



After the storm . . . the injuries

By Gale Pryor | September 28, 2017

The impact of the historic flooding of Houston due to Hurricane Harvey has been measured in 50 lost lives, thousands of submerged homes, and billions of dollars.

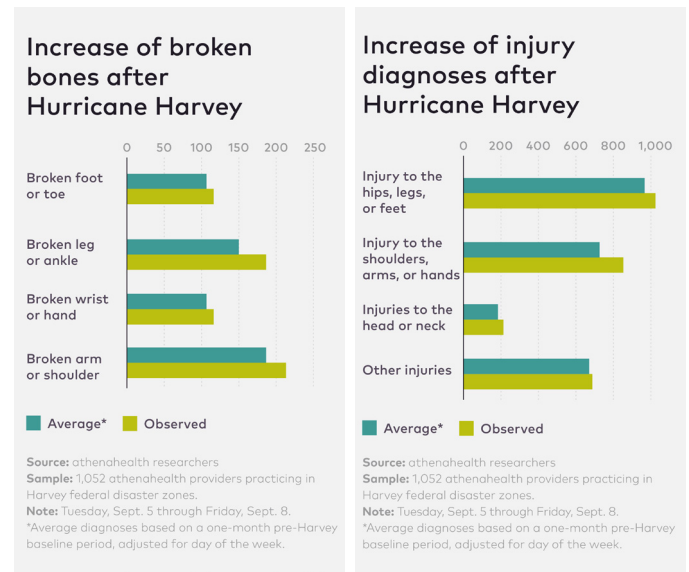
The impact of the historic flooding of Houston due to Hurricane Harvey has been measured in 50 lost lives, thousands of submerged homes, and billions of dollars.

Another measure of the devastation is the number and type of injuries Houston-area residents sustained in the storm and its aftermath.

Data from the athenahealth network gives a glimpse into Harvey's health effects. In the week following the hurricane, 14.7 percent more patients, visiting more than 1,000 area providers on the network, sought help for broken bones and other injuries than in the month before the storm.

At the practices of VillageMD, a national provider of primary care management services, doctors reopened their doors to patients on Thursday, Sept. 5, five days after widespread flooding began in Houston. Physicians and staff greeted "many new

patients with new symptoms and complaints due to the storm," says chief medical officer Clive Fields. What he saw: "Trauma – a lot of broken toes – and infection, as well as anxiety."



While broken toes may resolve relatively quickly, infections and other diagnoses may extend the impact of the storm, affecting the quality and kind of patient visits providers can expect. Respiratory

complaints, for example, rose 10 percent in the first few days following Harvey's landfall, compared to the previous month.

And in one especially long-term impact, births rose 8 percent in the week following the storm among Houston patients on the athenahealth network. That makes sense, says Fields. "Every OB should be ready when barometric pressure changes that much."

Gale Pryor is associate editor of athenaInsight.



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