



Department of Health

1 Geneva Road, Brewster, New York 10509
(845) 808-1390



MaryEllen Odell
County Executive

Michael J. Nesheiwat, M.D.
Interim Commissioner of Health

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Contact: Barbara Ilardi, Public Information Officer, (845) 808-1390

National Preparedness Month Observed for Fourteenth Year; “Prep Rally” Teaches Children How to Be Safe

BREWSTER, NY — Hurricane Harvey, like others before it, shows how challenging—and yet important—it is to plan for emergencies. This September, National Preparedness Month focuses on planning. The overarching theme is “Disasters Don’t Plan Ahead. You Can.” In Putnam County, the 14th annual observance is being promoted by the Putnam County Community Resilience Coalition (CRC), composed of agencies from the public, private and non-profit sectors that work year-round to build a strong foundation to ensure the safety and well-being of children before, during and after disasters.

“The safety of Putnam residents is always our county’s top priority,” said County Executive MaryEllen Odell. “Collaboration among many organizations makes this happen—emergency responders and our Bureau of Emergency Services, law enforcement, highway department workers, social services and the health department. When it comes to our children, the most vulnerable members of our community, we do everything we can to ensure their safety and protection. Building community resilience is crucial.”

To teach young children about emergency preparedness—in a fun, non-threatening way—the CRC has spearheaded efforts to bring the “Prep Rally” to after-school programs and daycare centers throughout the county. Created by Save the Children, the free program is designed to teach children, grades pre-K to 5, the basics of emergency preparedness through fun, engaging games and activities. By practicing a catchy song and dance called the “Prep Step,” children learn how to recognize risks, plan ahead and gather emergency supplies.

“Supporting the work of the CRC helps strengthen our infrastructure and our resilience,” says interim Health Commissioner Michael J. Nesheiwat, MD. “The first step is to plan for yourself and your family. It doesn’t have to be complicated. Create a list of emergency contacts and share them among family members and close friends. Adding to, or updating your emergency supplies at home, is another easy step. These are simple things nearly everyone can do.”

Taking these initial steps is much easier with some online help at www.ready.gov and www.savethechildren.org/getready, which has all of the resources for the Prep Rally program, including tip sheets for parents. A super simple tool for families to write an emergency plan is the “Preparedness Wizard” from The National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University’s Earth Institute. Find it at <http://bit.ly/prepwizv2>.

“Getting accurate information during an event is also important,” says Anthony Sutton, Commissioner of the Bureau of Emergency Services (BES), “You can sign up for free local and state emergency messages from NY Alert.” Real-time information about current threats can be sent to a cell phone. You pick the alerts you want and delivery by email or text. You can cancel or change at any time. Your personal information is completely protected and never shared. Sign up at www.nyalert.gov.

“Residents who want, and are in the position to do more, should consider joining the Medical Reserve Corps,” says Dr. Nesheiwat. “We still need all types of volunteers, both non-medical and medical. Help is always needed in particular with logistical support or administrative tasks.” Interested residents can find out more information by visiting the Putnam County website or calling the health department at 845-808-1390.

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The mission of the **PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (PCDOH)** is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit the PCDOH website at www.putnamcountyny.com/health or visit the social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter [@PutnamHealthNY](https://twitter.com/PutnamHealthNY).

The **COMMUNITY RESILIENCE COALITION (CRC)** is a community-based partnership of public, private and not-for-profit stakeholder groups working together to assess and strengthen community resilience to support the protection and recovery of children in the event of an emergency. It is part of the Resilient Children, Resilient Communities initiative, led by the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University’s Earth Institute in partnership with Save the Children, funded by a grant from the biopharmaceutical healthcare company, GSK. For more information, visit www.putnamcountyny.com/health/community-resilience-coalition.

The **BUREAU OF EMERGENCY SERVICES OF PUTNAM COUNTY** keeps county residents safe from harm, by providing services to all fire, EMS and related emergency management initiatives. This includes training and equipping special teams for fire investigation, fire police response and hazardous materials mitigation, and a credible assessment team (CAT). Additionally the BES maintains a countywide communications system and continually seeks ways to improve response to both natural and manmade disasters. For more information, please visit the Bureau of Emergency Services website at www.putnamcountyny.com/pcbes/.

The **PUTNAM COUNTY MEDICAL RESERVE CORPS (MRC)** recruits and trains volunteers to support and strengthen the county’s existing response system. Its mission is to engage volunteers to strengthen public health, emergency response and community resiliency. Local community-based MRCs mobilize volunteers who donate their time and expertise, not only to prepare for and respond to emergencies, but also to promote healthy living throughout the year. For further information, please visit the MRC at www.putnamcountyny.com/health/mrc/.

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