

Public health and general practice

Speed read

- All disasters will have some impact on public health.
- Public health outcomes are greatly increased when disaster management plans are developed and the community is well informed and aware of actions to take before an event.
- Public health response actions can be characterised by the SAWFISH acronym.

Key points

Communicable diseases spreading after a disaster depends on:

- the type of disaster
- the background prevalence of diseases
- what population health measures are in place (such as the level of immunisations)
- access to sanitation and sound hygiene practices
- the level of contamination in food and water supplies.

Public health response actions to consider:

S	Safety of first responders
A	Air quality
W	Water quality
F	Food safety
I	Insects, vectors and vermin control
S	Sanitation issues
H	Hygiene and health promotions

Public health information is communicated to the public through brochures, posters, print media, television, radio, websites and social media, as well as working directly with relevant community groups. Local and state government bodies will have their own media release policies that local authorities should follow.

Spaces where communities are evacuated need to consider water supply, sanitation, waste management, shelter and food, nappies and formula for babies, people's medication needs and chronic illness, provisions for women, LGBTQIA+ and cultural necessities.

Areas should be considered safe before communities' return. This may include water supply, sewerage and landfill and potential health hazards such as exposed asbestos or damaged septic tanks.

GPs are often the main healthcare provider throughout communities. They strengthen healthcare provision through coordination and continuity of care across all domains of physical, psychological and socio-environmental health. Continuity of medications, Psychological First Aid (PFA), early reassessment of health needs for those with chronic conditions and ongoing surveillance for emerging effects are a vital role for general practice.

Quick Guide

Take action

- Print or save the SAWFISH public health response actions
- Include GPs in your preparedness planning
- If you are a GP, develop a Business Continuity Plan

More information

- [Health and Disaster Management](#) (AIDR 2019)
- [WHO's One Health approach](#) emphasises the relatedness of human, animal, and environmental health and the importance of working across disciplines
- [Evacuation Planning](#) (AIDR 2023)
- [Public Information and Warnings](#) (AIDR 2021)