



**System Memo: # 428**

Date: December 29, 2023  
 To: All System members  
 From: Matthew T. Jordan, MD, FACEP  
 EMS System MD  
 Connie J. Mattera, MS, RN, PM  
 EMS Administrative Director  
 RE: **EMS Guidelines when encountering unexpected busloads of migrants/displaced persons**

**Situation**

- Buses filled with migrants and displaced persons are arriving in Chicago and Suburban Cook County from southern Border States in large numbers, sometimes without notification or coordination with local authorities. As of Thursday, Chicago has received more than 26,000 asylum seekers and is currently housing nearly 15,000 persons at 27 temporary shelters.
- There is currently a workflow for incoming buses created by the Chicago Office of Emergency Management and Communication (OEMC and DOT) that requires 48 hours advance notification and a permit.
- “Rogue buses” are not following the prescribed workflow, and are emptying at locations in proximity to public transit and at random areas throughout Cook County. Local municipalities are not informed in advance and the influx of persons may exceed their surge capacity. Presently, CBS news reports that 30 buses have dropped migrants off in suburban communities (Elmhurst, Naperville, Aurora, Lockport, University Park, Fox River Grove, Glen Ellyn, Lombard, and Kankakee). They arrive at all hours of the day and night creating a humanitarian crisis.
- Municipalities are responsible for sheltering and/or transporting displaced persons under ESF#6 Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Temporary Housing & Human Assistance; as well as ESF #8 Public Health & Medical Services.**
- On average, 12-50 displaced persons are on each bus. Those not picked up by relatives need to be transported to the **Immigrant Landing zone (ILZ)** established by the City of Chicago located at 800 S. Des Plaines, Chicago, IL 60607. If transported to Chicago on Metra Trains, they arrive at the Ogilvie Transportation Center in the West Loop where they are met by a bus that will take them to a shelter. Contact phone numbers for Chicago OEMC are included in the temporary SOP.

**Health concerns**

These persons have been living and traveling in large groups, making it ideal for the spread of diseases and conditions like those often seen in refugee camps such as:

Lice; scabies; bed bugs	Measles*
Influenza	Tuberculosis (TB) & Drug resistant TB*
Covid-19*	Chicken Pox*
Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)	Waterborne illnesses/ dysentery.
*Airborne transmission	

There is no way to verify vaccination status or the overall health of persons encountered. It is assumed that all occupants on the same bus, having spent multiple hours in close proximity, have effectively exposed one another if disease is suspected or present.

Chicago has policies in place to perform public health screenings at their shelters and to identify those with acute medical conditions that require care at an ED. New arrivals are also able to catch up on some vaccinations.

**Community responses**

It is imperative that local jurisdictions have a robust plan in place to respond if migrants are abandoned in their community. The goal is to **transport all displaced persons quickly and safely to either the Ogilvie Transportation Center (via Metra train) and/or the ILZ (via bus)** in Chicago where services and infrastructure (including medical) are in place to care for them.

Anticipate having to move quickly to limit exposure to the elements and cold weather as many on the buses lack cold weather apparel and are often in shorts, t-shirts, and slippers or athletic shoes.

## NWC EMS System – EMS Response Guidelines for Care of Unexpected Migrants

When an UNEXPECTED bus containing displaced persons presents to your community:

