Office of the Commissioner

Field Safety Policy

Policy #: DHHS-08-15 **Issue Date:** 09/04/15

I. SUBJECT

Field Safety Policy

II. POLICY STATEMENT

This policy is to be used as a guide for individual Offices, Divisions, or other business units of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to create individualized and program-specific policies and procedures promoting safety for employees who are in the community conducting official DHHS business. The specific Office/Division policy and procedure is to be developed, distributed and enforced to promote the safety of DHHS employees when in the conduct of their official duties.

III. RATIONALE

DHHS conducts business over a wide geographic area providing a host of services. Due to the nature of the work, employees visit a variety of locations to conduct the business of the Department. Some of these locations are remote, including home and business entities not controlled by DHHS or its employees. Each Office/Division that conducts business in the community is required to develop a policy and procedure to promote safety for field personnel.

Nothing in this policy, or any individual Office/Division policy and procedure is intended to prevent an employee from exercising reasonable and prudent caution in the maintenance of their respective personal safety when conducting official Department business.

IV. PROCEDURE STATEMENT

Offices/Divisions that have employees working in the community are to develop policies and procedures specific to the nature and scope of the relevant business being conducted. The policies and procedures are to provide directives for staff regarding situations that may arise in the course of their respective duties that actually or potentially undermine personal safety. The substance of policies and procedures should include:

1. The directive to contact 911 when imminent danger presents.
2. The directive that when personal safety is compromised, departure from the location is strongly advised.
3. The directive that appropriate identification must be maintained on the person when conducting the business of the Department in any location, including office or community.

4. The directive to never conduct Department business in the community without prior communication with other DHHS personnel or management regarding logistics, including means and methods for contact.
5. Directives regarding identification and communication of concerns for safety when conducting Department business. (See attached guidelines for safety checks prior to working in the community.)
6. Directives regarding communication with district or central office personnel for business in the community, including business that concludes after regular business hours. Directives should also include clear instruction for district or central office personnel when employees in the community fail to make the requisite contact.
7. Resources for dealing with situations that have potential public health implications, such as aggressive pets, infestations and unanticipated illness or disease.
8. A requirement, as appropriate, for program specific safety training.
9. A description of the mechanism for distribution, amendment authority, and enforcement of the Office/Division policy and procedure promoting safety for employees conducting Department business in the community.
10. A directive requiring Department employees to submit an incident and/or threat report in the event that personal safety has actually or potentially been compromised when conducting Department business in the community. The directive should also include the responsibilities of relevant management to identify risk mitigation strategies where and when appropriate and debrief opportunities for staff as needed.

V. DEFINITIONS

For this policy, employee is defined as a staff member, contract employee, or other individual that would be determined an agent of the Department for the purpose of performing for the business of DHHS.

"Community" means any site that is outside of a DHHS office or location where official Department business must be conducted.

Office or Division means any entity or business unit of DHHS that is conducting official business on behalf of DHHS.

VI. ATTACHMENTS/WEBSITE LINKS

"Personal Safety Check" attached - as an example

For Public Health Concerns:
http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/disease/index.shtml
The listings are alphabetical and give guidance for dealing with various conditions staff would find in the field. The guidance is specific for Public Health Nurses, but there are steps that staff can take.

Threat Information Form can be found at:
http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/policies/threatreport.pdf

EAP contact information:

http://www.maine.gov/deh/healthbenes/eap/index.html Available 24/7 at 1-800-451-1834

VII. DISTRIBUTION

All Department employees via e-mail and posting on the DHHS intranet.

September 4, 2015
Date

Mary C. Mayhew
Commissioner

Attachment

"Personal Safety Check" Procedure Sample – taken from the Drinking Water Program at the MeCDC

The procedure and the Personal Safety Check plan are intended to provide guidance when there is potential for staff member's personal safety to be at risk and to provide a plan to ensure community visits are as safe as possible.

The following are provided as guidance to Offices in developing their own staff safety check:

1. When in imminent danger, immediately call 911.
2. At the first indication that personal safety is in question, leave the location.
3. If a particular visit is expected to have a higher likelihood of being confrontational, prepare for that visit through consultation with your supervisor. These types of encounters may require seeking information from law enforcement prior to the visit, and/or conducting the visit with a peer, a supervisor or a member of the law enforcement community.
4. Review all case notes prior to contact to determine if extra caution is recommended.
5. When conducting visits in the field the following protocol is required:
   - Notification of your supervisor or his/her designee where you are going and your expected time of return. As a matter of practice, if it is not being done currently, enter all appointments, visits, etc. on your outlook calendar.
   - A cell phone number you can be reached at. In the case of multiple cell phones it is recommended that all numbers be listed.
   - Ensure that your supervisor has the following information about your vehicle: make, model, color, license plate.
   - Location (physical address) of the site
   - Name of client you will be seeing
   - Once you are on your way back to the office or to your home (if the visit occurs toward the end of the work day), contact your supervisor by email or telephone to let him/her know you are on your way there. Once you have arrived, contact your supervisor to let them know you have arrived safely.
   - For supervisors – if any employee has not contacted you within a reasonable amount of time, call them to determine if they need help. If the staff member fails to contact you and cannot be reached, determine when the authorities will be contacted for a safety check.
6. During the client visit, be aware of the surroundings, and carry only what is needed to conduct DHHS business. This should include a cell phone that can be accessed easily.
7. Avoid having the client walk you to your car after the visit is over.