

Special Needs Newsletter

**FDOH
HILLSBOROUGH**

January 2025



Hello Hillsborough County from the Florida Department of Health!

Welcome to the next issue of our special needs shelter newsletter! We are thrilled to share with you the latest updates. This is a great opportunity to provide the community and our clients with information and guidance on the special needs program.

We have recently concluded another hurricane season. The special needs shelter program aims to provide emergency access to shelter for individuals in our community with medical needs during emergency situations, most notably, hurricanes. Many of our clients have mobility issues, or medical needs that require continuous electricity, oxygen supply, or assistance with care.

This past year we had some changes to the program, specifically to the registration process. This newsletter will provide guidance on the registration process for clients and their caregivers, a recap of the 2024 hurricane season, how to prepare for 2025, and other important information. Thank you for your support and enjoy Issue #3 of the Special Needs Newsletter.

Emily Haas, MPH, CPH
Special Needs Shelter
Coordinator
Florida Department of
Health - Hillsborough
County

P: (813) 307-8063
F: (813) 276-8689

In this newsletter
you can expect:

2024 Hurricane
Season Recap

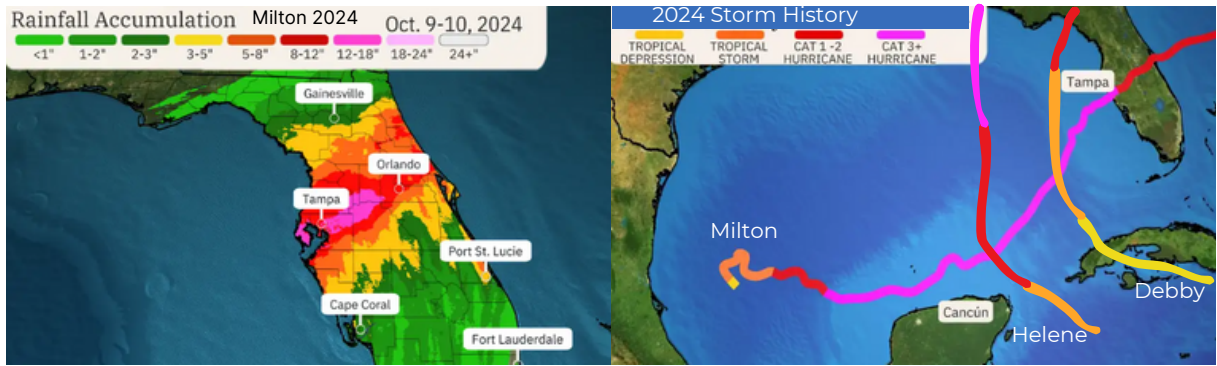
Preparing for
2025

Special Needs
Registry

Reminders &
Contact
Information

Outreach &
Inservice

More
Information &
Resources



2024 Hurricane Season Recap

This past season was unlike any that we have seen in recent years - we got hit harder than we have in a long time. We know this was a tough experience for many in our community and express our deepest support for all who were affected.

With two back-to-back storms, we relied heavily on our community to take care of each other, and your efforts do not go unnoticed.

Going into the 2024 season, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA] predicted Atlantic hurricane activity to be above normal, with influences from warmer ocean temperatures and La Nina.

The graphic below represents the predictions and results of the season, highlighting the two big hits we got this year.

Hurricane Helene



Hurricane Helene made landfall September 26th on the Gulf Coast as a category-4 storm and brought flooding, winds, and catastrophic storm surge to many areas across Florida and into the Appalachians. Hillsborough County saw significant flooding, causing damage to many areas of our community. NOAA data shows Helene was the deadliest hurricane we have seen since Katrina in 2005.

Hurricane Milton made landfall in Siesta Key, just two weeks later on October 9th as a category-3 storm. While much of our community was still recovering, we had to get ready for another big storm. This time, we were predicted to get a direct hit. While Milton landed just south of us, impacts were seen across the state including 46 tornadoes, flooding, and widespread power outages lasting days after the storm.

2024	Predicted	Result
Named Storms	17 - 25	18
Hurricanes	8 - 13	11
Major Hurricanes	4 - 7	5

Hurricane Milton Response & Recovery

While Milton was a lesser-category hurricane than Helene, we felt some of the same lasting effects and saw a lot of similar damage after the storm had passed. With lasting power outages, many of our special needs shelter clients could not go home right away.

