
FACT SHEET

If a public health emergency (such as an infectious disease) should arise in which a large number of Houstonians need to receive antibiotics or vaccines to prevent them from getting sick, a system is in place to make sure that everyone in the City who needs medication can get it quickly.

What is a Community Emergency Medication Center, or CEMC?

A Community Emergency Medication Center (CEMC) is a special clinic designed to rapidly distribute antibiotics or vaccines in an emergency setting. In other communities, CEMCs may be called Point of Distribution (POD). CEMCs do not offer routine medical care. Their purpose is to widely and quickly distribute medication in a public health *emergency*.

In what kind of a situation would CEMCs be set up?

CEMCs would be set up if a large number of people needed to receive antibiotics or vaccines rapidly to prevent them from getting sick. It is rare that large numbers of people would need to take antibiotics or vaccines to prevent an illness, but this might happen if an attack took place with biological weapons, such as anthrax, smallpox, plague, or tularemia.

What happens at a CEMC?

People who may have been exposed to a virus or bacteria that could cause a serious infection would go to the CEMC to receive medication. They would be asked several questions about their health. These questions would either be asked in person or written on a questionnaire.

There are usually several antibiotics that are effective in protecting people from getting these infections. Generally, one particular antibiotic is prescribed for most people. However, people who have allergies to the antibiotic, or have a special medical condition that makes them ineligible for it, or are taking other medications that may adversely interact with it, would be referred to a doctor and receive the best antibiotic for them.



Where will CEMCs be set up?

CEMCs will be set up in every neighborhood where they are needed. If CEMCs are required in every neighborhood, they will be set up in every neighborhood. The CEMCs will be located throughout the community so that most Houstonians will be able to walk or ride bus or light rail to the CEMC closest to them.

Does the City have enough antibiotics to take care of everyone?

A large supply of antibiotics and other medicines have been put aside and will be available to take care of every person who needs them.

What about undocumented immigrants and visitors to Houston?

You don't have to be a resident of Houston to be eligible to go to a CEMC to receive antibiotics or other medicines. Help will be made available to everyone who may have been exposed to the biological agent in Houston, regardless of resident status.

What kind of a biological attack might require distribution of antibiotics or vaccine?

A smallpox attack would require the rapid distribution and administration of smallpox vaccine. An anthrax attack would require the rapid distribution of antibiotics. For more information on smallpox, anthrax, and other biological agents of concern, please read the Department of Health and Human Services fact sheets, available at <http://www.houstontx.gov/health/OSPHP>.

Have CEMCs ever been used before?

In the Fall of 2001, anthrax was sent in the mail to several members of the news media and government officials, causing several illnesses and some deaths. As soon as the cause of the disease was recognized, everyone who had come into contact with the letters was encouraged to take antibiotics to prevent anthrax. The antibiotics were distributed through CEMCs set up in the affected workplaces. Thousands of doses of medication were provided to all who needed them, within hours and days of the scare.

Who will work in the CEMCs?

City of Houston Health Department employees and community volunteers will staff the CEMCs. Health professionals are encouraged to volunteer now by enlisting in the **Harris County Medical Reserve Corps** at <http://www.harriscountycitizencorps.com/volunteer/orgabstract.asp?org=12>.

Non-medical personnel interested in volunteering are encouraged to contact a recognized disaster volunteer organization, such as the **American Red Cross of Greater Houston** at <http://www.houstonredcross.org/>, or the **Harris County Citizen Corps** at <http://www.harriscountycitizencorps.com/>.

When will the CEMCs be open?

CEMC schedules will depend on how many people need to receive antibiotics or vaccine. If the entire City needs to receive antibiotics or vaccine, the CEMCs will remain open 24 hours a day, until all goals are met.

How will people know when and where to go to a CEMC?

People will be told through the news media when and where to go. Given the sensitivity required when planning for this kind of emergency, we cannot identify in advance the CEMC locations. The news media will therefore be our vital partner in getting information out to the public.

There are steps that you and your family can take now to prepare for any type of emergency. Putting together a family plan will ensure that you and your family know where one another are in the event of an emergency, hear important instructions from City officials, and respond in a way that keeps you and our City safe. For more information on developing family disaster plans or assembling emergency supply kits, visit **READYAmerica** at <http://www.ready.gov/america/index.html>.

What about people who do not speak English?

We recognize that English is not the first language of many Houstonians. Any printed material given out at a CEMC will be available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese. The Health Department also maintains a relationship with members of the ethnic press, and this will help ensure that our instructions reach non-English speaking communities throughout the City.