# Emergency Preparedness, Resilience & Response Communication Policy

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

The NHS England Core Standards for Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response EPRR (NHS England, 2015) requires organisations, including NHS Foundation Trusts, to have arrangements in place that include a process to inform and advise the public.

2. **PURPOSE**

This policy provides detail on what communication arrangements the Trust will put in place to prepare for, respond to and recover from a Critical or Major Incident.

2.1 **Definitions/Explanation of Terms Used**

Category 1 and 2 responders - Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 the agencies that may be required to respond to an emergency are categorised and given statutory legal duties. The Trust is a Category 1 Responder.


LRF – Local Resilience Forum. The Strategic Planning Group made up of emergency responding agencies. The Trust is represented on this group by NHS England.

SCG – Strategic Coordinating Group. Provides Multi Agency Strategic leadership within an LRF area during response to a major incident. The Trust is usually represented on this group by NHS England.

EA – Environment Agency.

LA – Local Authority.

PHE – Public Health England

CCG – Clinical Commissioning Group

Sitrep – Situation Report

3. **SCOPE**

This policy explains how the Trust will adhere to its responsibilities for warning and informing staff, patients, public, partners and stakeholders.

It sets out how the provision of relevant timely information about the nature of an unfolding event will be communicated. The policy is split into
preparedness, response and recovery in order to show how communications would differ between each phase of an incident.

The Policy provides guidance on:

- Managing the media.
- The process of communication with all staff.
- Sharing information about the different phases of an incident e.g. Response and Recovery.
- The warning and informing arrangements of other Category 1 and 2 responders and other organisations.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES, ACCOUNTABILITIES AND DUTIES

Responsibilities, accountabilities and duties may vary depending on whether the Trust is preparing for, responding to or recovering from a Critical or Major Incident. These are described in detail below. Definitions of a Critical or Major incident can be found in the Trust Major Incident Plan.

5. PROCEDURE AND IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Preparedness

Some types of incident are predictable such as severe weather. In such cases the Trust will ensure that staff, patients, public, partners and stakeholders are given appropriate messages in order to prepare for and mitigate the risk in order to ensure disruption to services is kept to a minimum.

The nature of the message must be tailored to the type of risk presented. The Trust Severe Weather and Winter Plan gives comprehensive guidance on actions to take in the event that the Trust receives notifications such as Cold Weather Alerts, Weather Warnings and Flood Guidance Statements. Similar guidance is provided in the Trust Heatwave Plan.

Other events that may be predicted could be the effect of a planned event on the transport network or a disruption to utilities provision. In such cases information may be received from a local authority or utilities company.

In these cases, once received, information is disseminated in the following ways depending on the nature of the risk and the time of day since some ways of communicating may be less appropriate out of hours:

5.1.1 Trust staff:

- Via Daily Communications All Staff Email sent by the Trust Communications Team or via Immediate All Staff Email sent by the Trust
Communications Team or Emergency Planning Officer depending on the urgency of the warning. A decision on who sends an all staff email will be agreed between the Communications Team and the Emergency Planning Officer.

- Intranet Message placed by the Trust Communications Team that takes appropriate precedence on the Intranet home page.
- Via targeted email e.g. email sent to specific Managers or Directors tailored to a specific geographical area that may be affected.
- Via ‘PageOne’ Communications’ this can be used in the event of the loss of the primary communications system e.g. switchboard or email. This system is separate from the Trust landline telecoms and IT system and so will not be affected by any failure of these systems. After consultation text messages may be sent to appropriate staff mobiles by the Emergency Planning Officer, Estates Manager, Care Group Director or out of hours equivalent. The PageOne Communications SOP provides detail on how this system is used. This system is a useful way to contact staff that are away from their base and may be more suitable for out of hours communications.
- Via Desktop Alert message. On screen messages to be displayed on a large number of IT devices simultaneously, e.g. to all Trust staff who are logged in to a desktop or laptop. For use in normal weekday hours only but messages can be set to deliver at set times. Further information contained in the Desktop Alerts Popup Messages Communication System SOP

Content within emails and messages will usually be provided by the Emergency Planning Officer or deputy. However the Trust Communications Team also receive weather warnings and will communicate appropriate content to all staff in the absence of the Emergency Planning Officer or deputy as per the guidance contained in the Trust Severe Weather and Winter Plan.

All communications to staff will be agreed with the Trust Communications Team before sending and be consistent with guidance given in warnings received from the agencies providing them.

Depending on the urgency of the situation emails may request acknowledgment or may be followed up by telephone to Care Group Directors or deputies to ensure information has been received and acted upon. In such cases follow up may be made by the Emergency Planning Officer or in their absence the Communications Team or another member of staff as identified by the Accountable Emergency Officer or deputy.