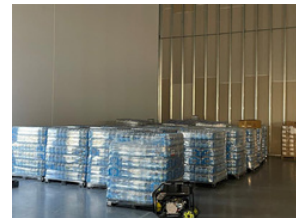
Special needs shelters opened Monday, October 7th, and while the storm had passed us by Thursday morning, we had clients in our county shelters until Sunday October 13th.

While power restoration efforts were in full swing, we had to find a solution for our clients who still could not return home at that point. The Florida Division of Emergency Management opened a facility in Lutz for us to bring our clients to where they would continue to have electricity for their medical equipment, and continue to receive assistance. Many clients were also suffering from property or housing losses, and needed assistance with finding temporary housing.

I have included some photos here of the Lutz facility, which was originally set up as a field hospital, and was transformed into a special needs shelter set up.



This photo shows the line of vehicles transporting special needs shelter clients from our shelters to the Lutz facility.



These photos show the supply of drinking water that was brought to the Lutz facility to support our clients.



This photo shows some of the rescue boats used to get to people stuck in the storm water or trapped in their houses. Just a reminder to heed evacuation warnings and don't wait until the last minute to leave.

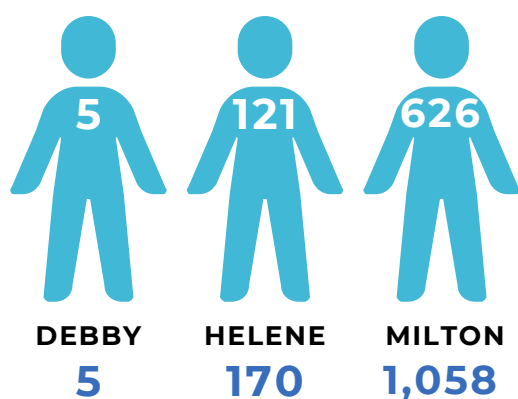


This photo shows one of the areas set up for special needs clients.

Special Needs Shelter Response

During the 2024 hurricane season, Hillsborough County opened special needs shelters for 3 storms: Debby, Helene, and Milton. The graphic below shows a report of how many special needs clients sheltered with us during each storm.

Note: The shelter opened during Debby was a combined shelter for both general population and special needs individuals. The graphic reflects only special needs clients.



*Note: the bottom number represents the total number of shelterees including caregivers and family members who accompanied a special needs client to the shelter

Total shelterees during Hurricane Milton reached over 1,000 with caregivers and family members who accompanied special needs clients to the shelters.

We appreciate the support from the community, volunteers, first responders, our DOH staff, and many others who all played a significant role in storm response and recovery. Now, it is time to prepare for next season!



*Photo from the Weather Channel

Preparing for the 2025 Hurricane Season

It is never too early to start prepping for next season, and you can never be too prepared. The following section will provide an overview of developing a plan that works for you and your loved ones.

Reminder: Hurricane season begins again on June 1st - Don't wait until last minute to solidify your plan! Here are some questions to get you thinking about your plan.

- Do you live in an evacuation zone?
- Do you have friends/family in the area or out of the area?
- Do you have reliable transportation?
- Do you need care for a medical condition, have electric-dependent medical equipment, or mobility issues?

Don't know your evacuation zone?

Navigate to the website at the bottom of the page and search your address to find out!

Having friends or family nearby can be important when deciding whether to stay home or evacuate out of the area. Discuss with your loved ones ahead of time if you will stay or go.

Transportation assistance is available to special needs shelter clients.

Special needs shelters are more equipped to care for individuals with medical conditions, rather than a general population shelter.

[Hillsborough County Hurricane Evacuation Tool](#)

Developing a Disaster Plan: The Basics

Supply List

Packing for an evacuation should focus on items that are necessary for you and your loved ones. Don't forget about your pets! A general rule of thumb is to pack for 5-7 days. What would you bring?

