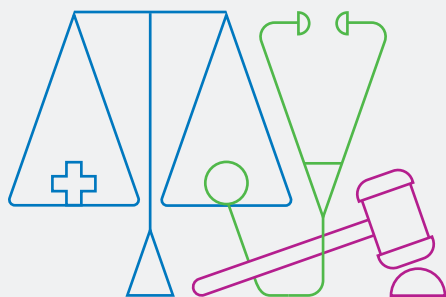




# Tabletop Exercise

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NATURAL  
DISASTER



# Introduction

Thank you for being a valued policyholder. As part of our commitment to provide insureds with practical risk management resources, we have developed this tabletop exercise guide to assist you and your teams with emergency planning and preparedness.

All healthcare organizations should anticipate, plan for, and be prepared to effectively respond to medical emergencies in their healthcare setting. Drills, simulations, and tabletop exercises can highlight knowledge deficits or gaps in expected response. They are useful for subsequent staff training on established protocols and identifying unique role-based responsibilities during emergencies.

Tabletop exercises are used in many industries but can be particularly relevant in the healthcare setting. A tabletop exercise is an informal, collaborative discussion to review emergency scenarios or unexpected situations that could arise in a particular setting. These sessions are intended to help organizations develop the roles that key team members may play and their responses during specific emergencies. They are also meant as a collaborative meeting where leaders and subject matter experts present an emergency scenario and allow the team to work through the organization's response protocol based on organizational policies, procedures, and industry best practices. The key to conducting these exercises is to allow candid, thought-provoking discussion to identify gaps in existing protocols to help your organization build a more successful and situationally appropriate response to emergencies.

## Tabletop exercises will help you:

- Identify potential hazards specific to your practice location, patient population, and facility type, including patient emergencies, system disruptions, hostile patient behavior, and weather events.
- Clarify the departments and specific staff roles that will be impacted by an emergency and outline their unambiguous responsibilities and particular duties during an emergency response.
- Develop a written emergency plan outlining the specific steps that staff should follow during an emergency.
- Focus on triage and prioritization of patient care during an emergency based on the availability of supplies and equipment as well as possible transfer needs.

## Lessons learned from a tabletop exercise put you in a better position to:

- Establish direct communication channels with staff, patients, families, and external partners to provide updates and coordinate efforts as needed during an emergency.
- Allocate resources such as designated funds, human capital, and other resources to maintain a readily accessible inventory of essential medications, equipment, and provisions for use in an emergency.
- Conduct training sessions for team members to better recognize the triggers for initiating emergency response procedures.
- Conduct training sessions to ensure team members are competent in emergency response, including proficiency in administering first aid, basic life support (BLS), or CPR; appropriately calling 911 for assistance; and understanding evacuation or shelter-in-place protocols.

By engaging key staff in a proactive conversation, the practice can more carefully plan, prepare for, and practice a potential emergency scenario. Medical staff and leadership will then be better positioned to support staff and patients during emergencies.

For additional information, please watch our 2-minute video Emergencies in the Medical Office Setting (<https://bit.ly/3ZMsm5l>). For any questions, please contact us at [RiskAdvisor@ProAssurance.com](mailto:RiskAdvisor@ProAssurance.com) or **844-223-9648**.



2-MINUTE  
VIDEO

# What is Expected During a Tabletop Exercise?

Tabletop exercises are used in many industries but can be particularly relevant in the healthcare setting. A tabletop exercise is an informal, collaborative discussion to review emergency scenarios or unexpected situations that could arise in a particular setting. These sessions are intended to help organizations proactively develop the roles that key team members may play and their responses during specific emergencies. They are also meant as a collaborative meeting where leaders and subject matter experts present an emergency scenario and allow the team to work through the organization's response protocol based on organizational policies, procedures, and industry best practices. The key to conducting these exercises is to allow candid, thought-provoking discussion to identify gaps in existing practices to help your organization build a more successful and situationally appropriate response to emergencies.

