

Major risks in Kirklees – emergency preparedness

Headlines

Emergencies can happen at any time, and often happen without notice. Whilst we cannot predict them we are able to respond to emergencies and limit their impact on health in Kirklees. Emergencies disproportionately affect those with existing health conditions and those with a low income, so taking action on these issues will reduce the impact of emergencies.

Why is this issue important?

A major incident or an emergency is any event or occurrence that requires organisations to put in place special arrangements in order to continue to meet the needs of the population. During an emergency, the existing needs of the population continue, as detailed elsewhere in this JSNA, but additional needs arise as a direct consequence of the incident. Different groups of people across Kirklees are vulnerable to the impact of different incidents. 1 in 4 people (25%) would expect to rely on the NHS for support following an emergency, with a similar number (22%) likely to rely on the Council¹. In an emergency like a flood that might involve evacuation of homes, about 1 in 10 people would need help to leave their homes, but this rises to 2 in 5 (43%) for people who describe their health in general as “very bad”¹. Kirklees Council and the NHS prepare for and respond to incidents through the West Yorkshire Resilience Forum, which brings together the Police, Fire and Rescue Service, Ambulance Service, the NHS, Local Authorities and a large number of other partners. This Partnership Forum ensures a co-ordinated response to any incident, and is the focus for preparedness activity across West Yorkshire.

In 2010, the fire at the Grosvenor Chemicals manufacturing facility near Linthwaite tested our response to a major incident. Other than this, Kirklees has been fortunate in the low number of incidents recorded in the borough. We run incident tests or exercises every year to make sure we remain prepared.

Major risks in Kirklees

The West Yorkshire Resilience Forum has a robust system for the identification of risks and has a local risk register. The Community Risk Register identifies pandemic influenza, flooding and heavy snow as the highest risks. The complete register is available at:

<http://www.westyorkshire.police.uk/help-advice/resilience>

What significant factors are affecting this issue?

Pandemic influenza²

An influenza pandemic results from the development of a novel strain of influenza, which can spread rapidly in humans.

People have limited or no resistance to the new strain. The 2009 swine flu pandemic resulted from a new strain of Influenza A that was first observed in Mexico. For most of the population, swine flu turned out to be a mild strain giving only limited health effects, but for some vulnerable members of the community, including young people, pregnant women and those with pre-existing neurological conditions, the effects were more severe (see infectious disease section).

The next pandemic could occur at any time and could be far more harmful than swine flu. Different pandemic strains affect different parts of the population differently, and it is not possible to determine in advance who will be most vulnerable to the health effects of a new pandemic strain. Health and social care services need to maintain their preparedness to respond to a pandemic and maintain the flexibility to deliver a response that is proportionate to the risk that a particular virus creates.

Flooding³

The likelihood of major flooding in Kirklees is low but the impact on the community and infrastructure could be significant. As a result, the West Yorkshire Resilience Forum has developed local plans. The West Yorkshire multiagency flood plan lists the roles and responsibilities for each organisation to ensure a co-ordinated response.

The greatest health risks associated with flooding are drowning, accidents and injuries due to moving water and concealed hazards. Longer term health consequences of flooding can include mental health issues associated with traumatic experiences and displacement of populations. The main area of concern for NHS Kirklees is to ensure patients continue to have access to health services in their time of need.

People who live in low lying areas or in river basins are most at risk from flooding. The Environment Agency provides further details on flood warnings and offers practical advice on preparing your home or business for flooding. This information can be found here:

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods/default.aspx>

Heavy snow⁴

Three of the last four winters have seen heavier snowfalls than has been typical for the last 20 years. During November 2010, West Yorkshire experienced heavy snowfalls that caused major disruption to public transport and road traffic. This resulted in large numbers

of NHS staff being unable to attend work and increased the pressures on health services. Those who were able to make it to work found it increasingly difficult to travel to see patients at home. Patient transport to hospitals was also disrupted. Those most at risk from severe weather include those who have limited mobility and anyone who struggles to keep warm at home for whatever reason during the winter.

Terrorism

The London Bombings in 2005 were the most recent terrorist attack in the UK. Hundreds of people were directly injured by the attacks but many more were affected by their experiences that day and in the days that followed.

Whilst much has been done to minimise the risk of future attacks on the country, if one was to be successful, the impact may be catastrophic. Immediate health needs of those affected vary with proximity to the attack, but long-term health needs resulting from terrorism can have an impact over a larger area.

The threat of terrorism extends across the country, and it is important that West Yorkshire is prepared to respond in order to mitigate the effects of an attack.

Our emergency plans

NHS and Public Health organisations throughout Kirklees have plans to respond to emergencies when they do occur. The Council's emergency plans are described at:

<http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/you-kmc/emergency-plan/emergencymenu.shtml>

What could commissioners and service planners consider?

In an emergency, some healthcare services will be more busy than usual, like Accident and Emergency Departments, but some can be temporarily reduced in order to release staff to meet urgent care demand. Others need to maintain business as usual. All healthcare services commissioned by the NHS or the Council need to be able to operate effectively in order to meet the differing needs of people during emergencies.

In addition, a very small number of health services or capabilities are commissioned specifically to respond to emergencies, such as the Hazardous Area Response Team run by Yorkshire Ambulance Service.

References

1. Current Living in Kirklees (CLiK) Survey; 2012.
2. Hine D. The 2009 Influenza Pandemic. Cabinet Office; July 2010.
3. Pitt M. Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods. Cabinet Office; June 2008.

4. Quarmby et al. The Resilience of England's Transport Systems in Winter. Department of Transport; October 2010.

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