



Case Study: Hurricane Flooding, Hospital Evacuation January, 2025

Erwin, Tennessee

- Friday, September 27, 2024 Hurricane Helene (category 4 hurricane) hit Florida and left torrential rain and fast-moving flood waters in eastern Tennessee
- Unicoi County Hospital became engulfed with flood waters extremely rapidly
- At 9:30 a.m. it was deemed evacuation was necessary
- County officials sent 11 ambulances to evacuate patients, but they were unable to get there in time
- Boats were then sent in around 10:20 a.m., however, could not safely navigate the rushing water surrounding the hospital
- At 12:30 p.m., patients and staff moved to the rooftop to stay dry
- High winds made air transport via helicopter impassable; however, by 2:30-3:00 p.m., they finally were able to fly in and conduct the evacuation
- There was a total of 54 people on the roof and seven people in rescue boats
- Virginia State Police and Tennessee National Guard conducted the rescue
- Three Blackhawk helicopters were used to transport patients and staff members to a local high school
- Unicoi County Hospital was not the only hospital evacuated that day, 39 patients from Sycamore Shoals Hospital in Elizabethton, Tennessee were also evacuated
- There was up to 30" of rain across the southeast that forced dozens of water systems to shut down and left nearly 2 million people without power
- Many hospitals were forced to suspend services due to the weather, some only taking patients in active labor
- By Tuesday, September 30th, 31 healthcare facilities in Florida had been evacuated and 11 others in Georgia and North Carolina were using power from generators; four facilities in Georgia had no water

Impacts:

- May require suspension of healthcare services
- Patient evacuation
- Power outages
- Water systems shut down
- Where to send patients that need daily medications, dialysis, chemotherapy, etc.
- Road systems may be ruined, access issues
- Supply shortages

Preparedness:

Resources on these topics and others can be found on the ASPR TRACIE [Topic Collection](#) website:

- Continuity of operation planning
- Crisis standards of care
- Alternate Care sites

- Family reunification
- Fatality management
- Facility evacuation/sheltering
- Mental/behavioral health
- Utility failures
- Responder safety and health
- Access and functional needs
- Recovery planning
- Risk communications
- Pharmacy

Sources:

- [Helene Nearly Turned a Hospital into a Death Trap](#)
- [Stranded patients, staff airlifted from Tennessee hospital roof amid flooding](#)

Resources:

- [Supporting the Community Through Historic Flooding: Central Vermont Medical Center's 2023 Experience](#)
- [ASPR TRACIE Topic Collection](#)
- [Climate Change Resilience and Healthcare System Considerations](#)