

The Pediatrician's Role in Disaster Preparedness (RE9702)

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine

ABSTRACT. This statement provides pediatricians with an overall view of disasters and disaster management and delineates the role of the pediatrician in disaster preparedness.

ABBREVIATIONS. FEMA, Federal Emergency Management Agency; AAP, American Academy of Pediatrics; EMS, Emergency Medical Services.

Dealing with disasters is not a day-to-day occurrence. Since 1987 events such as the bombing in Oklahoma City; hurricanes Hugo, Iniki, and Andrew; and the Loma Prieta and Northridge earthquakes have provided a perspective on the needs of children and the challenges facing pediatricians in event of disasters[1-4]

DISASTER TYPES, MAGNITUDE, PREPAREDNESS, AND MANAGEMENT

A *disaster* is an event that destroys property, includes injury and/or loss of life, and affects a large population or area. Disasters are usually described as natural, including earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, and floods; and man-made, including fire, mass transportation incidents, environmental toxins, and civil unrest. More narrowly defined and distinct are mass casualty incidents. Events that cause large numbers of injuries but do not threaten or harm large segments of the community.[5-7]

The effects of each disaster are different. Considerations are given to the size of the area involved, the extent of damage, and the effect on community resources. The extent of damage includes the physical injury to persons and damage to property, especially destruction of infrastructure (roadways, bridges, and communication lines). The effects on community resources include the absence of electricity, gas, sanitation, and potable water; the necessity for portable shelters; and the potential for recurrence (eg, earthquakes with aftershocks).[1,8]

The planning for and response to disasters traditionally have been the responsibilities of federal, state, and local governments. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is involved in declared national emergencies, providing Disaster Medical Assistant Teams (DMATs). [2,9,10] Other federal agencies include the Department of Transportation, Department of Defense, Department of Housing and Urban