



Behavioral Health Tips for Responders: Maintaining Calm at a POD

Assumptions:

- Receiving treatment at a point of dispensing (POD) will be an anxiety producing event for many people.
- Physical site conditions such as long lines, crowded areas, increased noise, perceived lack of personal safety, and limited access to necessities such as water, restrooms, or seating can increase distress.
- If large numbers of the public are involved, a small but significant percentage of individuals will have pre-existing behavioral health issues that make it difficult to remain calm.
- Active attention to the psychological and behavioral impact of the event and calm, consistent communication with persons to be treated will reduce individual and group anxiety.



What to Do:

- Assign staff to monitor the waiting area or line to actively communicate with persons to receive services to:
 - Provide a reassuring presence and convey that everyone will be cared for throughout the entire process;
 - Provide basic and accurate information about what to expect when they receive treatment (simple handouts, if available, are helpful);
 - Identify and intervene with persons experiencing severe psychological distress.
- Keep families or groups together and do not separate service animals from their handlers.
- Identify and provide special support to individuals deemed at higher behavioral health risk (e.g., persons with disabilities, children, older adults, pregnant women, and persons who are not able to communicate in English).
- If possible, establish “quieter” areas with seating to direct individuals experiencing extreme distress so that they do not raise overall anxiety in the environment.
- If available, direct individuals to basic necessities (e.g., water, restrooms, seating, or blankets).
- Maintain order in the waiting area or line; if persons need to leave the line for a short time, assist to save their place.

What to Say:

- Speak calmly, convey empathy, and provide basic factual information on what to expect; avoid jargon or complex language.
- Pre-scripted messaging can promote consistency, mitigate anxiety, and increase compliance. Messaging depends on the event, but may include the following:
 - Everyone will be treated; the process we are using to treat people is _____ (explain process and any reasons for treating certain people before others).
 - We are making every effort to move you all through this process quickly and efficiently. From this point in line your wait time should be _____.
 - Let me explain how the medications will be administered.
 - It’s normal to feel anxious right now, but everyone will be treated. We need to help each other stay calm.
 - We will keep families and groups together.
 - The medication we are giving you is generally well tolerated, but you may experience the following side-effects _____ (list).