



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Honoring those who served U.S.

COVID-19 Halts Veterans' Homes as Hurricane Evacuation Sites

Florida's seven state veterans' homes unavailable for family member evacuation.

Planning for the 2020 Atlantic Hurricane Season can be stressful, especially during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In spite of stay at home orders, it may become necessary for Floridians to seek safety in evacuation shelters.

In previous years, family members of both residents and staff have sheltered in place with their loved ones at one of Florida's seven state veterans' homes. The hardened facilities are designed to withstand high winds and powered with generators to allow routine life-safety activities to continue until relief arrives. We saw this recently during Hurricanes Irma and Michael. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed this long-standing Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs policy.

On March 11, 2020, the Governor, in conjunction with the Florida Division of Emergency Management and FDVA senior leadership, made the difficult decision to restrict all visitor access to our homes through Executive Order 20-52, with the exception of those whose veteran is receiving end-of-life care. This "no visitor" policy was undertaken to safeguard our predominantly older resident population, many of whom have multiple complex health conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to complications from infection. While FDVA health care professionals will continue to provide 24/7 critical and compassionate services to veterans' home residents, Florida's seven state veterans' homes are unavailable this hurricane season for family member evacuation.

The State of Florida is recommending the general public continue to follow the evacuation guidelines of their local county emergency management agencies. The state has been working with the counties over the past several months to create multi-tiered recommendations for evacuation to meet the dual safety considerations of hurricane response and COVID-19.

The Florida Division of Emergency Management is recommending residents remain in their home if they are not in an evacuation zone, not in a low-lying area, and feel safe to remain in their home. Emergency Management officials are messaging this through the *Know Your Zone, Know Your Home* campaign, found online at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/know-your-zone-know-your-home/>.

Give yourself more time than usual to prepare your emergency food, water and medicine supplies. Contact your local county emergency management office for additional information.

The CDC has provided additional Hurricane Resources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/>

<https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/prepare/ready.php>

<https://www.ready.gov/hurricanes>

<http://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/hurricane>