For flooding related risks some template messages are contained on page 16 of the Trust Severe Weather and Winter Plan. Wherever possible all messages should link to relevant guidance provided at the time on websites such as the Environment Agency, Met Office and Public Health England.

Where staff do not have access to email it is the responsibility of their Manager to ensure that information is provided in a suitable format.
5.1.2 Patients:

The communication of information to patients about a potential disruptive incident e.g. severe weather will be made by staff that are familiar with communicating with specific patient groups. This will ensure information is provided that will not cause undue concern or alarm. Staff communicating with patients will ensure the information they provide is consistent with that provided by the Communications Team.

It is the responsibility of Managers to ensure that they inform patients of any disruption to services that may be likely such as postponement of appointments and to provide guidance on what actions are being put in place to mitigate the effects of any disruption e.g. re-prioritisation of services.

Managers may use information provided by partner agencies as described above to ensure patients are kept fully aware of how a developing incident may affect the Trust’s ability to deliver services.

5.1.3 Public:

The Trust Communication Team is responsible for placing content on the Trust website and social media feeds. Where an incident affects Trust services e.g. industrial action the Communications Team may place statements on the Trust website or via social media. The content of such statements will be consistent with information provided by external agencies where appropriate and be agreed by the Trust Accountable Emergency Officer (Chief Operating Officer) or deputy (e.g. Director on Call) before publication.

Some statements may include links to advice on subjects such as keeping warm or to definitions of flood warnings.

Some statements may be pre-written for adapting later to serve these needs:

E.g.

“As you may be aware parts of Doncaster/Rotherham/North Lincs have been affected by flooding/heavy snow. This has disrupted some Trust services. Please note that if your appointment has been affected you will be contacted.”

Alternatively the Trust may play a collaborative role with partners in publicising messages to the public about preparing for winter or heatwave. This would include links to resources agreed by all partners.

5.1.4 Partners & Stakeholders:

Partner agencies such as commissioners and NHS England often request assurance that communication of potential risks to patients, staff and partners has occurred and that business continuity plans are in place. This request is usually made to the Accountable Emergency Officer or Emergency Planning Officer via email. In such circumstances the Emergency Planning Officer or
deputy will seek assurance this has been done and provide a response.

It is the responsibility of managers at team level to communicate with suppliers, contractors or voluntary agencies to check if they are liable to be affected by a potential incident e.g. severe weather so they can put in place appropriate contingencies.

5.1.5 Media:

It is possible that the Trust may receive enquiries from the media on its level of preparations in the run up to a potential incident. In such a situation all enquiries will be referred to the Communications Team who will issue statements on behalf of the Trust.

The Communications Team may also consider putting information about preparations for a potential incident on the Trust website and social media feeds to “head off” potential media contact. In the event that media request a spokesperson the Communications Team will respond.

5.2 Response

The Trust may respond to an incident in one of two ways:

- By continuing to deliver services in a normal manner managing response from within its own resources.

- By calling upon or assistance from external agencies to deliver services which may trigger the Trust Major Incident Plan.

During the response phase of an incident the demand for information and the requirement for effective communication increases.

The Trust Major Incident Plan describes the triggers and actions that take place in the lead up to the declaration of a Critical or Major Incident. This includes the various communication channels between Gold, Silver and Bronze levels of command and control within the Trust. It also describes the communication and reporting arrangements with external agencies.

During the response phase the following considerations should be taken when communicating with staff, patients, public, partners and other stakeholders.

5.2.1 Trust Staff:

The Emergency Planning Officer or deputy and the Communications Team will ensure that information is disseminated to staff about the response to the incident. For example they will continue to issue information about alerts and warnings about severe weather as these are received from partner agencies.

Information passed to staff must be consistent with that provided in alerts and warnings. This will be provided in the same format and using the same
medium as during preparation for an incident.

Should an incident develop that may at a later stage intensify and become a Critical or Major Incident a trust Director will activate the Major Incident Plan.

In such scenarios the Trust Accountable Emergency Officer (Chief Operating Officer) or deputy (e.g. Director on Call) would agree messages to disseminate to staff with the Communications Team and Emergency Planning Officer or deputy. If a “Critical Incident” or “Major Incident Standby” or “Major Incident Declared” occurs this information should be disseminated to staff using some of the suggested options below:

- Via an immediate all staff email sent by the Trust Communications Team.
- Prominent Intranet Message placed by the Trust Communications Team that takes precedence on the Intranet home page.
- Via an immediate targeted email e.g. email sent to specific Managers or Directors tailored to a specific geographical area that may be affected.
- Via a PageOne text message to all Trust mobile phones.
- Via on screen desktop alert popup messaging.

