

Becoming a Private Medication Center

Partnering with Public Health to Dispense Emergency
Medications to Employees, Patients/Clients, and their Families



Public Health Emergency: What to Expect?

Your local health department plans for and responds to a wide range of public health emergencies, including severe weather, chemical spills and accidents, terrorist attacks, and communicable disease outbreaks. In planning for and responding to a disease outbreak or pandemic, your local health department must account for a number of variables, such as how the disease spreads, when the disease was first noticed in the population, and if there are any preventative measures such as medications or vaccines that could be used to treat and prevent people from getting sick. Your local health department takes these factors and many more into consideration when forming its emergency preparedness and response plans. As the potential threats to public health become increasingly varied and complex, your local health department is relying on partners from the healthcare, government, nonprofit, and private sectors to join the planning process and pledge to help dispense emergency medications to their employees, patients/clients, and families during a public health emergency.

Your local health department has developed a tiered medication and vaccination strategy that can be activated depending on the number of affected individuals or groups in your community. For example, a targeted dispensing strategy calls for dispensing medications or administering vaccines to specific individuals or at-risk groups to prevent or treat an infection, whereas a mass dispensing strategy involves operating on a larger scale to dispense medications or administer vaccines to the general population. Beyond the size of the population they must reach, these dispensing strategies also account for how quickly medications are needed. Some diseases necessitate dispensing medications to affected population in a very short time frame, possibly as soon as 48 hours after infection.

Private Medication Centers play an important part in these dispensing strategies. A Private Medication Center is a location operated by a healthcare, government, nonprofit, or private organization where lifesaving medications are dispensed to an affected population during a public health emergency like a disease outbreak or a terrorist attack. Large employers or organizations that agree to become Private Medication Centers will dispense medications to their employees, patients/clients, and employees' family members and help ensure that all who need them receive emergency medications within a short amount of time. Unlike Public Medication

Centers, which are directly operated by your local health department or pharmacy, Private Medication Centers are not open to the general public.

For incidents that require a larger sustained response, your local health department may not have enough medication on-hand to dispense to the entire affected population. When this is the case, the state health department can request assistance from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS), a federally managed supply of medications, vaccines, and medical supplies intended for use during a public health emergency. Within 12 to 24 hours, resources from the SNS can be deployed anywhere in the United States or its territories to supplement and re-supply state and local health supplies. Through their local health departments, Private Medication Centers are eligible to receive supplies, including medications, from the SNS.



Why Become a Private Medication Center?

Your local health department invites your organization to become part of a growing network of large employers, healthcare organizations and businesses across the Puget Sound region that will serve as Private Medication Centers. A diverse set of organizations are choosing to become Private Medication Centers and be better prepared for a public health emergency.

There are a number of benefits to becoming a Private Medication Center:

- **Workforce health and safety:** Your employees will be able to receive lifesaving medications directly from your organization, potentially shortening the amount of time it would otherwise take them to receive medications at a Public Medication Center. During a public health emergency, employees are also concerned about the health, safety, and protection of their loved ones. Family members will form the support structure that allows your staff to continue working as the community endures and recovers from a public health emergency. For this reason, we recommend that you also plan to include employees' families in your covered population. Family members do not need to visit your office or workplace to receive medications. An employee's family members can fill out medication screening forms from home, and the employee can pick up medications for his or her entire family. Becoming a Private Medication Center is also a great way to increase employee goodwill and loyalty.



- **Continuity of operations:** Providing medications to employees at their workplace eliminates the need for them to visit a Public Medication Center. During a public health emergency, the healthcare system may be overwhelmed with a surge of patients. By avoiding having to stand in line at a doctor's office or a public dispensing site, your employees will be able to return to work sooner, allowing your organization to keep operations up and running during a public health emergency. Your organization will be able to continue to carry out its essential functions and provide goods and services to the public and/or your clients. Specifically for healthcare organizations that choose to become Private Medication Centers, you will be able to dispense emergency medications directly to your patients, guaranteeing continuity of care.
- **No cost:** Your organization will receive emergency medications from your local health department to dispense to the covered population within your organization's Private Medication Center Plan. These medications are provided free of charge.
- **Immunity from liability:** During a public health emergency, your organization, including your employees and volunteers, are protected by the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act of 2005¹. The PREP Act is federal legislation that protects individuals, companies, and organizations from liability if they have an agreement in place with their local health department to dispense medications during a public health emergency. This protection against liability covers both those who have a license to dispense medication and those who do not, so long as they are adhering to the program and have not shown willful misconduct, or intent to harm others.

