



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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In reply, please refer to:
File:

August 24, 2023

MEDICAL ADVISORY: MAUI FIRES—INFORMATION FOR PROVIDERS

The devastating fires on Maui have caused severe loss of life, injuries, and taken a severe emotional toll. Clinicians are advised to take the following actions:

- Proactively offer behavioral health care to those in need. Patients can access Hawaii CARES 24/7 by calling, texting, or chatting 988.
- Advise patients that debris and ash resulting from the fires presents physical and environmental health hazards; refer to DOH hazard advisory fact sheet for more specific information and guidance.
- Infectious hazards may also be present; encourage patients to stay up to date on COVID-19, flu, and other routinely recommended vaccines, and be on the alert for and report suspected vector borne diseases. Do not delay COVID-19 vaccination for those who are eligible and at risk.
- Healthcare services in West Maui are constantly changing as needs and capacity change.

Dear Healthcare Provider:

The Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) continues to provide services to Maui residents impacted by the August 2023 Maui wildfires and is marshalling resources from across the department to support the disaster response.

DOH would like to thank medical providers from across the state who are supporting our Maui community. This medical advisory provides guidance for these efforts. DOH will continue to coordinate closely with community, county, state, and federal partners and is committed to its mission to protect the health and environment for all people in Hawaii.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH:

The behavioral health impacts from the Maui fires are severe. Teams from DOH, the State Office of Wellness and Resilience, Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Red Cross, and many community organizations have been working to address the emergent behavioral health needs on Maui. However, behavioral health impacts are likely to be prolonged and may not reveal themselves for weeks or months after the disaster. Please consider proactively offering behavioral health care for your patients in need.

Current services are available from DOH at the Maui Community Mental Health Center in Wailuku and the Lāhainā Comprehensive Health Center, as well as limited services at hotels serving as non-congregate shelters. Efforts are underway to expand tele-psych capability. Please also share the Hawaii Coordinated Access Resource Entry System (CARES) crisis line with your patients. The Hawaii CARES crisis line can be accessed 24/7 by calling, texting, or chatting 988.

Behavioral health impacts from this event are not limited to people who lost loved ones or homes in the fire. Healthcare providers are at high risk of exhaustion, burnout, and other mental health conditions after a disaster. Please seek behavioral health support for yourself. Behavioral health support can be accessed via the sites listed above, your health insurance or by calling, texting, or chatting Hawaii CARES at 988.

DEBRIS AND ASH HAZARDS:

Debris and ash from the fires present physical and environmental hazards that may endanger people who return to the burned areas in Kula and Lāhainā. Debris can cause injuries and wounds and structures may be unstable leading to falls and crush injuries. Debris and ash contain toxic contaminants from the burned buildings including asbestos, lead, arsenic and other heavy metals and organic chemicals. In addition to the toxic contaminants, exposure to ash can cause irritation to eyes, nose, throat, and lungs. Anyone entering the burned areas should take precautions to prevent exposure to ash and toxic contaminants including wearing an N95 mask, goggles, long sleeves, pants, socks, and shoes. Children and pregnant people are at higher risk from the debris hazards and should not help with clean-up efforts. Clothes should be changed prior to interacting with children, pregnant people, or other at-risk groups.

Ash present in areas near the burned zones should be carefully cleaned while wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). Note that soil may be contaminated from chemicals in the ash and children should be prevented from playing in soil with ash.

For more information please see [DOH's hazard advisory fact sheet](#).

For additional questions about environmental or toxic exposures related to the Maui Fires, you or your patients can call the Hawaii Poison Center 24/7 at 800-222-1222.

INFECTIOUS HAZARDS:

