



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
Division of Health Care Quality
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Circular Letter: DHCQ 13-2-585

TO: Chief Executive Officers, Massachusetts Acute Care Hospitals
EMS Regional Directors

FROM: Madeleine Biondolillo, MD, Director, BHCSQ
Jamie Pianka, Director, Office of Emergency Medical Services
Iyah Romm, DPH, Special Advisor for Policy and Regulatory Affairs
Mary Clark, DPH, Director, Emergency Preparedness Bureau

SUBJECT: Hospital "Code Black" Policy

DATE: February 27, 2013

Attached are instructions for notifications to appropriate agencies during a "Code Black" event. When a hospital's Emergency Department status is "Code Black" the Emergency Department is closed to all patients (ambulance and walk-in patients) due to an internal emergency. Internal emergencies are defined as:

- minor/major damage to facilities or other events that compromise the health, safety and/or security of patients, visitors and/or staff; and
- an event that renders the Emergency Department unavailable to the public, and requires relocation or evacuation of the Emergency Department.

Examples of internal emergencies include, but are not limited to, events such as fires, explosions, hazardous material spills or releases, or other environmental contamination, flooding, power or other utility failures, bomb threats, or violent or hostile actions in the Emergency Department.

"Code Black" occurrences in Massachusetts hospitals have resulted from fires, chemical or other environmental contamination, and flooding due to broken water main pipes.

In Massachusetts, the only circumstance under which an Emergency Department may divert all incoming ambulances is when the Emergency Department is under "Code Black" status. Ambulance diversion is defined as an active statement that patients who are arriving by ambulance will not be accepted by a receiving facility.

If you have any questions about the information in this correspondence, please contact Jamie.Pianka@state.ma.us (617-753-8016) at the Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality, or Ed.Hennegan@state.ma.us (617-212-5929) at the Emergency Preparedness Bureau.

We request that you forward this circular letter and the attached Hospital Code Black Policy to the following staff at your hospital, and any others as appropriate: Chief Medical Officer, Chief of Emergency Services, Chief Nursing Officer, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator and QA Director/Risk Manager.

CC: DPH Boarding and Patient Flow Task Force