A Diverse Workforce

Our workplaces are strengthened by the diversity of cultures, languages, and abilities represented in our workforce. As an operator of a Private Medication Center, it is important to develop a plan tailored to the unique demographics and needs of your workforce. Your local health department will support you in developing a plan that meets the functional and access needs of your workforce through strategies such as language interpretation, translated materials, ADA accessible facilities, and culturally

¹ Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Retrieved July 23, 2015 from <http://www.phe.gov/preparedness/legal/prepact/pages/default.aspx>

appropriate messages. This approach will look different for each organization based on the composition of your workforce.



Establishing Responsibilities

Public Health Responsibilities

Your local health department will work closely with your organization to ensure that you have the necessary information and resources to establish a Private Medication Center. As with all preparedness activities, the more we communicate and exercise our response plans now, the more effectively we will respond if a public health emergency occurs.

Local Health Department Responsibilities

- Provide technical assistance, including but not limited to sample Private Medication Center layouts, fact sheets, dispensing algorithms, forms, and strategies to address functional and access needs, for planning your Private Medication Center
- Notify your organization of the need to activate your Private Medication Center Plan and verify the quantity of emergency medications needed and the locations for where you will receive these medications
- Provide 24-hour emergency contact information for your local health department
- Provide medication, forms, and instructions during a public health emergency
- Provide technical assistance and oversight to effectively operate your Private Medication Center during a public health emergency
- Share situational awareness and provide media guidance during a public health emergency to ensure consistent messaging between your organization and your covered population
- Collect any unused medications as well as copies of all medical documentation after the dispensing process has been completed and the Private Medication Center has been deactivated

Your Organization's Responsibilities

Your local health department will help you plan and operate your Private Medication Center, but there are also steps you must take in advance of and during a public health emergency. Responsibilities include the following:

- Complete an enrollment form or Memorandum of Agreement with your local health department agreeing to become a Private Medication Center
- Complete a Private Medication Center Information Sheet that contains contact information for your organization and the number of individuals (employees, employees' families, volunteers, etc.) that are a part of your dispensing plan and update this form annually
- Identify your facilities that will be receiving deliveries of medications and supplies and communicate these sites to your local health department
- Activate your plan during a public health emergency at the request of your local health department
- Receive and store medications and supplies at your facilities during a public health emergency
- Provide education materials supplied by your local health department to all individuals receiving medications
- Conduct a basic screening of individuals receiving medications based on guidance from your local health department
- Dispense medications to your covered population and maintain accurate records of medications dispensed and your inventory levels
- Secure any unused medications until a time when your local health department can make arrangements for retrieval or disposal
- Provide updates regarding your ongoing dispensing operations to your local health department during a public health emergency
- Participate in sponsored mass dispensing training and exercises

Requirements to be Eligible to Receive Medication

There are two ways your organization can access medications during a public health emergency. Your local health department has developed criteria to determine the ways medications will be picked up by or distributed to your organization.

Ways to Access Medications

- A direct shipment of medications to your organization's central delivery site
- A pre-arranged pick-up at a designated location operated by your local health department

How to Qualify for Direct Shipment

- Have a covered population of 1,000 or more individuals per your dispensing plan
- Have the ability to receive medications at a central delivery site and distribute across multiple sites (if your organization has more than one branch or campus) in Western Washington
- Have a signed enrollment form or Memorandum of Agreement on file with your local health department

How to Qualify for a Pre-Arranged Pick-Up

- Have the ability to dispense medications to your covered population per your dispensing plan
- Have someone designated to pick up medications for your organization and provide his or her information to your local health department
- Have a signed enrollment form or Memorandum of Agreement on file with your local health department

Plan Development Checklist

Developing a Private Medication Center Plan to dispense medications to a large number of people can at first glance appear extremely challenging, especially for non-health professionals. Your local health department understands the challenges you face and is committed to walking you through the process, step-by-step, to help your organization develop a comprehensive, responsive Private Medication Center Plan. Your planning process will include:

Appointing a Planning Committee

- Consider including human resources personnel, continuity managers, logistics specialists, security staff, and a liaison from your local health department

Determining Your Covered Population

- Decide who your plan will cover, including if it will accommodate employees' families, to estimate the amount of medication your organization will receive
- Define the term "family member" (reported to the IRS, household members, etc.)

