



Josh Stein, Attorney General

North Carolina Department of Justice Hurricane Helene FAQ *Current as of November 18, 2024*

I have questions about food, shelter, roadways, or need other general non-emergency information. Who can I call?

- Call 211 for any non-emergency related questions.

What are the road conditions?

- You can see the current roadway conditions by visiting DriveNC.gov or calling 511.
- DOT has ended the Western North Carolina "Do Not Travel" advisory
 - o You can use their dashboard to track progress on temporary repairs and reconstruction of roadways: [NCDOT Road Reopening for Hurricane Helene 2024 \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

I need shelter. Where can I find out what to do?

- Visit ReadyNC.Gov for sheltering information and follow your local government's social media and website for more information.
- Current list of open shelters: [Open Shelters | Ready NC](#)

I need help with clean-up at my home. Are there resources that can help me?

- FEMA is accepting applications for the Individual Assistance Program, which includes money for emergency housing at hotels, immediate recovery needs and more. Call 800-621-3362 or visit DisasterAssistance.gov for more information or to get started on an application.
 - o The deadline to file for FEMA Individual Assistance has been extended to Jan. 7, 2025.
 - o FEMA's helpline is available from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily. The line is open daily, and help is available in multiple languages.
- You should take photos of the damage and document what occurred and what your losses are. Then begin the clean-up process when it is safe to do so. And beware of scammers!
 - o Do not pay for work up front. Use a check or a credit card if possible.
 - o Beware of any contractor who tries to rush you or who comes to your home offering assistance.
 - o Report suspected scammers to local police and DOJ.
 - Visit [Hurricane Helene Response - NCDOJ](#) for more information on disaster repair

Questions about power outages:

- [Power Outages | Ready NC](#) (current outages and where to report). *Please note that the Attorney General's Office and the Public Staff of the NC Utilities Commission do not have authority over municipal utility systems.*

My home or community has damage. What is next?

- Damage assessments will be scheduled with impacted communities and counties where damage to homes, structures, and public infrastructure. This begins after any flood waters have receded and active response to life-safety hazards are completed.
- The US Small Business Administration has **paused** offering loans for disaster assistance for homeowners, renters, nonprofits, and businesses until Congress approves more funding. While applications are still open and being processed, applicants will not have their funds disbursed until Congress provides the money. Visit [Hurricane Helene | U.S. Small Business Administration \(sba.gov\)](#) for more information.
- To ease burdens for people whose vehicles were damaged by Hurricane Helene, the DMV will suspend the collection of various application and late fees, suspend certain requirements for both residents and businesses, and extend certain licenses for mechanics and businesses.
- Impacted persons who have relocated due to the storm can submit a change of address request at moversguide.usps.com.

My home or business had damage and I have questions. Who can I email?

- Residents with questions about the recovery process or Individual Assistance may [email IARecovery@ncdps.gov](mailto:IARecovery@ncdps.gov).

I am a farmer whose agriculture and livestock were harmed. Who can I contact?

- The N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has activated its hotline to connect farmers with resources that can assist with damage and other agricultural emergencies related to the storm. The toll-free number is 1-866-645-9403. A live operator will be available on the hotline between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.
- The N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer services has opened a hay and livestock assistance form to connect suppliers and those in need: [Hay and Livestock Assistance Form \(NCDA&CS\) | NC State Extension \(ncsu.edu\)](#)

My job has been affected by the storm? Are there resources that can help me?

- The North Carolina Division of Unemployment Services has opened disaster unemployment assistance. People in the emergency declaration area have 60 days to file for expanded benefits and benefits may last up to 26 weeks.
 - o File an application at <https://www.des.nc.gov/>.
- Governor Roy Cooper issued an emergency [Executive Order](#) authorizing the Division of Employment Security to increase the amount of weekly unemployment payments available to North Carolinians in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.
 - o Weekly unemployment benefits will increase from a maximum of \$350 a week to a maximum of \$600 a week. The order will also increase benefits by \$250 a week (up to the \$600 cap) for all eligible workers. This order is tied to the State of Emergency for Hurricane Helene.
- People in Western North Carolina counties impacted by Hurricane Helene who are enrolled in Food and Nutrition Services now have access to replacement benefits on their Electronic

Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. The United States Department of Agriculture approved North Carolina to allow current FNS participants in [23 counties](#) to receive 70 percent of their total monthly September benefit back on their EBT card. The benefit replacement is automatic and does not require action from the FNS participant.