These exercises take place, as the name suggests, at a table (or tables) in a conference room type setting. The typical exercise should only take about an hour to complete.

## Who Needs to Be at the Table?

Leadership buy-in, regardless of practice size, is imperative for these exercises to be successful. Depending on the scenario being reviewed during the exercise, participants could include:

- **Front-line staff** such as practice managers, registration, front desk, medical assistants, nursing, practitioners, and lab and radiology techs
- **Administration and management staff** such as CEO, CMO, CNO, CFO, COO, legal/compliance department, human resources, and team managers
- **Organizational support staff** such as call center, maintenance, environmental services, IT, risk management, quality improvement, supply chain, pharmacy, and laboratory.

For smaller practices that may not have multiple leadership positions, the list of management or lead personnel attendees may be much smaller and include different role types. In a small practice, the tabletop exercise attendees may include a practice owner or manager, principal provider, and lead nurse. Tabletop exercises are designed to apply to your practice's unique setup and staff ratios.

A constructive part of the discussion may include the realization that certain coworkers or departments valuable to the discussion were not in attendance and should be included in the next session. All participants should record their attendance on a sign-in sheet to capture team members that completed the exercise.

# What is the Focus of the Discussion?

During the exercise, attendees discuss an emergency that could feasibly occur at the practice. Participating individuals should discuss and confirm which departments and specific roles would be impacted and, therefore, should play a part in the response. It is important to discern if participants are aware of the existence of or the need for a relevant governing organizational policy or procedure. Taking these factors into account, the team will seek to lay out the consequences of the emergency, which staff must act, when they should act, and what sequential actions they will need to take individually or in tandem with other departments. Consider providing copies of relevant policies at the time of the exercise for review with the team.

# What About Your Specific Practice Might You Learn from a Tabletop Exercise?

The process of presenting a full-blown emergency scenario to relevant staff may yield surprising results. Oftentimes, the organization and staff members themselves realize that there is a learning gap when it comes to awareness of active policies and their content. There may be an assumption that the duty to react is someone else's responsibility, or maybe a misunderstanding of how many and which departments should take action to mitigate the emergency. These exercises are beneficial and eye-opening, pointing out areas for continued or focused training and mindfulness. A tabletop exercise is an efficient preliminary step to a simulation or mock drill.

# What Do You Do After the Tabletop Is Completed?

- Consider assigning key tasks to team members along with realistic timelines to complete. Included with this packet is an evaluation form to record opportunities identified during the exercise.
- Review policies and procedures for accuracy and update them as needed based on the results of the exercise.
- Work the improvements into your Quality Improvement program and include any emergency response team members, if applicable.

*The information provided offers risk management strategies and resources. Guidance and recommendations contained in these materials are not intended to determine the standard of care but are provided as risk management advice only. The ultimate judgment regarding the propriety of any method of care must be made by the healthcare professional. The information does not constitute a legal opinion, nor is it a substitute for legal advice. Legal inquiries about this topic should be directed to an attorney.*

# Potential Staff to Include at a Tabletop Exercise

Note: The listed roles are suggestions for inclusion in the tabletop exercise. The list is not exhaustive and you may want to include roles in your practice that are not listed here. Your attendee list may be shorter or longer depending on the staff makeup of your office.

## Leadership

- ☐ CEO/President
- ☐ CFO
- ☐ COO
- ☐ CMO
- ☐ CNO
- ☐ Information/Technology Director - CIO
- ☐ General Counsel
- ☐ Board of Director representation

## Other Supportive Departments

- ☐ HR
- ☐ Legal/Compliance
- ☐ Risk Management/Quality Improvement
- ☐ IT
- ☐ Materials Management (supplies/equipment)
- ☐ Maintenance
- ☐ Security
- ☐ Medical Records
- ☐ Credentialing (if emergency credentials may be applicable)

