This presentation was given to Medical Reserve Corps volunteers on May 18, 2017.

It is available here as a self-paced introduction to Sonoma County Health Department’s MRC Program.

Please contact us for any questions at phpreparedness@sonoma-county.org.
Sonoma County’s MRC was established in 2002 using a grant from the US Office of the Surgeon General. As part of its public health mission, the Surgeon General’s Office initiated the MRC program to assist local communities with building the extra staffing they would need to respond to health or medical needs during disasters in their communities.

When Sonoma’s MRC was originally developed, the Health Department’s goal was to build staff for mass dispensing sites in case we were ever faced with suddenly needing to dispense medication or to vaccinate large numbers of people, even up to our entire population, if necessary. Since then, as our disaster response planning has expanded, we are finding other ways that MRC volunteers can assist in supporting the health needs of our community in disaster.
In Sonoma County, because the MRC program is under the Health Department, we have focused our recruitment efforts on those who can help with health or medical services during disaster. Even with a “health” focus, we still need a wide range of skills and people, including non-licensed personnel, who can support those seeking care or needing health services or information.
Sonoma’s MRC is part of a constellation of MRC programs in local communities across the country.

MRC units perform a variety of services before, during, and after disasters. Some units are active in community service, providing blood pressure screenings or distributing information at health fairs. Some provide a range of services during local emergencies, such as vaccinating people under a local disease outbreak or providing child care to emergency responders. Some MRC units even deploy to federally declared disasters outside their area.

To read more about the MRC program and about the activities of the many MRC units, go to: https://mrc.hhs.gov/HomePage
The U.S. Surgeon General’s Medical Reserve Corps program teamed up with the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) to develop this set of core competencies that are applicable to MRC volunteers no matter what kind of assignment they might be given.

Generally speaking:

• Each MRC volunteer should have his/her own disaster plan—you need to be ready to respond.
• You should understand how you will fit in to the working structure alongside other responders wherever you are sent for duty.
• You will need to understand how to communicate with other responders and with the public.

**NOTE:** MRC are not expected to communicate with media—this is a task assigned to an official representative of the Health Dept.

• You will need to be aware of stress and mental health impacts for yourself, your working colleagues, and those you are serving, and how you can remain supportive.
• You will need to follow instructions carefully.
• You need to pay attention to your limits and work with your lead worker so that you are doing appropriate work for your skills.

The presentations given at the annual MRC Assembly provide most of the core competency information you need.

Taking FEMA’s ICS-100 online course will also provide understanding of communication, safety, and community recovery.

When you are deployed, you’ll receive more detailed information about your role, about safety, and about the delivery of health care during the response effort.
Sonoma’s MRC is made of a wide range of health professionals and non-licensed volunteers ready to be deployed by the Health Department. Even with a large base of over 300 volunteers, we know that we need to keep up recruitment efforts like this MRC Orientation.

Many of our volunteers already have jobs at health facilities and will be needed there during emergencies. Other volunteers may not be able to serve at the time. In a very large disaster having impact across our county, just the health response efforts alone could take hundreds of people working at various locations over several days to support our community.

Here is a photo of one of our early MRC orientations at the Sebastopol Veterans Building. Volunteers are invited to attend the orientation each year as a refresher and to re-establish connection with potential disaster response colleagues.
Our volunteers have to be ready to serve in a variety of roles and settings.

Training can take place in various ways:
This presentation on Sonoma MRC Roles and Responsibilities is part of several presentations given at the Orientation designed to give our MRC a foundational understanding of how MRC volunteers might serve in our area.

The Health Department offers ongoing training opportunities each year and is developing an online training resource to be used for self-paced trainings at your convenience. Please look for these announcements in your email and sign up when you can. CEUs are frequently offered.

Drills and exercises are a good way to practice what you learn in a training. The Health Department, as well as our local health facilities, all conduct exercises where MRC might have a role. Please look for email announcements for opportunities.

Finally, before an actual deployment, you will be briefed on exactly what you will need to know to do your assignment. This is called “just-in-time” training, often delivered in a “huddle,” as in this photo, with your Lead Worker giving instructions to workers on how to do your assignment.
The Health Department has responsibility to assure health care in a variety of settings during disasters.

As you have already seen, mass points of dispensing (PODs) are Public Health venues for dispensing medications or providing vaccination to protect large numbers of people. Our MRC volunteers were key to providing the H1N1 vaccine to nearly 12,000 people in 2009-2010 at five large PODs.

Another large-scale operation that health departments plan for is potentially setting up in-patient care sites that are separate from hospitals, in scenarios when hospitals are overwhelmed with patients. You can imagine that during an influenza pandemic, there could be a few thousand people with flu who would normally be admitted to hospitals. But if hospitals are full and people are too sick to go home, then alternate care sites may be set up to address this health need.
MRC volunteers might be asked to report for duty at the hospital nearest to their home. A few hospitals have established a working team of MRC volunteers from their area and invite them to exercises at their facility.

The Health Department also works with the Red Cross and others to assist with health care at evacuation shelters, such as during fires or floods, for example.
At the offices of the Health Department, MRC volunteers might assist with providing health information during a disease outbreak.