1. Notify Police and follow Internal Departmental Policy
2. **Anticipate the need for Spanish language interpreters**
3. **Responders:** Apply appropriate **Body Substance Isolation (BSI) / PPE**
  - a. Gloves
  - b. N-95 respirators if any persons have a fever or are coughing; procedure masks if all persons appear well without evidence of respiratory infection
  - c. Eye Protection if any persons are coughing
  - d. **If droplet/contact illnesses are suspected (RSV):** A gown is appropriate
  - e. **If bedbugs/scabies are suspected:** shower the infested person ASAP and bag their clothes. If that is not feasible, offer a coverall suit to the patient, or blanket wrap them for containment, until they can be showered.  
**EMS personal** should brush off their uniform and wash them in hot water after the call. Responders may wear a Tyvek suit as optional protection, but that is an individual agency discretion item rather than a policy recommendation as there are no sources to cite for that recommendation.
4. **Vigilant situational awareness:** Take all reasonable precautions to ensure scene safety and person dignity
5. **Keep everyone on the bus if possible**
6. Notify the Chicago Officer of Emergency Management and Communications (**OEMC**) Duty Desk at: **312-746-8800** and report the bus.  
Also contact the Cook County EMRS via the duty desk at **312-603-8185**.  
**Do your best to obtain and report baseline demographics including ~ages:**
  - a. # Single Males
  - b. # Single Females
  - c. # Unaccompanied children (under 18)
  - d. # Families (adults & children): keep in units whenever possible
7. Use an internal tracking system to easily identify individuals. **Triage tags** are acceptable given they have unique numbers.
8. Complete an emergency screening assessment (Primary survey) and remove those who appear to have an immediate life threat (implied consent), and those who request medical treatment.  
**Health protocol in an emergency:** If the person is c/o chest pain, difficulty breathing, decreased responsiveness, confusion, unstoppable bleeding, severe pain, or is blue or has unexplained pale skin, law enforcement personnel/shelter staff are directed to call 9-1-1.  
**EMS shall care for these persons using the NWC EMSS SOPs.**
9. **If ON the Bus:** Complete the **Region 9 School bus incident form** | Contact NCH OLMC with report prior to redirecting the bus to the Immigrant Landing Zone in Chicago.
10. **If OFF the Bus and found wandering or in groups:** Protect them from adverse weather elements and follow local protocols: Recommend transport via Metra train to the Ogilvie Transportation Center (West Loop) from which they will be bused to a shelter.
11. **If OFF the Bus and relocated to temporary shelter:** Follow local protocols; and consider need for transport to the Ogilvie Transportation Center and/or Immigrant Landing Zone in Chicago as above.  
**For all found off the bus: Complete the “Mass gathering Patient Log sheet”** outlined in Policy E-6. Report to ECRN the number of persons encountered, the # requiring transport to Chicago, the # sheltered, the location, how long they will be sheltered, and a call back number.

**\*\*\* Basic Demographic information should be provided to OEMC free of PHI\*\*\***

**Bus Occupants cannot be forced to remain on the bus, or be relocated to a shelter, and must be allowed to leave if they so choose.**

**Northwest Community EMS System  
Response Guidelines for Unexpected Migrant Arrivals**

**Migrants On Bus?**

**Yes**

1. Notify local Police re: arrival of bus containing migrants; try to keep occupants on the bus. Follow Local procedures.  
Obtain interpretive services prn.
2. Don PPE
3. Complete cursory medical screening assessment of occupants. Apply triage tags. Remove/Transport those requiring immediate care.
4. Contact NCH OLMC with verbal report and specify "Migrant Bus" arrival.
5. Complete School bus incident form documenting occupants.
6. **Contact Chicago OEMC at 312-746-8800 and Cook County EMRS via the duty desk at 312-603-8185 with basic demographics of occupants.**
7. Follow local policy/procedures for coordinating bus relocation to:  
**Immigrant Landing Zone  
800 S. Des Plaines  
Chicago, IL 60607**

**NCH is not responsible for notifying Chicago OEMC, temporarily sheltering, or coordinating transportation to the Immigrant Landing Zone.**

**No**

1. Notify Local Police of Bus abandoning migrants, and follow local procedures. Obtain interpretive services prn.
2. Don PPE
3. Keep bus occupants together if possible.
4. Protect from weather
5. Complete cursory medical screening assessment of group; apply triage tags; transport those requiring immediate care.
6. Contact NCH OLMC with verbal report including number sheltered, the shelter location, and a call back number.
7. Follow Policy E-6 "Episodic Large Events" and complete a "Mass gathering patient log sheet" for documentation.
8. **Contact Chicago OEMC at 312-746-8800 and Cook County EMRS via the duty desk at 312-603-8185 with basic demographics of displaced persons.**
9. Follow local policy/procedures for Temporary Shelter Operations until occupants can be safely transported to:  
**Immigrant Landing Zone  
800 S. Des Plaines  
Chicago, IL 60607**

**Normal patient care and transport criteria still applies.**