

## UNESCO/IOC

### ICG/CARIBE EWS

#### Tsunami Services and Evacuation/Sheltering Considering Physical Distancing Practices

##### Context

The current COVID-19 response has required changes in workloads, work venues as well as physical distancing practices worldwide. This may create ambiguity or confusion with regards to warning services and tsunami response actions, like evacuation, and the implementation of national response plans. This document clarifies the status of the regional tsunami services, as well as suggests best practices for local and national actions.

##### Regional Tsunami Services

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, as the UNESCO IOC CARIBE EWS Tsunami Service Provider (TSP), continues to operate 24 x 7 to provide tsunami services to the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions according to the [CARIBE EWS Users Guide](#).

In the case that operations were affected, a communication will be issued to its stakeholders, including the CARIBE EWS Tsunami Warning Focal Points (TWFP) and National Tsunami Warning Centers (NTWC). In such circumstances alternative arrangements for regional warning services would be put in place as much as feasible.

Coordination is also maintained with the Caribbean Tsunami Warning Program (CTWP), the Caribbean Tsunami Information Center (CTIC) and the Central American Tsunami Advisory Centre (CATAC).

It is important to reiterate that each country is solely responsible for the safety of its own population from tsunami hazards. The country's NTWC or Emergency Management Agency (EMA) is the authority for issuing a tsunami warning for any or all of its coasts, as the CARIBE EWS TSP information is only advisory.

It is also important to recall that for the case of local tsunamis the natural tsunami warning signals should be the trigger for immediate self-evacuation. Persons along low-lying coasts should self-evacuate and not wait for their National Tsunami Warning Center to issue a tsunami warning.

##### National and Local Tsunami Services and Evacuation/Sheltering Best Practices during COVID-19

1. 24/7 arrangements of the national agencies to provide timely warnings to the local and national authorities, media and the public, when their action is required.
2. When the NTWC and/or the Emergency Management Agency issues a tsunami warning, the desired action for the public is to evacuate from at-risk locations.
3. The public needs to continue to use natural warning signs for tsunamis as cues for response, i.e. if people are near the coast and experience any of a tsunami's natural warning signs, they should quickly leave at-risk locations and move inland or to higher ground. The natural tsunami warning signs are strong or long ground shaking (from an earthquake), a sudden change of the sea level or a loud roar from the sea (from a tsunami).
4. Immediate life-safety is the priority when evacuations are directed. It is important that the public understands that **AN EVACUATION ORDER TAKES PRIORITY OVER THE STAY-AT-HOME**

**ORDER.** It is also important that the risk to the public of COVID-19 spread during evacuations is managed to the greatest extent possible.

5. If people do NOT live in a tsunami evacuation zone, then should continue to shelter in place to avoid unnecessary exposure to COVID-19. NO evacuation is necessary.
6. The following adjustments to current COVID-19 public channels and warning message content may be considered as applicable in order to ensure the public receives timely and accurate information regarding official evacuations and self-evacuations, and to ensure that responding agencies have clear procedures:
  - a. In the case of another emergency, one should do what one would normally do, according to the response plan for this type of event.
  - b. In case of an earthquake: drop, cover under strong furniture and hold during the shaking. If one is near the coast, remember if shaking is long or strong, move inland or to higher ground because a tsunami may attack.
  - c. If you are advised to evacuate by authorities because of a tsunami, earthquake, flood, fire or other emergency, follow the evacuation advice. **Emergency evacuation orders must override the COVID-19 requirements to stay at home.**
  - d. If one has to evacuate, grab bag/emergency backpack and move to higher ground immediately. In addition to their usual contents, emergency grab bags/backpacks should also include disposable tissues, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes and face masks, in consideration of the heightened sanitation and hygiene needs.
  - e. The public should seek to adhere to all COVID-19 related hygienic advice provided by national and/or local authorities such as those related to the wearing of face masks, as well as sneezing or coughing into disposable tissues, avoiding direct contact with people and physical distancing wherever possible
  - f. Daily routines have changed. Given these changes, hope for the best but plan for the worst if an emergency threatens our area. Now is a good time to ensure we are ready.
  - g. Visit \_\_\_\_\_ for more information about what to do in an emergency.

### **Other Considerations for Evacuation**

Plans for tsunami assembly areas and shelters should be reviewed to take into consideration physical distancing and medical isolation needs related to COVID-19. .