You might be asked to help with an increase in telephone volume related to a health incident, or you might interview people exposed to an illness.

You might be asked to assist at a clinic to vaccinate a large group of people.

Examples of MRC in action in Sonoma County include:

• 2016 – MRC supported TB testing to a large number of students and staff who had been exposed.
• 2015 – MRC nurses and behavioral health clinicians support response in Lake and Napa counties for Valley Fire.
• 2014 – provided flu vaccines to 133 people at Family Support Center homeless shelter clinic
• 2010 – In a rabies exposure event, MRC volunteers received just-in-time training and then were sent with flyers to post in a Windsor neighborhood after a rabid fox was found.
• 2009 – MRC staff mass vaccination sites during H1N1 pandemic
Sonoma County’s MRC was first established to help with mass public dispensing. Mass dispensing is very different from how people usually get their medications.
For mass dispensing, the Health Department has to develop strategies to potentially dispense to about 500,000 people, our total population—no small task!

The effort is different if we are dispensing pills, which could be given to one person for an entire family, versus having to vaccinate individuals. We have to focus on ways to streamline our processes so that we serve the maximum number of people possible with our POD sites and staff.

This slide shows a quick calculation just of the processing time, or “throughput,” that would be needed to reach our county population.

During the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, at one of our PODs we actually exceeded the target rate, although fleetingly.

- We didn’t have the whole population at our doors, so we didn’t vaccinate 4801 people per hour all day long.
- Average time at the vaccinator’s station was 1 min 20 sec.
- If a vaccinator could keep this up steadily for a whole shift, s/he would be vaccinating 46 people per hour.
You can see there is a POD role for any kind of volunteer who signs up.

Some people hand out forms, others watch for questions or signs of stress among the crowd. Clinicians will screen people for medical questions, or package and dispense medication. In some disaster situations, we may even have non-licensed personnel dispensing pills that are pre-packaged and labeled.

We would use only the POD roles that are essential for the situation. It takes all of us to make a POD work.

It is important to keep the mission in mind when working at PODs: inform POD clients and dispense the medication quickly.

This means that staff may be assigned or moved around during the work shift at a POD to wherever staff assistance is needed. If we have a bottleneck at the entry area, for example, we might move staff, even medically licensed staff, to help out there until the POD is flowing efficiently. We will try to assign MRC to roles that use their skills best, but we must all be open to working wherever we are needed when we can do so safely. Please be prepared to be flexible and willing to work where you have skills to help.
MRC volunteers often serve their communities throughout the year when there is no disaster.

Here in Sonoma the MRC partners with Save Lives Sonoma! to train 7th graders in hands-only CPR.

A few years ago when the threat of avian flu was present, our volunteers gave fun, interactive presentations on hand hygiene to grade school kids, showing them graphically how germs are spread by tossing a sticky ball to one another during play. In just a few tosses, those sticky balls were covered with little handprints!

Here is a summary of community health education work done by MRC volunteers:

- 2014-17 – MRC assist in the Save Lives Sonoma program to train all Sonoma County 7th graders in hands-only CPR.
- 2014 – MRC supported bi-annual Sonoma County Homeless Survey by assisting with field survey crew interviews of ~400 homeless persons and data entry of survey findings
- 2014 – provided flu vaccines to 133 people at Family Support Center homeless shelter clinic
As a volunteer, you are working to protect the health and safety of your community. But health and safety have to START WITH YOU.

Even before you come to work as a volunteer, you’ll have to make sure that your home and family are safe first.

Before you depart for an MRC assignment, you’ll receive specific information on safety practices or hazards to be aware of.

Once at your MRC worksite, you’ll receive just-in-time training to teach you how to be safe in your work role. You’ll receive all the personal protective equipment (PPE) you’ll need, such as face masks or respirators, gloves, or other supplies.

After that, please stay aware of your work environment, of the behavior of people around you, and of your own stress signs. These workplaces can be very stressful, so everyone has a role to help each other be well and safe.
Now that you have a good idea of what is involved in becoming an MRC volunteer in Sonoma County, you can take the steps to enroll in the MRC program.

The next slides describe the processes of registering, of preparing yourself, and of standing by for MRC service.
There are several steps to full registration.

**Job Description & Application** - First you’ll want to read through the MRC job description and fill out our application. We use one broad job description and one application form to cover all the potential roles we might ask of our volunteers. Our MRC is certified under the Disaster Service Worker (DSW) Program of Sonoma County, which provides workers compensation and liability protection for volunteers when the Health Department sends you out on assignment. The application describes the importance of confidentiality in MRC service and requires a loyalty oath in order to receive insurance protections. Submit your application to the Public Health Preparedness Program in the Health Department.

**DHV Registration** - Next, you’ll need to sign on to the computer registration system. We use an electronic registration system provided by the State of California. The system is called Disaster Healthcare Volunteers (DHV) of California. We know that not everyone uses, or is comfortable with, computer programs. But being able to manage the volunteer information electronically is a huge boost for Health Department efficiency during disasters, so we must ask volunteers to work with us in this way. **NOTE:** throughout the year, people may discover our MRC by finding the DHV website first. They can set up their preliminary DHV profile online and we will then receive a notice to contact that interested volunteer to complete all the steps to register.

