

# Hurricane preparedness survey: Worries about drinking water and medical care

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Three years after Hurricane Katrina devastated parts of the Gulf Coast, a new survey conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health Project on the Public and Biological Security shows that one-third (34%) of those affected by the storm report they are very prepared if a major hurricane were to strike their communities in the next six months.

The top worries of respondents threatened or hit by Hurricane Katrina are that they would not have enough fresh water to drink (42% very worried) and that they would not be able to get needed medical care (41% very worried). The survey of 5,055 people was conducted in eight states—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas—and only included residents of high-risk counties, those within 20 miles of the coast. The poll also included a special sample of the New Orleans metropolitan area.

The top concern of respondents who were not affected by Katrina is that they would have problems getting gas needed to evacuate (39% very worried). This is a concern that Katrina-affected respondents share (36% very worried) but rank below worries about fresh water and medical care. Those not affected by Katrina are much less likely to be worried about fresh water (27% very worried) and getting needed medical care (29% very worried).

"The top concerns of people in high-risk hurricane areas—having enough fresh water, getting medical care, and obtaining gas to evacuate—are all things that public officials can plan for before the

major storms of this season hit," said Robert J. Blendon, Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Katrina-affected respondents have a heightened degree of concern across a number of issues compared to those not affected by the storm. These concerns include caring for a chronically ill or elderly household member, having enough cash on hand during the storm's aftermath, dealing with the conditions at an evacuation shelter if they should need to go to one, and being threatened by violence. Approximately one in three Katrina-affected respondents are very worried about each of these problems while those who were not affected by Katrina are less worried.

These findings are based on interviews conducted May 27 – June 23, 2008 with 5,055 adults in high hurricane risk counties in eight states. Twelve percent of the survey's respondents said they were threatened or hit by Hurricane Katrina while 46% were threatened or hit by a different hurricane during the past five years.

Links to the complete survey, charts and individual state results can be found in the online press release:

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/2008-releases/hurricane-survey-katrina-fresh-water-medical-care.html>

The results of this survey will be distributed to state and local officials for use in emergency planning.

Source: Harvard School of Public Health

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