Determining Staffing and Structure

- Develop a staffing plan for operating your dispensing site(s) using existing employees and volunteers

Identifying a Dispensing Site and Designing your Floor Plan

- Identify a site that can be used for dispensing medications and storing supplies
- Design a floor plan that is able to serve your covered population, including individuals with access and functional needs
- Identify and purchase common supplies that would be used at your dispensing site, such as tables and chairs

Determining Security Needs & Capabilities

- Consider your current security resources and capabilities and determine if additional security would be needed during a public health emergency in order to protect your facility and staff

Developing Dispensing Plans & Procedures

- Use your Private Medication Center Planning Workbook, provided by your local health department, to prepare your dispensing plans and procedures

Developing Communication & Messaging Systems

- Establish an awareness campaign that informs your employees of your organization's role as a Private Medication Center and your partnership with your local health department
- Prepare activation and informational messages before a public health emergency so that your organization can quickly communicate with your covered population
- Educate your employees on your Private Medication Center Plan



Interested in Becoming a Private Medication Center?

Please contact your local health department for more information on enrollment and the planning process. If you are a pharmacy and have signed the Washington Statewide Pharmacy Memorandum of Understanding, you are already enrolled. Healthcare facilities are also already enrolled.

Points of Contact:

King County

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Thank You

Your local health department would like to thank you for taking the time to examine these materials and taking the first step toward becoming a Private Medication Center. By developing long-lasting partnerships between government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private businesses, our community will be better prepared to respond to a public health emergency.

Your local health department is prepared to protect citizens from the health impacts of a wide range of emergencies and disasters. We utilize a whole community approach to improve our capabilities and better understand roles and responsibilities. Your participation as a Private Medication Center is essential to this whole community approach and will help prevent disease, illness, and death during a public health emergency.



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How much does it cost to become a Private Medication Center?

A: During a public health emergency, your organization will receive emergency medications from your local health department to dispense to the covered population within your organization's Private Medication Center Plan. These medications are provided free of charge. Your organization will develop its own Private Medication Center Plan with the assistance of your local health department.

Q: When would we be asked to activate our Private Medication Center Plan?

A: During a disease outbreak, your local health department's dispensing strategy is to maximize the efficiency of the existing pharmacy and healthcare infrastructure to meet the medication needs of the affected population. However, if a public health emergency becomes a community-wide incident, your local health department may ask your organization to activate its Private Medication Center Plan and request you to stand ready to receive and dispense medications.

Q: How will we be notified during an incident?

A: Your local health department will use multiple mechanisms to communicate with your organization during a public health emergency. All Private Medication Centers are asked to provide contacts that can be included into our emergency notification system. The notification system sends messages through multiple channels, including email, SMS text, and voicemail. Regular communication will occur throughout the public health emergency, and conference calls will be scheduled so that you can receive briefings on the situation and ongoing guidance and instructions.

Q: Who should work at our dispensing sites?

A: Employees or volunteers who are knowledgeable about your organization's facilities and personnel usually make the best fits to staff your dispensing operations. If your organization has an occupational health and safety office, these employees are also good candidates to work at your dispensing site(s). Additional staffing guidance and tools are made available in your Private Medication Center Workbook and through your local health department.

Q: How do I cover employees who commute long distances to and from work?

A: As a Private Medication Center, you should expect to provide medications to all employees and possibly others, including employees' families. Medications should be made available to long-distance commuters, but these employees are not required to go to your dispensing site(s) to receive medications. It may be more convenient for these employees to instead visit an open or public medication center closer to their residences. In any case, you should still plan to dispense medications to each and every employee.

Q: What happens after dispensing operations are completed?

A: After your Private Medication Center has completed its operations, you will need to return or submit the following to your local health department:

- Any unused medications, which will then be returned to a cache or destroyed
- Copies of all health assessment and screening forms
- Copies of any incident reports

Your local health department keeps record of all dispensing records in the event of an adverse reaction or if additional follow up is needed. Dispensing records are kept safe and secure, and your local health department is bound by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) to protect patients' identifiable information. Dispensing records will only be retrieved if there is a need to do so, and only a small number of public health employees will be authorized to access these records.

Q: Are there any legal risks to becoming a Private Medication Center?

A: If you complete the process of becoming a Private Medication Center, your organization, including your employees and volunteers, are protected by the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act of 2005. The PREP Act is federal legislation that protects individuals, companies, and organizations from liability if they have an agreement in place with their local health department to dispense medications during a public health emergency. The PREP Act goes into effect upon an official declaration signed by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. The PREP Act specifically refers to people and organizations participating in a Private Medication Center as "program planners" who "supervise or administers a program to administer, dispense, distribute, provide or use" medications and assets from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). This protection against liability covers both those who have a license to dispense

medication and those who do not, so long as they are adhering to the program and have not shown willful misconduct, or intent to harm others.

