



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama Department of Public Health announces stroke system expansion in Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Stroke is the leading cause of serious long-term disability and the fourth leading cause of death in Alabama, killing more than 2,500 Alabamians each year. To combat this condition, the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) and the Office of Emergency Medical Services are activating a Statewide Stroke System beginning October 30, 2017.

Patients who are experiencing symptoms of a stroke need to be rapidly evaluated at a hospital and treated within a few hours of the onset of symptoms to either reverse the stroke or minimize the damage. The stroke system includes a network of hospitals, EMS agencies and a high-tech communication center, the Alabama Trauma Communications Center (ATCC). These partners work to route patients with signs and symptoms of stroke to the nearest hospital that is ready to care for them.

Currently, 61 hospitals across Alabama and 5 hospitals in bordering states have applied to participate and complete the rigorous inspection requirements to be designated as a stroke hospital in the statewide system. There are three different levels of stroke hospitals, depending on the level of care they can provide.

“This system presents a greatly enhanced opportunity to improve stroke care,” Acting State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris said. “One of the most frustrating things to a physician is when a patient presents to the hospital too late to qualify for stroke treatment. Early evaluation and treatment is vital, so we want to ensure that any patient experiencing stroke symptoms can be transported to the closest hospital with the appropriate treatment available.”

“We simply could not make this system work without our wonderful hospital partners and EMS providers who are committed to improving stroke care for Alabama’s citizens. We look forward to seeing this system improve the quality of life for those patients suffering from strokes in our state,” Dr. William E. Crawford, state EMS medical director, said.

Dr. Stephen Suggs, medical director of the Primary Stroke Center at Baptist Medical Center South in Montgomery, said, “Quality assurance is important to the function of the statewide stroke system; therefore, participating hospitals and ADPH are constantly monitoring the system to correct, improve and validate the quality of care provided.”

The pilot system was activated August 26, 2013, in the Birmingham and Southeast regions of the state. After the pilot program was initiated, ADPH began rolling out a statewide stroke system of care, and all areas are covered with the exception of 14 counties that are currently ramping up.

“Alabama’s hospitals are constantly seeking ways to improve care and to collaborate with our health care partners to ensure patients get the right care when they need it,” said Danne Howard, chief policy officer, Alabama Hospital Association. “Many people have worked diligently to get this system operational, and we are confident it will save many lives.”