Respiratory Diseases

COVID-19 cases have been steadily increasing statewide for the last few months, with early indications of a further increase in cases on Maui based on the [latest COVID-19 reporting data](#) as of August 23, 2023. Displacement of persons, sheltering, and decreased access to basic goods and services has created conditions that are likely to result in significant localized outbreaks. With the onset of flu season, there is high concern that infectious respiratory illnesses on Maui will cause significant morbidity this fall and winter. The Hawaii DOH and partners are conducting surveillance and offering vaccinations to displaced persons. Please encourage vaccination against COVID-19 and influenza to minimize the impacts of these illnesses on the health care system.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is tracking a new variant of COVID-19, BA.2.86, which has been detected in the continental United States and internationally. Early reports on the new variant suggest it is highly transmissible, but it is too early to know whether or not it causes more severe disease or will respond differently to vaccines. Hawaii State Laboratories Division continues to conduct active surveillance for new [COVID-19 variants](#). BA.2.86 has not yet been detected in Hawaii. An updated COVID-19 booster anticipated to be released in mid-late September is designed to provide increased protection against recent Omicron variant strains. However, for individuals 65 and older and those with [certain underlying conditions](#), being recently vaccinated (within the last 4 months, or at provider's discretion for those who are immunocompromised) is more important for protection against severe disease than the specific formulation of vaccine received. Staying up to date on COVID-19 and flu vaccines is also important for people who may be exposed to crowded or congregate settings.

Vector-borne Diseases

Flea-borne (murine) typhus is considered endemic in Hawaii. In the last 10 years locally acquired cases have been reported in all counties with most being reported on the island of Maui. Infected fleas of rats, cats and other animal reservoirs transmit the disease through flea bites and flea dirt. Cases typically occur in areas where people and infected rats occupy the same building or space. Pets can also come in contact with fleas that carry typhus and transmit the fleas to people and other animals. One to two weeks from exposure typical symptoms include abrupt onset of fever, headache and myalgias. Rash occurs in 50-80% of patients but typically is not present at initial presentation. Renal and respiratory failure, aseptic meningitis, or septic shock, while not common can occur. Early recognition and prompt initiation of effective treatment can prevent these worst outcomes. Laboratory confirmation may require repeat testing and take several weeks. Doxycycline is the drug of choice for treatment of suspected or confirmed flea-borne typhus; treatment should not be delayed awaiting convalescent serologies or other laboratory testing. Any suspect cases should be reported on a routine basis to the DOH Disease Reporting Line and be managed in consultation with clinicians expert in diagnosis and management of murine typhus including infectious disease specialists. Additional resources from CDC and DOH about murine typhus and preventing flea bites are listed below.

[Flea-borne \(murine\) typhus | Typhus Fevers | CDC](#)

[Murine Typhus | Disease Outbreak Control Division \(hawaii.gov\)](#)

[Preventing Flea Bites | Fleas | CDC](#)

Debris and standing water in the impacted areas has the potential to increase the risk of mosquito borne diseases. Response efforts including debris removal and vector control activities in the impacted are underway to prevent emergence of these conditions. While dengue has not been locally transmitted in Hawaii in recent years, providers should remain alert for and promptly report to the DOH any travel-associated vector-borne diseases such as dengue. This facilitates vector control activities which can prevent outbreaks from occurring. Suspected cases of vector-borne disease should be reported urgently to the DOH Disease Reporting Line.

Disease Reporting

Maui

Phone: (808) 984-8213

After hours, weekends, and holidays report to: 1-800-360-2575

O'ahu

Phone: (808) 586-4586

After hours on Oahu (Physician's Exchange): (808) 600-3625 or Toll Free 1-800-360-2575

Hawai'i

Phone: (808) 933-0912

Kaua'i

Phone: (808) 241-3563

HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN WEST MAUI:

The DOH has been coordinating health care services in West Maui. DOH's Lāhainā Health Center provides general medical care, prescription refills, and mental health services and is open seven days a week. The clinic is located on Ākoakoa Place, below the Lāhainā Civic Center. No appointment is necessary for clinic services and insurance is not required. Mobile health care teams are also operating at the shelter hotels and at community sites throughout West Maui.

VOLUNTEERING HEALTH CARE SERVICES:

There has been a tremendous outpouring of support for the people of Maui from all over the world. Thousands of health care providers have volunteered their services to help. DOH is coordinating volunteer medical services along with multiple community partners. If you are a health care provider and interested in volunteering, please visit <https://health.hawaii.gov/mauiwildfires> and fill out the online form.

The full scope of the needs for the people affected by the fires is still unfolding. We appreciate the hard work to care for all people of Hawaii and to support Maui in this challenging and sad time. Please visit <https://health.hawaii.gov/mauiwildfires> for more resources. Please also consider the importance of caring for yourself so you can care for others.

Sincerely,



Diana Felton, MD
Chief, Communicable Disease &
Public Health Nursing Division



Sarah K. Kemble, MD
State Epidemiologist