

Emergency Health Management after Natural Disaster



**PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
1981**

A GUIDE TO EMERGENCY HEALTH MANAGEMENT AFTER NATURAL DISASTER



Scientific Publication No. 407

PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
Pan American Sanitary Bureau, Regional Office of the
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
525 Twenty-third Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037, U.S.A.

1981

Issued in Spanish (1981) as:
*Administración sanitaria de emergencia
con posterioridad a los
desastres naturales*

1989 - Reprint (4000)

ISBN 92 75 11407 2

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PREFACE

This *Guide* is intended for use by decision makers and senior administrators in disaster-prone developing countries who are responsible for providing health services after sudden natural disasters.

It presents a general overview of the problems that will be encountered when a disaster overcomes a nation's resources and suggests general criteria that should be applied in choosing relief measures. It is not within the *Guide's* scope to elaborate on the technical aspects of the measures chosen for implementation. The Pan American Health Organization will later publish detailed technical guidelines on specialized topics such as the management of medical supplies, vector-control measures, health management in refugee camps, and communicable disease surveillance as a series of manuals.

For the purposes of this *Guide*, natural disasters comprise earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, tidal waves, and destructive winds (cyclones, hurricanes, and tornadoes). Man-made catastrophes, famine, drought, and other slow-onset disasters, and epidemics are not included. The *Guide's* object is not to give detailed technical information but to present a framework within which an administrator can make rational and effective decisions about relief measures. It deals only with the period immediately after disaster—the first three or four weeks—and not with long-term problems of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Nor is it intended to anticipate every circumstance; to meet local conditions, some adaptation of the approaches suggested will be necessary. It is hoped the *Guide* will serve as a framework for developing national manuals covering local circumstances. It should be emphasized that the health sector must work within the framework and priorities that higher levels of authority establish during this period, and that greater priority may be given to other sectors.

The *Guide* is divided into two sections. The first presents a summary of experience with common public health problems after natural disasters. The second and longer part deals with specific health topics and relief procedures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND REFERENCES

This publication has been made possible by the competent and dedicated contribution of Dr. John Seaman, Senior Medical Officer, Save the Children Fund, London, who drafted and reviewed its preliminary versions.

Acknowledgment is owed many people in and outside the World Health Organization for their valuable comments and criticism based on long field experience. We are particularly grateful to UNICEF, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the League of Red Cross Societies and the American Red Cross, the Research Center on Disaster Epidemiology in Belgium, and the many individual experts in disaster-prone countries who contributed their comments to the extensive revision of several chapters. Thanks are also due Dr. Claude de Ville de Goyet and Mr. David Donaldson of the Pan American Health Organization and Dr. Wolfgang Bulle of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control for their detailed technical review of the drafts and preparation of the manuscript.

The valuable contributions and comments from all World Health Organization regions and especially WHO's Emergency Relief Operations Office in Geneva have made it possible to address the problem globally.

Material and ideas have been drawn from many sources, but particularly from the following publications which are essential complements to this Guide:

1. de Ville de Goyet, C., J. Seaman, and U. Geiger. *The Management of Nutritional Emergencies in Large Populations*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1978.
2. *The Selection of Essential Drugs; Report of a WHO Expert Committee*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1979. (WHO Technical Report Series 641.)
3. Protein-Calorie Advisory Group of the United Nations System. *A Guide to Food and Health Relief Operations for Disasters*. New York, United Nations, 1977.
4. Assar, M. *A Guide to Sanitation in Natural Disasters*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1971.

Additional reading materials are listed in Annex 2.