## Providers and Clinical Support Staff

- ☐ Practitioners
- ☐ Nursing
- ☐ MAs/CNAs/Techs
- ☐ Front Desk
- ☐ Practice/Office Manager
- ☐ Pharmacy staff
- ☐ Radiology staff
- ☐ Laboratory staff

## Other

- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

## CASE SCENARIO:

# Weathering the Storm: Natural Disaster Disruption

Testing Preparedness When the Winds Shift—Power Loss, Patient Safety, and Real-Time Decision Making

### Objective

To assess the physician office's ability to prioritize patient and staff safety, maintain continuity of care, and implement emergency procedures following a natural disaster that creates a utility outage.

### Scenario

At approximately noon, a small tornado strikes nearby residential and commercial areas. The tornado does not directly damage your office, but there are peripheral effects creating the following situation:

- Loss of power (no access to EMR, phones, refrigerators, autoclave, etc.)
- Four patients in exam rooms when power is lost
- Seven patients in the waiting room when power is lost
- Emergency generator provides dim lighting only in some areas
- A walk-in individual enters the lobby with visible lacerations from flying debris

There is no clear information on how long the outage will last or the full extent of the damage.

## GROUP BRAINSTORMING

# Suggested Discussion Questions

### 1. Patient Safety, Immediate Medical Needs, and Documentation

- What are your first actions after the power goes out?
- How do you assess and triage the walk-in patient with lacerations?
- Do you have access to basic wound care supplies? Who is designated to assist?
- What measures do you take to ensure the safety of the patients in exam rooms and the waiting area?

### 2. Power Loss and Equipment Impact

- Which critical systems are affected (e.g., EMR, phones, refrigeration)?
- What happens to temperature sensitive medications or specimens?
- How do you continue care without electronic chart access?
- What are your backup documentation procedures when the EMR is down?

### 3. Communication, Notification, and Staff Roles

- Who do you notify internally? Who handles external communication (e.g., emergency responders, utility company, patients with upcoming appointments)?
- How do you handle incoming patients? Is there signage? Are staff posted at doors?

### 4. Decision Making

- Who is in charge during this event? Does everyone know the chain of command?
- At what point do you decide to close the office or continue care?

### 5. Post Event Recovery and Continuity

- How do you plan to resume operations once power is restored?
- How do you handle missed visits, rescheduling, and follow-up communication?
- Are staff physically and emotionally supported after the event?



## GROUP BRAINSTORMING

# **Suggested Discussion Questions** *(continued)*

### **Roles to Clarify During the Exercise**

- Emergency Response Coordinator
- Clinical Lead
- Patient Liaison
- Front Desk
- Facilities
- Security Point of Contact
- Documentation
- Incident Log Keeper

### **After Exercise Debrief**

Facilitate a debrief session after completing the exercise to discuss the following:

- What worked well? What strengths came out of the discussion?
- What didn't go as expected? What knowledge or competency gaps were surprising?
- What policies or procedures need to be updated?
- Identify 2-3 immediate improvement actions and who is responsible.

# Suggested Materials to Include in Your Toolkit

Consider creating a disaster toolkit with the following items and any others you've identified during the exercise:

- Emergency Contact List Template
- Downtime Paper Charting Forms
- Medication Temperature Log
- Patient Evacuation Checklist
- Emergency Supply Inventory List
- Staff Roles & Phone Tree Template

## Additional Resources

See these resources for more information on natural disasters:

- ProAssurance Risk Management bundle “Disaster Mitigation (<https://bit.ly/3HduD3K>)”
- *2 Minutes: What's the Risk* video “Natural Disaster Mitigation and Preparation (<https://bit.ly/45o5Ams>)”
- “Senior Care Hurricane Preparedness Checklist (<https://bit.ly/4lzNy77>)”

# Post-Tabletop Action Items

Opportunities Identified	Team Member(s) Assigned	Action Plan/Next Steps

# Attendance Sign In Sheet

Name	Department	Signature