- Families looking for child care can find assistance through the NC Child Care Hotline at 1-888-600-1685 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays. It is run through DHHS and the Child Care Resource & Referral agencies to help families find child care options for children up to 12 years old.
- Land of Sky Regional Council created a [map](#) of public Wi-Fi resources to help individuals who do not have working internet.

Questions about support for emotional distress related to the disaster?

- Call or text 1-800-985-5990. This is a national hotline providing year-round disaster crisis counseling. This toll-free, multilingual, crisis support service is available 24/7.
- DHHS has launched the Hope4NC Helpline (1-855-587-3463) to provide free, 24/7 mental health support for first responders and volunteers working on our Hurricane Helene disaster response. It is help for the helpers.
- The Disability Disaster Hotline, 800-626-4959, provides information, referrals and guidance to people with disabilities and their families during disasters. Help is available 24/7.
- Governor Cooper issued an [executive order](#) providing bereavement leave for state employees.
 - o Employees will be eligible for up to 40 hours of paid leave following the loss of an immediate family member, including a spouse, child, sibling, parent, or grandparent. Step, half, and in-law family members are included along with any dependent living in the employee's home.
 - o The bereavement leave covers the loss of a loved one for any reason and is retroactive to September 27, 2024, due to Hurricane Helene. Any eligible employee who suffered a loss after September 27, whether due to the storm or other causes, will have access to the leave. Eligible employees have up to six months after the death to take leave.
 - o Employees who lost a colleague will be eligible for up to eight hours of bereavement leave to attend a funeral or memorial service for their coworker.

Where can I find county-specific updates?

- DPS has compiled a list of resources for [county updates](#).

I have specific skills and would like to volunteer to help. Where can I go?

- If you have specific skills, you should connect with a VOAD partner with those needs. Here is a link to the NCVOAD members: <https://www.ncvoad.org/members/>.

I have a loved one who is incarcerated and am worried for their safety.

- The North Carolina Department of Adult Corrections (DAC) has confirmed that all incarcerated populations are safe.
 - o DAC has a Family and Friends Hotline for questions from loved ones of incarcerated persons 1-800-368-1985
 - o Visiting at all occupied prison facilities has returned to normal schedules and operations

- Five facilities, Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution, Black Mountain Substance Abuse Treatment Center for Women, Craggy Correctional Institution, Mountain View Correctional Institution, Western Correctional Center for Women, have been evacuated
- Locations of incarcerated persons will appear on the [NCDAC Offender Public Information database](#) approximately 24 hours after relocation. Evacuated populations will return to their original facilities when it is safe to do so.

I have questions about water safety and contamination.

- DHHS has released guidance on safety water consumption as it relates to Hurricane Helene: [NCDHHS Urges Safe Water Usage following Hurricane Helene | NCDHHS](#)
- To check the status of public water supply, visit this dashboard: [PWS SRTS PUBLIC View Dashboard \(arcgis.com\)](#)
- The Division of Public Health is providing free, well-testing kits through local health departments.
 - o [Contact](#) your local health department to request a free kit.
- Restaurants without their usual sources of water can reopen through an Emergency Operations Plan developed with their local health department: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/restaurant-emergency-operations/download?attachment>
- Hotels and motels are encouraged to submit [Emergency Operations Plans](#) to their local health department so they can reopen as quickly as possible while water systems and infrastructure continues to be repaired in western North Carolina.
 - o The Division of Public Health recently launched a resource for hospitality operators to assist with environmental health and safety requirements. Operators can reach out directly at EHpreparednessquestions@dhhs.nc.gov or call 919-707-5999.

Questions about health insurance appeals, network services, prescription drugs and other medical treatment.

