

INITIAL PRIMARY CARE SCREENING FOR SEVERE PSYCHIATRIC ILLNESS AFTER DISASTERS

Most reactions experienced by individuals affected by disasters will be transient or respond to brief supportive interventions. However, primary care providers conducting initial assessments should remain vigilant for mental disorders requiring further psychiatric evaluation and treatment. The following screening questions will help primary care providers determine when additional referral is indicated:

1. Are you seeing a mental health care provider? (e.g. a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, nurse, or mental health counselor)
2. What medications do you take?

If answers to the above indicate a history of psychiatric problems, refer for further psychiatric assessment.

3. During the disaster, did you think you were going to die or were you fearful for your life?
If yes:
 - a) Are you still feeling very frightened or having nightmares?
 - b) Are you having trouble sleeping?

If answers to above indicate severe life threat with persistent anxiety/fear and or sleep disturbance, refer for psychiatric assessment.

4. Are you feeling sad or blue?
5. Did you lose, or do you think you may have lost a loved one in the disaster?
6. Are you feeling hopeless?
7. Are you having any thoughts of hurting yourself or others?
8. Do you have a gun or other weapon?

If the answers to the above indicate possible depression or risk of suicide, or risk of injury to others, refer for urgent psychiatric assessment.

9. How much do you usually drink?
10. Do you use any street drugs?

If the above indicate risk of substance withdrawal, refer for urgent psychiatric assessment.