For Immediate Release

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Washtenaw County Health Department Shares Findings from Extreme Weather Preparedness Survey

Survey results from local seniors will inform emergency preparedness work

YPSILANTI, Mich., October 19, 2023 – The Washtenaw County Health Department is releasing an Extreme Weather Preparedness Survey Summary detailing findings from a local survey of older adults in Washtenaw. The summary shares key survey findings describing knowledge gaps and barriers to community preparedness in the event of an extreme weather emergency.

“We’re seeing more and more extreme weather locally as a result of climate change,” says Amanda Harris, CDC public health associate with the Washtenaw County Health Department. “After the widespread power outages from storms in summer 2021, we implemented this survey to identify and learn about members of our community who may be disproportionally impacted by extreme weather events.”

The survey initially focused on community members living in population-dense senior apartment complexes and communities impacted by power outages in Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township. It was then later opened to the general population of Washtenaw County, with a focus on older adults. A total of 255 respondents completed the survey between June and October 2022.

“We were glad to see many community members reported understanding the difference between emergency watches and warnings, but they are less likely to be aware of other local emergency information resources or alert systems,” says Kimberly Collom, MS, Washtenaw County Health Department emergency preparedness manager. “Many seniors surveyed have health conditions, rely on adaptive equipment, or have medications that require special accommodations – all of these needs must be considered as we prepare for extreme weather events in Washtenaw.”

“Our survey findings highlight the need for additional support systems to address basic needs like food, water, transportation, shelter, and medication during weather emergencies,” continues Harris. “At the same time, individual actions like signing up for local alerts, preparing an emergency kit, and making an emergency plan can go a long way in protecting health during emergencies.”

The survey asked respondents where they seek out information during emergencies, what emergency supplies they have on hand, who they can turn to when they need help, and how vulnerable they feel they are to losing basic resources like food, water, and medication during an emergency. See all survey findings in the full summary: https://bit.ly/ewpssum23

The Health Department is using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to expand its emergency preparedness work. This includes hiring of two health educators and capacity for community
preparedness initiatives (e.g., educational trainings and emergency kit supplies). Additionally, this funding will support volunteer management and coordination activities to better prepare for and respond to future weather-related events and health emergencies.

How to prepare for extreme weather

- Sign up for local alerts. The Washtenaw Alert Emergency Notification System (also known as Everbridge) is a communications service public officials in Washtenaw County use to quickly notify citizens of emergency situations and other important information or events. Sign up to receive alerts at www.washtenaw.org/alerts and learn more here.
- Review the Washtenaw County Health Department Emergency Preparedness Checklist. This checklist has information on how to make an emergency kit, how to create an emergency plan (including considerations for children, those who need special assistance, and pets), food and water safety, and more.

Emergency preparedness resources

- Michigan Prepares
- Ready, a national public service campaign designed to educate and empower the American people to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate emergencies and disasters.
- Washtenaw County Emergency Management
- MDHHS: Climate and Health

Washtenaw County Health Department
The Washtenaw County Health Department promotes health and works to prevent disease and injury in our community. Our mission is to assure, in partnership with the community, the conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives through prevention and protection programs.

Local public health information and updates are always available at www.washtenaw.org/health. The Health Department also provides frequent social media updates (@wcpublichealth) and sends regular email updates, sign up at http://bit.ly/WCHD555.

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