

DATE: September 6, 2005

FROM: Carefirst, Medicare Part A

TO: All Providers

SUBJECT: Emergency Instructions Associated with Hurricane Katrina

We at CMS express our deepest sympathies to those coping with Hurricane Katrina. We truly appreciate your support to the affected health care communities during this very difficult time.

Hurricane Katrina has devastated much of the telecommunications infrastructure along the Gulf Coast including MCI's New Orleans Switch for FTS Service. Medicare provider contact centers impacted by this disaster have been forced to route some or all of their telephone traffic to alternate locations which has increased the call volume at the sites receiving the calls. In response to these events, CMS is waiving the contractors with provider call centers most directly impacted by the hurricane from the completion rate and service level indicator performance requirements for the fourth quarter of FY05. The contractors waived are Arkansas BCBS, Cahaba (with the exception of the RHHI) and Trispan.

To further assist providers in the affected areas use the guidance listed below:

- Suspend cost report audits of any providers in the affected areas until further notice.
- Approve all "reasonable" provider requests for cost report extensions in the affected areas, and send the RO a copy of your approval. Also, provide the RO copies of any denials.
- Grant "reasonable" provider requests for accelerated/advance payments without the RO's prior approval, until further notice. FI's may develop an expedited process for accelerated/advance payments. FI's may waive some of the documentation requirements, when a facility is totally destroyed. Provide copies of your approval/denial letters to ROs
- Temporarily suspend any overpayment recoveries from providers that make a reasonable request until further notice. We will issue further guidance re: interest tolling/adjustment as it becomes available.

Additionally, there may be hurricane refugees who present themselves in other areas of the country and need medical attention. Valid providers calling to determine the Medicare eligibility of these individuals may not have all of the information needed to authenticate the individual and meet the privacy requirements, such as the HIC number. To enable providers to get this information, all contractors' customer service representatives are permitted to release information about beneficiary entitlement over the phone to providers

even if all of the privacy elements are not met if the providers state that the beneficiary is a hurricane refugee. If these calls are monitored for Quality Call Monitoring purposes, the Adherence to Privacy Act scorecard should be scored as Pass.

Additionally, stop sending hard copy mail, especially paper checks to the affected areas. Attached is a list of Post Offices and Zip Codes that are currently out of service in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Hold all of these materials until further notice.

CMS has posted a question and answer document on its website at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/hki> . This document will be updated periodically. All contractors must post this link on their websites and send a message out on their provider listservs notifying the provider community about the availability of the information, including the web link, no later than Tuesday, September 6th.

SOURCE: JSM 05508

THIS BULLETIN SHOULD BE SHARED WITH ALL HEALTH CARE PRACTITIONERS AND MANAGERIAL MEMBERS OF THE PROVIDER/SUPPLIER STAFF. BULLETINS ISSUED AFTER OCTOBER 1, 1999 ARE AVAILABLE FROM OUR WEBSITE AT [www.marylandmedicare.com](http://www.marylandmedicare.com)