All communications must be agreed between the Trust Accountable Emergency Officer (Chief Operating Officer) or deputy (e.g. Director on Call) and the Trust Communications Team before sending.

Care Group Directors will be required to acknowledge receipt of information and confirm that this has been passed onto Managers to ensure all staff are aware. In such cases follow up may be made by the Emergency Planning Officer, Communications Team or other staff delegated by Directors.

For flooding related risks some template messages are contained on page 16 of the Trust Severe Weather and Winter Plan. Wherever possible all messages should link to relevant guidance provided at the time on websites such as the Environment Agency, Met Office and Public Health England.

The Trust Communications Team will also be responsible for disseminating information on the overall Trust response to all staff. Where staff do not have access to email or Intranet it is the responsibility of their Manager to ensure that information is provided in a suitable format.

5.2.2 Patients

The communication of information to patients about a potential disruptive incident e.g. severe weather will be made by staff that are familiar with communicating with specific patient groups. This will ensure information is provided that will not cause undue concern or alarm. Staff communicating with patients will ensure the information they provide is consistent with that provided by the Communications Team.

It is the responsibility of Managers to ensure that they inform patients of any disruption to services that may be likely such as postponement of appointments and to provide guidance on what actions are being put in place.
to mitigate the effects of any disruption e.g. re-prioritisation of services.

Managers may use resources provided by partner agencies as described above to ensure patients are kept fully aware of how a developing incident may affect the Trust’s ability to deliver services.

5.2.3 Public

The Trust Communication Team is responsible for placing content on the Trust website and social media feeds. Where an incident affects Trust services the Communications Team may place statements on the Trust website or via social media (Facebook and twitter). The content of such statements will be consistent with information provided by external agencies where appropriate and be agreed by the Trust Accountable Emergency Officer (Chief Operating Officer) or deputy (e.g. Director on Call) before publication.

This may be done by providing links to other organisation’s websites where appropriate so as to not risk misinterpretation. Additionally the Trust may issue information about any immediate action it has taken, for example impacts and possible changes to services caused by an incident.

5.2.4 Partners & Stakeholders:

Partner agencies such as commissioners and NHS England often request assurance that communication of potential risks to patients, staff and partners continues as response to an incident occurs and that business continuity plans are being used. This request is usually made to the Accountable Emergency Officer or Emergency Planning Officer via email. In such circumstances the Emergency Planning Officer or deputy will seek assurance this has been done and provide a response.

It is the responsibility of Managers at team level to communicate with suppliers, contractors or voluntary agencies to check if they are affected by the incident e.g. severe weather so as not to be taken by surprise if services or deliveries are disrupted.

5.2.5 Situation Reports

The Trust Major Incident Plan contains guidance about how situation reports (sitreps) are requested and submitted to agencies such as commissioners or NHS England.

For the avoidance of doubt any request for information regarding response to an incident that is received from any external partner should be shared with Trust Gold Command, the Trust Accountable Emergency Officer and the Trust Emergency Planning Officer before a response is sent.

It is often advisable to share the contents of Trust situation reports to ensure all staff have an awareness of how the Trust is responding. In a Critical or Major Incident the Communications Team will seek guidance from Gold Command before sharing situation reports with staff.
In a Critical or Major Incident the Trust will track information requests by keeping a record at Gold and Silver commands. This may be included in official logs or minutes of meetings.

At operational level each team’s Business Continuity Plan contains a blank log sheet. This can be used by teams to log information requests from Gold or Silver and record actions. This sheet should be commonly available to all team members to consult and update.

5.2.6 Coordination

Situation reports are also produced by partner agencies. These are often placed online using the Resilience Direct system. This is a secure web based system where all emergency responders share information to ensure they are coordinated in response.

Resilience Direct is only available to category 1 and category 2 responders as described in the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act. The Trust has an account and can request additional accounts. Access should be restricted to Trust Gold Command staff. Currently the Head of Communications and Emergency Planning Officer hold accounts.

In the event of a multi-agency incident Resilience Direct will be monitored by the Emergency Planning Officer or deputy for information to inform Trust response and enable close coordination with other agencies.

5.2.7 Media:

It is possible that the Trust may receive enquiries from the media on its response to an incident and impact on services. In such a situation all enquiries will be referred to the Communications Team who will issue statements on behalf of the Trust.

In the event that the Trust is required to conduct a press conference the Communications Team will respond.

The Communications Team may also consider putting information about a response to an incident on the Trust website and social media feeds to “head off” potential media contact. The Trust Communications Team will also if required brief a trust spokesperson who will address the media if required.

5.3 STAND DOWN AND RECOVERY

Following a Critical or Major Incident the return to normal services may potentially take weeks or months depending on the severity and impact of the incident on the Trust.

