US hospitals face IV fluid shortage

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Beckers Hospital Review

Hospitals across the nation are conserving IV fluids amid a new shortage of supplies — the latest example of fallout from Hurricane Helene.

Somerville, Mass.-based Mass General Brigham held a press call Oct. 3, saying Baxter International, the nation's largest supplier of IV solutions, sent a letter to the health system and other customers stating it would be receiving 40% of the level of supply it typically receives.

"We have been informed that due to the devastating effects of Hurricane Helene, we will be receiving a reduced supply of IV fluids from Baxter International as they work to mitigate disruptions in their manufacturing operations," Paul Biddinger, MD, chief preparedness and continuity officer, said in a statement to *Becker's*. "Having experienced similar challenges in the wake of Hurricane Maria in 2017, we continue to be mindful of how we manage the supply of these medications to ensure minimal impact on our patients. Hospital operations continue as normal and patient care remains unaffected."

The supply disruptions affect hospitals across the country and stem from the closure of a Baxter International plant in North Carolina, which suffered significant damage during the storm. The company supplies about 60% of IV solutions used in the U.S., manufacturing around 1.5 million bags per day. The company is assessing the extent of the damage and communicating with customers about actions it is taking to minimize potential disruptions.

In a Sept. 30 statement, Baxter said product allocations will help prevent stockpiling and "increases the likelihood of equitable access to available products."

It's unclear when the facility will be able to resume operations

In the meantime, hospitals have put conservation measures into action. At Mass General Brigham, which consumes more than 100,000 liters of IV fluid each month, is giving patients who are healthy enough Gatorade or water instead of IVs. The hospital has also temporarily halted the practice of discarding IV units, regardless of their current volume, and replacing them with new units when patients are transferred from one unit to another. In an email to staff obtained by *The Boston Globe*, the health system called the shortage as "serious and immediate."

Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles remains fully operational, though the hospital has implemented contingency plans.

"We are utilizing alternative solutions based on guidelines from national medical associations and exploring other ways to source IV fluids," a Cedars-Sinai spokesperson said in a statement to *Becker's*. "We are closely monitoring the situation, which is evolving quickly, and will keep our community and patients informed."

Chicago-based Northwestern Medicine told *NBC News* it anticipates IV fluid supply disruptions to be a "long-term issue."

Aside from conservation efforts, hospitals have few options to bolster supplies, an official from Premier, a group purchasing organization for hospitals, told *The Wall Street Journal.* For example, the U.S. can't rely on European manufacturers due to existing global shorages.

Meanwhile, other U.S. suppliers are stepping in to try and fill supply gaps. B. Braun Medical, a manufacturer that makes around 23% of supplies used in the U.S., told *NBC* it is hiring new employees as it works to build up to 24/7 operations at two of its facilities in the coming weeks.

"It's too early to say what would happen if this [shortage] continues for many weeks or months," Dr. Biddinger said.