**MRC Orientation** - This slide presentation is part of a set of trainings given at a once-a-year MRC Orientation. You can find this and other presentations on our MRC website (www.sonoma-county.org/mrc). Other components of the MRC Orientation include an introduction to Health Department disaster plans, an orientation to emergency management and SEMS principles, and a clinical presentation of emerging and category A diseases.

**Swear-In & Badging** - The final step is being sworn in personally by an official in the Public Health Preparedness program and receiving your MRC identification badge. We do this all year long by appointment.
The on-line DHV system is the only way the Health Department has to rapidly pull up your information and contact you in time of disaster.

You set up your profile, which includes your name, contact information, special skills, licensure, occupation, and other data. The website is secure, so you can be assured that your information is not shared or widely available. It will be up to you to decide how you want to be contacted and also up to you to keep this information current.

The DHV system is programmed to check on the medical license status of clinicians every day. This is critical information when licensed personnel are quickly needed.

The DHV system also has the ability to contact you by phone, cell phone, or email all at once 24 hours a day. When volunteers are needed immediately, this call-out capacity is crucial for rapid emergency response.

Please help us to respond to disasters by keeping your registration current. Contact us at 707.565.4496 for any assistance at all with your registration.
When you register on DHV, there are two steps.

First, set up an account name and password the way you want them—choose something you can remember and write it down so you can find it later. We recommend you write this down in your MRC Handbook.

Once your account is established, then enter your name and contact information. Select that you want to join the Sonoma MRC and enter your work occupation.

The DHV system will tell you that your INITIAL REGISTRATION is complete and will lead you to the next screen...
The second step is to enter information about your skills and preferences.

Look at each heading here on the MY PROFILE – SUMMARY page. Some items will be complete and others will show as either incomplete or needs attention. Try to get each part completed.

This can be a little tricky.

For example, on this screen the IDENTITY profile needs attention: the driver’s license has expired.

The MRC volunteer noticed this and clicked on “Identity” and went to the area for the license expiration—it’s a calendar. Only the year needed to be changed, so the volunteer changed the year and saved. That took the person back to the SUMMARY page, where she saw that the IDENTITY still “needs attention,” even though she just changed it!

So she went back in to the IDENTITY and tried again. This time she noticed that when she changed the year, the date dropped off. This kind of glitch may be fixed by the time you register as a volunteer, but you have to be patient and observant when entering your information.

Again, we want to help you with this. Call Public Health Preparedness at 707.565.4496 if you have troubles after trying to register.
Once you are registered, you have attended the MRC orientation, and you have been sworn in as a disaster service worker in the MRC program, it's time for you to make yourself and your household ready.

The MRC Handbook and the mini Guide to Emergency Preparedness (both part of Orientation packet materials) are thorough introductions to personal readiness. You need to think about how you will make your home, your loved ones, and your animals or pets safe during a disaster. The more resilient you and your family are, the sooner you will be free to support others in emergency response.

For more on personal disaster readiness, visit the American Red Cross website at: http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family.

Additional websites on personal preparedness are noted in the MRC Handbook.
Now that you and your household are ready to survive a disaster, you need to stay alert to possible calls from the Health Department for MRC volunteer service.

Keep your home disaster plans and supplies current.
Take trainings and sign up for exercise opportunities.
Keep your DHV registration current. This is something like a job. You have to manage this information if you want us to be able to reach you.

And when you hear of a local disaster, start to tune in to the news. Listen for radio reports (local radio stations that broadcast emergency notices are listed in your MRC Handbook) and watch for emails or voice messages from the DHV system.

During normal times we encourage volunteers to contact us for questions, but during disasters, please wait for us to call you. We will be working fast to get our disaster response activities in order and will contact MRC volunteers as soon as possible if we have a disaster response role for you.
As we described before, the Health Department uses the DHV online system to quickly notify volunteers by phone or email. Because many counties or other government agencies also use DHV to manage their volunteers, the system is rather formal to suit the needs of many organizations.

Email messages, for example, are from “Disaster Healthcare Volunteers Site”. You should be attentive to watch for these messages and be ready to follow instructions.

Telephone messages are even more formal and impersonal. An electronic recorded voice might notify you of an event or give you critical information. It will sound like just the kind of call that you want to hang up on. BUT PLEASE LISTEN JUST A LITTLE LONGER to be sure this is not a message from Public Health using the DHV system to call you. Although the system could be a little more personal, it is extremely efficient for quickly notifying all of you when an event strikes.
Here’s a screenshot of Sonoma’s MRC web page. We’ve got some updates in the works, and will post this and other orientation presentations online for your convenience.

Check back with the website for other updates and for training or exercise opportunities.
Sonoma’s Health Department is extremely fortunate to have so many residents registered as Medical Reserve Corps volunteers.

We are always looking for ways to improve this program and to help you be better prepared to survive and serve your community during disasters.

Please contact us any time at 707.565.4496 or at phpreparedness@sonoma-county.org.

Thank you for your service!