstretched.

How will you coordinate and prioritise the order in which the people are transferred to emergency departments?

Scenario 6: The storm

Reflection

What might be the immediate and longer term social/emotional/mental health impacts of this extreme weather event?

You are aware that changing weather patterns will result in more frequent and severe extreme weather events such as thunderstorm asthma. What advice would you give to community members and primary health care clinics to help them better prepare for such events?