



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Health and safety advocates call for a statewide trauma system

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Today Alabama's hospitals and physicians joined the Alabama Department of Public Health and state legislators in calling for the establishment of a statewide trauma system.

"The establishment of a statewide trauma system will move us toward our goal of ensuring that seriously injured people in any part of the state will be promptly transported to and treated at facilities with resources to care for their injuries," said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer. "While 90 percent of all injuries will continue to be appropriately treated in local community hospitals, creating a statewide system will ensure the severely injured 10 percent get the specialized care they need."

Dr. Williamson and other speakers stressed the importance of getting severely injured patients the care they need within one hour of the injury in order to save lives and ensure the best long-term quality of life for the patient. Officials added that trauma is the leading cause of death for Americans under 45 years of age and accounts for 73 percent of deaths of the ages 15 to 24.

State Sen. Parker Griffith of Huntsville and Rep. Ron Johnson of Sylacauga are proposing legislation that would establish a statewide system to coordinate trauma care, with oversight for this system falling to the Alabama Department of Public Health. The bill also creates a statewide council that will work with regional councils to operate the system.

A trauma system is a coordinated system of care that includes emergency medical technicians, a trauma communications system, hospital emergency department staff, trauma surgeons and other physicians who provide the needed surgical and other care. In a trauma system, these providers would work together to determine the best possible course of action for the injured who are reported through the 911 system.

Dr. Williamson cited the Birmingham trauma system as an example of how a coordinated effort can save lives. "The Birmingham Region started a trauma system in 1996, and in the next nine years more than 23,000 patients were treated for trauma," said Dr. Williamson. "During this time

the Birmingham Region showed a 12 percent decrease in the death rate, while the rest of the state showed no improvement.”

Health officials provided the following statistics as further evidence of the need for statewide coordination:

- Alabama has the fourth highest highway trauma death rate in the United States, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Almost 80 percent of trauma results from motor vehicle crashes, with the death rate twice as high in rural versus urban areas of the state. In fact, in 2005 28 percent of Alabama’s motor vehicle crashes occurred in rural areas, yet they accounted for 69 percent of fatalities.
- The time between serious injury and receiving surgical care is the most important predictor of survival. This is called the “golden hour.” Among the many challenges in rural trauma care are the limited resources available for that 10 percent of those whose injuries are severe. Real stabilization occurs in the operating room where bleeding is stopped and blood volume is restored.
- A trauma system will get the patients to the right hospital to take care of their injuries in the shortest possible time. Patients who are taken to a local hospital for initial stabilization can be transferred to the best hospital to care for their injuries with a single phone call. The system will coordinate all prehospital transports, such as air or ground, and uses computerization and around-the-clock staffing.
- Sixty million Americans are injured annually. Of these injured patients, 150,000 die, 9 million are disabled, and 300,000 are permanently disabled. As trauma is more commonly a disease of the young, it has a far greater impact and its cost (more than \$400 billion annually) is twice that of heart disease, stroke and cancer combined.
- The cost of trauma in Alabama for 2006 was estimated to be \$6.5 billion. This includes medical care, loss of wages, property damage, and other costs.