The end of the response period is signified via communication from Trust Gold Command via the communication channels mentioned above.

The Trust Major Incident Plan requires a Recovery Coordination Group to be set up during the response period which is responsible for the overall
recovery of the Trust from the incident.

During the recovery phase the following considerations should be taken when communicating with different stakeholders.

5.3.1 Trust Staff

Internally it will be important for the Recovery Co-ordination Group to keep all staff informed as to the progress of recovery via regular updates. This will be facilitated by the Trust Communications Team.

5.3.2 Patients

The Trust will continue to communicate with patients to ensure they are aware of any further disruptions to service or to inform them of the resumption of normal business.

5.3.3 Public

The Trust Communication Team is responsible for placing content for public consumption on the Trust website and social media feeds regarding information about recovery.

5.3.4 Media

During the recovery, media attention will be high, and journalists may contact the Trust regarding local stories, particularly during periods of lull. The Communications Team are the team to which all media enquiries must be routed.

It is also possible that the Trust may receive enquiries from the media on significant anniversaries. The Communications Team have access to statements on file.

5.3.5 Partners & Stakeholders

Externally NHS England and CCGs are likely to require regular situation reports on the status of the Trust recovery to any incident.

The nature and severity of the incident will dictate the type and number of requests for information.

During recovery the Recovery Coordination Group should ensure that all communications with outside agencies are coordinated via the Emergency Planning Officer, Accountable Emergency Officer and Trust Communications Team.

The Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response Communications Policy should be read in conjunction with the Trust Major Incident Plan and Trust Major Incident Recovery Plan.
6. **TRAINING IMPLICATIONS**

It is required by NHS England that the Trust exercise its communications arrangements annually in the form of a desktop exercise. Should the Trust activate these arrangements for an incident the desktop exercise is not required.

Directors on-call should be aware of this policy and be familiar with its contents. Details of this policy will be included in Director on call packs and reference made in the Trust Major Incident Plan.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Staff groups requiring training</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>On Call Directors, Care Group Directors, Associate Nurse Directors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriate Gold, Silver and Bronze levels of Command and Control as defined by the Emergency Planning Officer.</td>
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*A Training Needs Analysis (TNA) is not required for this policy as training for this policy is not mandatory or statutory.*

7. **MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS - model format**

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<tr>
<th>Area for Monitoring</th>
<th>How</th>
<th>Who by</th>
<th>Reported to</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td>Annual Training Exercise</td>
<td>Exercise Report to be produced</td>
<td>Emergency Planning Officer</td>
<td>Operational Management Meeting</td>
<td>Annually</td>
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8. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING**

This policy was provided in line with the EIA associated with the EPRR Policy. In order to ensure this policy overcomes and exclusion issues the Emergency Planning Officer, Communications Team, or on call member of staff will state in any EPRR related message they put on the Web, all staff email, or other notification that it is the responsibility of
managers to ensure, within reasonable adjustments, that information is communicated to staff and patients with access issues.

8.1 Privacy, Dignity and Respect

The NHS Constitution states that all patients should feel that their privacy and dignity are respected while they are in hospital. High Quality Care for All (2008), Lord Darzi’s review of the NHS, identifies the need to organise care around the individual, ‘not just clinically but in terms of dignity and respect’.

As a consequence the Trust is required to articulate its intent to deliver care with privacy and dignity that treats all service users with respect. Therefore, all procedural documents will be considered, if relevant, to reflect the requirement to treat everyone with privacy, dignity and respect, (when appropriate this should also include how same sex accommodation is provided).

Indicate how this will be met

| No issues have been identified in relation to this policy. |

8.2 Mental Capacity Act

Central to any aspect of care delivered to adults and young people aged 16 years or over will be the consideration of the individuals capacity to participate in the decision making process. Consequently, no intervention should be carried out without either the individuals informed consent, or the powers included in a legal framework, or by order of the Court

Therefore, the Trust is required to make sure that all staff working with individuals who use our service are familiar with the provisions within the Mental Capacity Act. For this reason all procedural documents will be considered, if relevant to reflect the provisions of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 to ensure that the interests of an individual whose capacity is in question can continue to make as many decisions for themselves as possible.

Indicate How This Will Be Achieved.

| All individuals involved in the implementation of this policy should do so in accordance with the Guiding Principles of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. (Section 1) |

9. LINKS TO ANY ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- Trust Major Incident Plan
- Trust Major Incident Recovery Plan
- Trust Severe Weather and Winter Plan
- Trust Heatwave Plan
- Pandemic Influenza Plan
- Road Fuel Emergency Plan
- The PageOne Communications SOP
- Desktop Alerts Popup Messages Communication System SOP

10. REFERENCES

N/A
11. APPENDICES

N/A