



Frequently Asked Questions

About the Orange County Public Health Reserve Corps

What is the Orange County Public Health Reserve Corps?

The Orange County Public Health Reserve Corps (PHRC) is a federally funded Medical Reserve Corps Unit that organizes community members and professionals to serve as volunteers during public health emergencies and for ongoing public health initiatives.

What is the PHRC's mission?

The PHRC exists to provide trained and credentialed medical and non-medical volunteers for increased response capacity during public health emergencies and for ongoing public health programs offered by the Orange County Health Department and its community partners.

Why does the Health Department need volunteers?

In the event of a public health emergency, the capabilities of the Health Department's primary responders may become overwhelmed, especially after the first 12 to 72 hours. Medical and non-medical volunteers would be needed to assist in the response.

What is the chain-of-command for the PHRC?

Typically, the Orange County Health Director informs the Public Health Preparedness Coordinator of a need for volunteers. The Public Health Preparedness Coordinator will inform the Volunteer Coordinator and the Volunteer Coordinator will send a request to PHRC Volunteers.

What is the PHRC's organizational structure?

The Health Department's Volunteer Coordinator and Public Health Preparedness Coordinator oversee the PHRC. The Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for volunteer recruitment, credential verification, development of volunteer role descriptions, coordinating trainings, and ensuring successful deployment and placement of volunteers. In general, the Public Health Preparedness Coordinator oversees training and supervision of volunteer nurses.

Volunteers are divided into three groups based on the roles they could fulfill in public health emergency response, non-emergency public health programs, and outreach programs with partner agencies.

Description of volunteer groups is as follows:

- ❑ **Group A Volunteers** - Have medical or mental health credentials and active professional licensure that are currently practicing in their profession. Examples of these professionals include, but are not limited to: Registered Nurse, Pharmacist, Social Worker, Physicians
- ❑ **Group B Volunteers** - Have medical or mental health credentials but no or inactive licensure. Also includes volunteers with medical or mental health credentials and active professional licensure that have not been practicing in their profession for five or more years/or do not possess the skill level to perform clinical duties without specific training or supervision. Volunteers in this group who maintain their professional license can provide support services to clinical activities or can be specifically trained and supervised on tasks requiring licensure. Examples of these professionals include, but are not limited to unlicensed nurses, students, and retired medical professionals.
- ❑ **Group C Volunteers** – Have no medical or mental health credentials. These volunteers can perform support and administrative duties. Examples include, but are not limited to: administrative personnel, Health Educators, Childcare Specialists, and Interpreters.

What is O.C.E.A.N?

O.C.E.A.N is the acronym for Orange County Emergency Activated Nurses. This is the nursing unit of the PHRC.

How is my personal and professional information stored?

The data you supplied on your registration form is entered into the program's password-protected database, which is maintained by the Volunteer Coordinator. Your registration form is stored in a locked file cabinet in the program office. The Orange County Health Department's Public Health Preparedness Coordinator, Risk Management and Quality Improvement Coordinator, and Health Director also have access to your information for instances when the Corps needs to be contacted or activated and the Volunteer Coordinator is unavailable. Your information is not shared with outside sources.

How will my credentials be verified and why?

Professional's credentials are verified through state licensing boards. We do this to ensure that only qualified persons provide care. Reminder letters are mailed to volunteers whose license is expected to expire within the next 30 days. Volunteers with inactive professional licenses can still volunteer, but they will be unable to provide professional services placing them in the **Group B Volunteer** category.

What is the time commitment?

We ask that PHRC Volunteers attend the provided trainings, as well as any activities offered. In the event that the PHRC is activated, services during emergencies would require volunteer flexibility and commitment, usually on a 24-hour/day schedule. The expected time commitment of volunteers will depend on the scale of the public health emergency, training activity or on-going health program that you wish to participate in. We would ask that you commit to serve throughout the event, but your availability to volunteer is up to you.

What type of emergency will a PHRC volunteer be needed for?

PHRC Volunteers may be called to help after a public health emergency occurs in the county. Volunteers may also be called upon to help with emergencies in neighboring counties and other states if severe enough. Examples of these events might include:

- Emergencies resulting from the release of chemical or bioterrorist agents
- Communicable disease outbreaks
- Natural disasters (hurricanes, ice storms, tornadoes)
- Mass trauma (if the hospital requests assistance)
- Emergencies requiring prolonged public sheltering

How will volunteers be notified of an emergency?

Program staff may utilize the following methods to activate the Corps within 24 hours of event response:

- Telephone
- Pager
- E-mail
- Radio Alerts
- Television Alerts



We are in the process of developing a volunteer notification system called a call-down tree, in which, select volunteers will be responsible for contacting a group of volunteers using the means stated above and notifying them of the need to mobilize. **If there has been a major disaster and you have not yet been contacted, please listen to WCHL 1360 AM for information on where volunteers are to report.** Other local radio and television stations may also be utilized.