- Water
- Food
- Personal hygiene items/toiletries
- Clothing
- Electronics and chargers
- Medical supplies (including prescriptions, oxygen supply, and mobility devices)
- Medical equipment (CPAPs, nebulizers, oxygen concentrators, glucose monitors, heart monitors)

What to Bring to a Special Needs Shelter

Should you need to evacuate to a special needs shelter, please limit the number of bags to one per person. Shelter space is limited and can become quite constricted, especially for larger storms. In addition to the items listed above, you should plan to bring the following to a special needs shelter:

- Medical history & documents (health insurance cards, DNR paperwork)
- Comfort items such as blankets, pillows
- Any special dietary needs
- Comfortable clothing & closed toed shoes
- Entertainment (cards, games, books)
- Back up batteries

MEDICAL PLAN

If you have a medical or chronic condition that requires ongoing care, coordinate with your care provider or physician to develop a plan for continuation of care.

Examples: dialysis, infusions, chemotherapy

Florida Special Needs Registry

Over the past year, we have transitioned from using a local database to a statewide online registry for special needs clients.

Here is the link to the online registry:

snr.flhealthresponse.com

Using the online registry, clients are able to create an account using an email address, and submit their information for review. Family members, friends, or loved ones can submit on their behalf. Home health agencies, nurse registries, and hospitals can submit the information of their clients as well.

Each submission comes to the DOH for review, to determine whether the individual (a) meets criteria and is eligible for a special needs shelter, (b) does not meet criteria and would be appropriate at a general population shelter, or (c) exceeds the capability of care in a special needs shelter and may need shelter placement at a facility with a higher level of care. Each individual who needs placement at a higher acuity facility will be coordinated and placed by the DOH team.

New clients can be submitted at any time online. However, it is important to note we will stop evaluating new submissions between 48-72 hours before a storm arrival. These new submissions will be evaluated after the storm.

If you are not registered, submitted a registration but it has not been reviewed yet, or are unsure if you are registered; you may go to a special needs shelter if you have a medical need that you believe would require a special needs shelter. Monitor the news and go to the closest open shelter where you will be evaluated by a nurse.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

Everbridge (813) 307-8063

Save this number in your phone; this is the special needs shelter line. All notifications/messages that we send out during an emergency will come from that number using a platform called Everbridge. It is important that you answer and follow the instructions in each notification. These notifications are automated messages with important information such as evacuation orders, shelter openings, situation updates, etc.

If you are not receiving messages and you are on the special needs registry, please call us to ensure we have your most up-to-date phone number.

***Please note: only those who are pre-registered online will receive these messages.

Hospitals

Hospitals are NOT shelters. Do not plan on sheltering at a hospital unless authorized by your physician, care team, case worker, or the DOH.

Community Outreach

We are happy to provide in-service training at any of our home health care providers, organizations, or agencies interacting with special needs populations and individuals. Please reach out to us for more information and to set up a visit. Please fill out the below information and send it via email to Emily.Haas@flhealth.gov.

- Agency/Organization
- Address
- Point of contact (name, phone number, email address)
- Number of attendees
- Availability

Evacuation Orders

If you live in an evacuation zone or mobile home, and your zone is called for evacuation, do NOT wait. Once the sustained wind speeds reach 45 miles per hour, rescue vehicles will be off the roads and there will be no way to get to you. This is why it is so important to make a plan ahead of time. Don't hesitate when it comes to your safety and the safety of your loved ones. Form a solid plan that you are all comfortable with, and use it.

Contact Information

Emily Haas - Special Needs Shelter Coordinator
Emily.Haas@flhealth.gov
Special Needs Line: (813) 307-8063
Desk Line: (813) 559-4054
Fax: (813) 276-8689

Department of Health, Hillsborough
Main Line: (813) 307-8000
Website: [FDOH Hillsborough](http://FDOH.Hillsborough)

**IF YOU ARE HAVING AN
EMERGENCY DURING AN
EVACUATION OR STORM
AND NEED FIRE, POLICE, OR
AN AMBULANCE**

CALL 911

Scan the QR code
to get to the
Florida Special
Needs Registry.



Thank you for reading!

A list of resources and webpages are linked below.

[Ready.Gov](#)

[FDOH Preparedness](#)

[2024 Hurricane Season Predictions](#)

[2024 Hurricane Season Wrap-Up](#)

[Hurricane Milton 2024](#)

[La Nina](#)