



FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2008 • PAGE 3A – NATIONAL NEWS

Post-Ike: 'It's a public health emergency'

By Donna Leinwand, USA TODAY

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Nearby, a trauma team prepares for a patient arriving by helicopter who was hit in the head by a falling tree.

It is noon Thursday, five days after Hurricane Ike. Every bed in the emergency department is full. Nearly every 20 minutes, a helicopter carrying another critically ill person lands on the roof.



Ernest Coronel, of the Los Angeles branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, searches Thursday for missing pets in a neighborhood destroyed by Hurricane Ike in Galveston, Texas. *Photo by LM Otero, AP*

There are at least 10 people with severe stomach ailments, a woman who sliced her thigh open with a chain saw, three people awaiting emergency dialysis, two broken legs, a woman with pregnancy complications who arrived in a Black Hawk helicopter and one child with asthma. Another 13 people sit in the waiting room.

"We are getting slammed," says Jamie McCarthy, director

of emergency medical services at the hospital, who has been sleeping in his office on an air mattress since the day before the storm.

The Texas public health commission has warned of a public health crisis if post-hurricane conditions persist. The University of Texas Medical Branch, a major hospital with a trauma center in Galveston, is closed because of water and wind damage. Health officials already are seeing a flood of hurricane-related injuries and illnesses.

"It's a public health emergency," says Jim Parisi, who oversees 10 emergency departments at Memorial Hermann Hospital System, the region's largest hospital group.

"This is a huge disaster."

Emergency calls soar

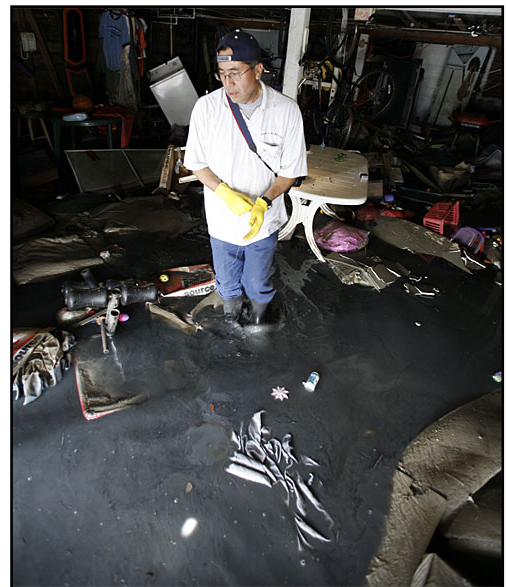
Memorial Hermann at Texas Medical Center sees 130 patients on an average day. Since the hurricane, the number has surged 30%, McCarthy says. On Wednesday, ER doctors saw 205 patients.

The day after the storm, the Houston Fire Department fielded 4,700 emergency calls, more than four times their average.

Most dialysis clinics lack power and remain closed, forcing patients to seek care at the ER or even relocate to a special shelter in Dallas. "People are coming to the hospitals in crisis because they haven't been able to get dialysis for days," Parisi says.

A family practice affiliated with University of Texas Medical School at Houston is treating overflow patients from the ER who have less critical illnesses and injuries. Doctors there saw 14 patients by Thursday afternoon, including a Houston police officer with a cut on her face and a woman who had fallen at a supermarket.

"We'll handle whatever comes in here," says Carlos Moreno, a professor at the medical school who runs the clinic. His doctors have seen skin rashes, insect bites, asthmatics, fractures, back injuries and minor cuts.



Hoping to salvage some possessions, John Torres looks through his flooded garage in Galveston. *Photo by LM Otero, AP*

Starting Wednesday, paramedics were told to bring the least critical patients a few blocks away to an engineering building at Rice University, where the federal government's Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMAT) set up a mobile medical unit.

More infections expected

Another disaster medical team that has worked in the Galveston hospital's emergency room since Sunday treated 650 patients by Thursday night. About 60% were flown out by helicopter.

"People who stayed during the storm are coming on foot, by bicycle," says Michael Purcaro of the Connecticut-based medical team that, along with an Iowa team, is staffing the Galveston DMAT.

Doctors there are seeing exhaustion, heat-related illnesses and cardiac problems, he says. Patients with serious illnesses and injuries are sent by helicopter to Houston.

Purcaro anticipates more stomach illnesses, rashes and infections as more residents and emergency workers come in contact with storm debris, flood water or the slimy, smelly muck that has pooled in Galveston's streets.

Marta Santana, 51, a Galveston resident who stayed on the island, says she and three of her friends flush their toilets with floodwater that they collected in buckets. "We've been using bottled water to clean up," she says.

The bacteria in the flood zone has had time to incubate, says UTMB president David Callender. "There is no running water, no sewage process, no natural gas to cook food, food is spoiled, there's all this debris," he says. "We're moving into a high-risk phase."

Contributing: Marisol Bello in Galveston and Julie Appleby in McLean, Va.

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Fixing the economy **Wall Street crisis**
 How would Barack Obama or John McCain really respond to the nation's financial turmoil? For a clue, check out their economic advisers.

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path of Ike
 in Texas and USA's
 in Houston, 3A



Dow's decline
 Despite Thursday's sharp reversal, stocks have slid more than 20% in the nearly year-long bear market.
Cover story

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 crash; federal regulators
 in't necessary, 3A.
l on Congress vote
 vote in Congress, but ad-
 on representation, 4A.
ads aim at Apple
 e diversity of Windows
 lay off rival's ads, 6B.
n in SEC catfight
 as No. 6 Louisiana State
 college football, 7-8C.
 ers in NL Central, 5C.
ugs at the heart
 Gervais leads ensemble
 *** review, 1D.
 in seventh season, 3D.

Oct. 9, 2007: 14,164.53
 Source: Thomson & Research Institute
 (Obama by Getty Images; McCain by Tim J. Murnighan for USA TODAY; Graphics by USA TODAY)

Two candidates, two approaches: As the economy took center stage in the presidential race, Democrat Obama blasted Republicans' focus on deregulation, while GOP nominee John McCain took aim at co-

Finance, business vets
 candidates are in daily con-
 range of economic advisers

'It's a public-health emergency'

Texas hospitals slammed as post-hurricane conditions deteriorate

By Donna Levinwand
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The Texas public-health commission has warned of a public-health crisis if post-hurricane conditions persist. The University of Texas Medical Branch, a major hospital with a trauma center in Galveston, is closed because of water and wind damage. Health officials already are seeing a spate of hurricane-related injuries and illnesses.

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Lost and hoping to find: Ernest Coronel, of the Los Angeles branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, searches Thursday for missing pets in a neighborhood destroyed by Hurricane Ike in Galveston, Texas.



Donations: A man with two young helpers carries food and supplies distributed Thursday at the University of Houston.

Outages continue far beyond Texas

The Associated Press

Utility crews will work into the weekend to restore power to about 800,000 homes and businesses still in the dark, days after remnants of Hurricane Ike tore through the nation's midsection.

Residents in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and Pennsylvania are trying to get back to normal after Sunday's rain and windstorms 1,000 miles or more from where Hurricane Ike struck Galveston, Houston and the Texas coast with 110 mph winds.

Remnants of Ike
 Many communities in the path of Hurricane Ike are still without power.



Ike's death toll in the USA stands at 56, including 22 in Texas. At least seven deaths were in Ohio and two in Kentucky. There is still fear that more Texas victims could be found. After Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, bodies continued to turn up for more than a year.

"It's very much unknown," said Galveston County Medical Examiner Stephen Pustilnik. "There are large parts of the county that haven't been searched. Just like