What are the mobilization procedures for emergency response?

Volunteers will be notified and, if needed, will be asked to report to the incident's staging area. The staging area is the core component of emergency response. This is where volunteers check-in, receive their badge and are briefed on the situation and their duties.

When reporting to a staging area, volunteers should bring the following items:

- Driver's License or other photo identification
- Expired professional license if a renewal copy has not been sent

- Personal preparedness bag (72-hour bag – i.e. change of clothes, personal medications, toiletry items, emergency contact information)

Volunteers should not bring the following items:

- Active professional license already on-file with the PHRC
- Pets
- Children
- Valuables (bring only a small amount of cash, i.e. \$10 to \$20)

When would a volunteer be needed in an emergency?

Local emergencies can quickly overwhelm the capacity of the health department staff. PHRC volunteers may be called to assist in the immediate response or after the first 24 hours. PHRC volunteers may also be contacted to assist with public health emergencies in other NC counties or states.

Do I have to respond to a call for volunteers?

No, the Orange County Health Department understands that volunteers may have personal or professional interests that conflict with program activities. The decision to mobilize, attend trainings, or participate in community outreach is yours to make. However, we ask that volunteers do all they can to prepare for public health emergency response, such as having a family disaster plan, and identifying family members or friends that could care for children or pets so you can be free to help in the response.

When needed during an emergency, should I respond to my employer's or the PHRC's request?

Volunteers should respond to their employer's request first.

How will volunteers be assigned to duties during an emergency?

Volunteer assignment during an emergency will be based on the particular needs of that event. Whatever the case, your credentials and skills will be matched to the event's needs and the Incident Commander or Command Staff will assign you to an activity.

I'm not interested in public health emergency response. How else I can participate in this program?

Yes, the PHRC works with other community leaders in the county and Health Department to identify local public health needs and gaps that volunteers could help fill.

Is there volunteer liability coverage?

Yes. When providing volunteer service, volunteers are protected through three means:

- 1) **Orange County Liability Policy** – states that the actions of volunteers would be protected as long as services provided are within the volunteer's scope of duty and are not negligent. Also protects the volunteer if they are properly licensed, certified and authorized to perform activities.
- 2) **State of North Carolina's Good Samaritan Law** – State law that exists to protect those who assist victims of an accident or crime.
- 3) **US Volunteer Protection Act** – Federal act that protects volunteers if the act or omission was within the volunteer's scope of duties and responsibilities. Also protects the volunteer if they are properly licensed, certified and authorized to perform activities.

Are volunteers compensated for their services?

Volunteers are not monetarily compensated for their time and services.

Where is my photo ID badge?

Your PHRC identification badge remains stored in the program office. The Volunteer Coordinator or your preceptor will issue your badge when you arrive at the designated staging area or placement site.



What training resources are available to volunteers?

The PHRC holds trainings in various public health emergency topics. Your professional background and skills set will determine the trainings that are offered to you. All volunteers are expected to attend training on the Incident Command System. This is the organizational system that the Orange County Health Department and other government agencies participating in response efforts will use when responding to an incident.

In general, the following trainings are provided to volunteers:

- Nurses - mass care sheltering; mass medication dispensing and vaccination
- Pharmacists/Pharmacy Technicians - mass medication dispensing and vaccination
- Social Workers/Mental Health Providers - mass care sheltering and disaster mental health
- Non-medical volunteers: mass care sheltering; mass medication dispensing and vaccination
- **All volunteers will receive “just in time” training on their assigned role at the time of the event**

I am not a health professional, what can I do as a PHRC volunteer?

Members of the community are encouraged to volunteer in a manner that is appropriate to their skills and training. Persons with no health experience are unable to provide clinical services during an emergency. You can, however, help with administrative and other essential support functions. You can also help provide preparedness education in the community.

Are volunteers recognized for their contributions?

YES! All PHRC volunteers are recognized annually for their commitment in a Volunteer Recognition Ceremony.



Is there a job description for my volunteer role?

Yes, there is a job description for your role. PHRC Information Packets created after February 2005 contain a job description. If you don't have one, contact the Volunteer Coordinator to request this.

How can I contact the Volunteer Coordinator?

Amanda Bartolomeo can be reached by phone at 919-245-2388 or e-mail at abartolomeo@co.orange.nc.us

Is there a PHRC web site?

Yes, please visit our website at www.co.orange.nc.us/health/BecomeAVolunteer.asp

We also have a profile page at the Medical Reserve Corps homepage that lists our membership statistics and past activities. Visit www.medicalreservecorps.gov -> Find MRC Units -> North Carolina -> Orange County Public Health Reserve Corps.

Is there a PHRC newsletter?

Yes. We send our quarterly newsletter, *To the Corps*, to active volunteers and persons expressing interest in the program to keep them apprised of program and Health Department activities.

For more information:

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