- DOI has released a bulletin detailing certain relief for insureds following Hurricane Helene: [Microsoft Word - Tropical Storm Helene Advisory.docx \(ncdoi.gov\)](#)
- The NC Board of Pharmacy has approved pharmacists being able to refill some prescriptions w/o provider authorization because providers might not be in a position to provide medical services: [Home \(ncbop.org\)](#)
- All [shelters](#) have Naloxone and a source of methadone to make sure all opioid treatment programs in the region are reopen.
- The North Carolina Board of Pharmacy has created a dashboard of operating pharmacies in Helene-affected areas: [EmergencyOperatingPharmaciesHelene](#)

Questions about misinformation.

- North Carolina Emergency Management (NCME) and local officials are cautioning the public about false Helene reports and misinformation being shared on social media. NCME has launched a [fact versus rumor response webpage](#) to provide information in the wake of this storm. FEMA also has a [rumor response webpage](#).

Questions about tax relief for those affected by Helene.

- The NC Department of Revenue has published a tax notice granting relief from certain tax penalties: [Important Notice - Tax Relief Granted in The Disaster Recovery Act of 2024](#)

- The IRS provided [guidance](#) to taxpayers on how to address disaster-related losses in their 2024 tax return, as well as providing guidance on how qualified disaster relief payments are generally excluded from gross income.
 - o The IRS also has a special hotline specifically dedicated to taxpayers with disaster-related tax questions. Helene victims can call the agency's hotline at (866) 562-5227.

Resources for veterans.

- The VA has launched a new dedicated disaster relief webpage: [Disaster Help | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#) and a disaster relief hotline: 1 (800) 507-4571
- If you or a veteran you know needs immediate housing assistance after Hurricane Helene, you can call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at (877) 424-3838.
- Legionnaires, Sons of the American Legion members, and Legion Posts that have been displaced from their primary residence due to damage sustained during Hurricane Helene may be eligible for [financial assistance](#) through the American Legion. Applications for assistance are due on December 26, 2024.
 - o Legionnaires and Sons of the American Legion members may be eligible for up to \$3,000. Legion Posts may be eligible for up to \$10,000.
- For other questions, veterans can contact their local VA office: [Find VA Locations | Veterans Affairs](#)
- For 24/7 crisis counseling support for veterans and their families, call 988 then press 1 or text 838255

Questions about legislative relief.

- Governor Cooper signed the [Disaster Recovery Act of 2024](#) on October 10, 2024.
- This law creates a new Hurricane Helene fund with \$273 million from the state's Savings Reserve Fund. Here's how it breaks down:
 - o \$250 million to the Department of Public Safety's Division of Emergency Management to match to federal disaster relief funds.
 - A portion of these funds establishes a revolving loan program to help local governments and state agencies with cash flow while they are waiting for federal reimbursement.
 - o \$16 million to the Department of Public Instruction for lost compensation of school nutrition employees due to school closures.
 - o \$2 million to provide local governments technical assistance with local recovery funds.
 - o \$5 million to the State Board of Elections.
- The law also:
 - o Allows public schools to make up or mark as completed any number of the days or hours missed and use up to 30 days of remote instruction toward required instructional days.
 - o Waives DMV fees for obtaining a duplicate driver's license.
 - o Waives certain environmental requirements for state highway repairs.
 - o Grants county board of elections flexibility to address polling site issues.
- Attorney General Josh Stein said [this](#) about the legislation:
 - o "I thank the General Assembly for moving quickly to draft and pass this bill and allocate initial funds for western North Carolina relief and recovery. As I've traveled

western North Carolina and visited with affected people, it has been abundantly clear that the work to help our fellow North Carolinians is going to take weeks, months – and in some cases, even years. We're going to need to keep working together on a bipartisan basis to help our neighbors recover from this disaster.”

- Governor Cooper signed the [Disaster Recovery Act of 2024 – Part II](#) on October 25, 2024.
- The law adds \$604 million to the Helene fund, including:
 - o \$65 million for the Department of Public Instruction
 - o \$20 million for the University of North Carolina
 - o \$71.4 million for DHHS
 - o \$56 million to the Department of Commerce
 - o \$139 million to the Department of Environmental Quality
 - o \$130 million to the DPS
 - o \$106 to the Office of State Budget and Management and the Treasurer
 - o \$16.7 million for community colleges.
- The relief package also grants additional calendar flexibility to impacted public school districts, up to 20 additional waived days, and provides emergency grants for postsecondary students who have suffered financial hardship due to Hurricane Helene.