

# Plain Language Emergency Alerts

Making it easier to respond to emergencies

**Community  
Medical Center**

**RWJBarnabas  
HEALTH**

# Hospital Codes

For decades emergency alert codes (e.g. Code Blue, Code Red) have been widely used in hospitals throughout the country. These codes are a way of quickly alerting team members to critical situations without alarming patients and visitors.



EMERGENCY CODE LIST	
	CODE BLUE   Medical Emergency Adult CODE 13   Medical Emergency Pediatric
	CODE RED   Fire Emergency
	CODE PINK   Child Abduction (PATIENT)
	CODE AMBER   Child Abduction or Missing (VISITOR)
	CODE WHITE   Urgent Security Request
	CODE ORANGE   Hazardous Materials
	CODE GREEN   Emergency Operations Plan Activation
	ALL CLEAR   Cancellation Notice
	OVERHEAD   Security Alert
	OVERHEAD   Weather Emergency

# Code What?

Nationwide there is a lack of standardization that has resulted in a remarkably wide range of code words being used to identify critical situations.

15 states have already moved to plain language.

- California has 47 infant abduction and 61 combative patient codes
- Pennsylvania has 80 different codes, in 37 categories and 152 meanings
- New Jersey statewide statistics are unknown

# Code Confusion

As RWJ Barnabas Health expands and our team members travel to different facilities throughout the system, the transition to plain language alerts is critical.



# Why Plain Language?

Community Medical Center is committed to being a High Reliability Organization

- Plain Language Alerts send a clear message to employees, physicians, patients and visitors, empowering each to react immediately as needed to an emergency
- Decreased confusion among employees and physicians who work and visit multiple healthcare facilities.

# Plain Language is Supported

- 15 states have already moved to plain language
- The Joint Commission
- The New Jersey Hospital Association
- The New Jersey Department of Health
- Institute of Medicine
- Center for Disease Control
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Food and Drug Administration
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- American Hospital Association
- Emergency Nurses Association

# Plain Language...

- Allows individuals to understand and act appropriately
- Central tenant of written and verbal health literacy
- Recommended for compliance, interagency communication and safety of responders (NIMS compliant)
- Ensures transparency and facilitates patient and public safety
- The verbal equivalent of informed consent allowing everyone to make choices for their safety

# Three Types of Alerts

1. Facility Alert
2. Security Alert
3. Medical Alert



# Facility Alert

Just as it sounds, a Facility Alert is any type of emergency that affects all or part of the building and occupants. Examples include:

- Hazardous Materials spill
- Evacuation of all or part of the facility
- Fire
- Command Center Activation
- Weather Emergency

# Security Alert

Any security threat to the facility or a specific location within. Examples include:

- Active Shooter
- Bomb Threat
- Disruptive / Disorderly Persons
- Elopement
- Missing Person (Child / Infant / Adult)

**\*\*Some Security Alerts may not be announced overhead**

# Medical Alert

Any medical emergency that requires a clinical response from throughout the facility. Examples include:

- Mass Casualty Incident
- Cardiac Arrest
- Sepsis Alert
- Rapid Response Team

# How Do I Initiate an Emergency Alert?

When an emergency occurs:

1. Call the emergency phone number \*\*\*111  
\*If calling from an inpatient bedside phone, dial x555
2. Give your name and extension
3. State the emergency using this script
  - A. Type of Alert (Facility, Security, Medical)
  - B. Type of Emergency (e.g. Fire, Missing Person, Stroke)
  - C. Detailed Location of the emergency
  - D. If needed, specific directions

# How Do I Initiate an Emergency Alert?

Examples:

“Hello, This is Scott at extension 12345”

“I have a Medical Alert – Adult Cardiac Arrest –  
Unit 2A”

“Hello, This is Scott at extension 12345”

“I have a Security Alert – Patient Elopement –  
Unit 3B”

# What Will I Hear?

Once an Alert is received by the operator, a Plain Language Alert is to be made overhead, for example, the operators will announce:

- “Medical Alert – Stroke Response Team – 2F”

# What Will I Hear?

Sometimes, directions may be included:

- “Medical Alert – Mass Casualty Incident – Emergency Department”
  - Examples of Directions
    - “All Departments Follow Your Mass Casualty Incident Protocols”
    - “All Employees Report To Your Departments and Await Further Instruction”

Directions may vary by emergency

# CMC Approved Alerts

## Facility Alert

- Command Center Activation
- Fire Alarm
- Decontamination (Internal or External)
- Evacuation
- Hazardous Materials Spill
- Shelter in Place
- Utility Interruption
- Technology Interruption
- Weather



# CMC Approved Alerts

## Security Alert

- Active Shooter
- Suspicious Item
- Bomb Threat
- Civil Disturbance
- Lockout / Lockdown
- Patient Elopement
- Hostage Situation
- Security Assistance
- Child / Infant Abduction

# CMC Approved Alerts

## Medical Alert

- Any Medical Emergency Requiring a Specialized Response May Be Used
- Mass Casualty Incident

# Example

- “Facility Alert – Hazardous Materials Incident – Internal – Pharmacy – Please Stay Away From Area”
- “Security Alert – Infant Abduction – Pediatrics – Description of Missing Child”
- “Medical Alert – Sepsis Team – Emergency Department”

# Terminating an Alert

Once the emergency situation has been resolved some alerts may need to be cancelled, the announcement terminating an emergency will be:

“All Clear” – Repeated 3 times via overhead page

# Crosswalk – Former Codes vs. New Alerts

Old Code	New Emergency Alert
Code Red	Facility Alert + Fire Alarm + Location
Code Orange	Facility Alert + Hazardous Materials Incident + Location
Code Amber	Security Alert + Infant/Child Abduction + Location + Description
Code Gray – Security Assist	Security Alert + Security Assistance + Location
Code Gray – Elopement	Security Alert + Patient Elopement + Location
Code Yellow	Security Alert + Suspicious Item / Bomb Threat + Location + Directions (as needed)
Code Silver – Hostage Situation	Security Alert + Hostage Situation + Location

# Crosswalk – Former Codes vs. New Alerts

Old Code	New Emergency Alert
Code Silver – Active Shooter	Security Alert + Active Shooter + Location + Directions (as needed)
Code Triage	Medical Alert + Mass Casualty Incident + Location OR Facility Alert + Command Center Activation + Location
Code White	Medical Alert + Pediatric Cardiac Arrest + Location
Code Blue	Medical Alert + Adult Cardiac Arrest + Location
Code Chill	Medical Alert + Hypothermia Response Team + Location
Code Stroke	Medical Alert + Stroke Response Team + Location
Code Sepsis	Medical Alert + Sepsis + Location

# Crosswalk – Former Codes vs. New Alerts

Old Code	New Emergency Alert
Code MH (Malignant Hyperthermia)	Medical Alert + Malignant Hyperthermia Response Team + Location
RRT	Medical Alert + Rapid Response Team + Location
Code Clear	All Clear