



# THE WTC RESPONDER HEALTH WATCH

## WTC Medical Monitoring and Treatment Program



Scottie Hill (left) and Annie Lok (right)

## Dear 9/11 Responders:

**THIS EDITION OF** the *World Trade Center Responder Health Watch* is dedicated to the issue of mental health. Eight and a half years later, the emotional consequences of 9/11 linger for many World Trade Center responders.

Trauma, the emotional response to a traumatic event like 9/11, is typically marked by feelings and experiences of depression, anxiety, irritability, anger, guilt, nightmares, flashbacks, and strained relationships. That said, trauma affects everyone differently, and each person's journey towards recovery, or feeling better, is different.

In preparing this newsletter, we reached out to WTC responders via email to ask about your thoughts and experiences of dealing with the emotional consequences of 9/11. We asked you to share with us any tips or strategies that you have found helpful in your own recovery journey. Dozens wrote back to us with inspiring stories, tips, and steps towards feeling better. Advice ranged from prayer to exercise to spending time with family.

The messages were inspiring and moving, but by no

means did they all come from responders who have fully "recovered," or who have "gone back to normal." Many still struggle with their memories of 9/11 and continue to seek help. Woven together, however, the messages we received make up a picture of resilience—life is not perfect, or exactly the same as it was on September 10, 2001, but through a variety of ways, 9/11 responders are finding ways to cope.

This picture can be called a "new normal" for 9/11 responders. In this newsletter, we've put together some things you can do—on your own, with your family and friends, or with a mental health professional—that may help you find your new normal. The advice comes from fellow 9/11 responders as well as from program therapists.

We recognize that "recovery" can take a long, long time. But you have shown us, time and again, that 9/11 responders are strong and resilient. I hope that the information in these pages will be helpful to you.

We wish you health and peace of mind.

Sincerely,

Scottie Hill & Annie Lok  
Member Services, Education and Retention  
WTC Medical Monitoring and Treatment Program  
Data & Coordination Center

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# What is Trauma?

**THE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001** terrorist attack on the World Trade Center was a traumatic event. A traumatic event is a highly stressful situation that poses a threat to a person's safety. Trauma is the emotional response to that experience.

Emotional responses to 9/11 vary greatly among World Trade Center responders. It is extremely important to be aware of the emotional consequences of 9/11 and how these consequences might affect you, your health, your family and your work.

Here are some ways trauma can show up in your life.

**Trauma can affect how you feel, think and behave in the following ways:**

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Loss of pleasure
- Panic attacks
- Irritability, easy to anger, impatience
- Feeling scared often or all of the time
- Nightmares, flashbacks
- Unwanted thoughts that you can't stop
- Sleep problems
- Difficulty concentrating
- Avoiding certain situations, places, events that remind you of trauma
- Unstable moods
- Substance abuse (See box for more about this)

**Trauma can affect your body and physical health in the following ways:**

- Headaches
- Nausea
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- High blood pressure
- Stomach problems
- Eating problems
- Pains in your body

**Trauma can affect your relationships with your spouse, partner, children, friends and others in the following ways:**

- Feelings of isolation and inability to connect with other people
- More arguments
- Less communication
- Marital and relationship problems; separation or divorce
- Violence at home
- Less happiness in your spouse or partner

**Trauma can affect your children, because they are especially vulnerable and sensitive to what is happening with their parents. And the impact on children can show up in these ways:**

- Behavior problems such as aggression
- Depression and anxiety
- Nightmares
- Trouble paying attention in school
- School performance problems

**Trauma can affect your work in the following ways:**

- Trouble concentrating at work
- Trouble getting motivated to go to work
- Problems with co-workers
- Absences from work due to emotional or physical symptoms
- Job loss due to symptoms
- Certain things at work can trigger memories of 9/11

All these parts of your life are inter-related, and so problems in one area can affect another. For example, your anxiety might lead to shortness of breath and high blood pressure. And your health issues cause you to miss work and lose pay, and that in turn makes you more likely to argue with your spouse.

You may experience a number of these symptoms, or none of them, or you may experience symptoms not on these lists at all. If you are not feeling well, or just not feeling like yourself, you can get help. **You can call this program at 1-888-702-0630, or your clinical center, to ask questions or set up an appointment.** You can also read about steps you can take on your own on p. 9, and what other responders have done to cope on p. 10.

**Many trauma sufferers also experience substance abuse. It is often associated with a trauma-related mental health condition. Here is some information that may help you see if you have a substance abuse issue.**

#### WHAT IS SUBSTANCE ABUSE?

It is defined as the use of alcohol or another mood-changing drug (prescription or not), in a compulsive or dangerous way. For example, someone with an alcohol abuse problem may feel like they can't stop drinking even if they wanted to.

#### WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE?

Common signs that someone has a substance abuse problem include:

- Neglecting responsibilities at work, home, or school because of drug or alcohol use.
- Using alcohol or drugs under dangerous conditions, or taking risks while drunk or high, such as driving while intoxicated.
- Getting into legal trouble, such as arrests for disorderly conduct, driving under the influence or stealing to support a drug habit.
- Alcohol or drug use is causing problems in relationships, such as fights with spouse, family members, people at work, boss or loss of friends.

- Alcohol or drug use that negatively impacts your life in some way and is a problem for you. This will be different for each individual.
- Feeling like you have a lack of control over your drinking and/or drug use.

#### WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT A SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROBLEM?

Substance abuse is treatable. Out-patient counseling, in-patient detoxification that includes medical monitoring of withdrawal symptoms, and residential rehabilitation programs that feature intensive counseling are some of the ways substance abuse is treated.

Substance abuse is a covered condition in this program if it is WTC-related, and we can make treatment referrals for 9/11 responders when it is appropriate. Even if the problem is not WTC-related, clinicians in our program can refer you for help. For more information, please call your clinical center or 1-888-702-0630. **Any information you share with the program is confidential.** If you belong to a union, you may also consider contacting your union's membership assistance program for help.

# Journey Towards Recovery

**FEELING BETTER AFTER** a traumatic event like 9/11 is a journey, and each 9/11 responder travels this journey at his or her own pace. It's important to be aware of the emotional consequences of 9/11 (see opposite page for a list of possible responses to trauma), because that is often the first step toward feeling better and getting the appropriate help.

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**Many 9/11 responders who suffer from trauma eventually create a “new normal” in their lives.... There are many ways to feel better after experiencing a traumatic event like 9/11.**

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Some responders still experience the emotional consequences of 9/11 today. Others report that they feel better, but may never feel the same way they did before 9/11. There is no right or wrong place to be on your own journey towards recovery. And, it is important to recognize that after a traumatic event like 9/11, you may never again feel like you did before 9/11.

Even if you feel bad now, it doesn't mean you'll feel bad forever. Many 9/11 responders who suffer from trauma eventually create a “new normal” in their lives that allows them to keep going and even move forward while, at the same time, never forgetting 9/11 and the way it changed their lives. There are many ways to feel better after experiencing a traumatic event like 9/11.

One way is to seek professional treatment. Some 9/11 responders have chosen to go to social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, or other mental health professionals for help.

**Our program offers 100% confidential mental health services for covered conditions, free of charge.** We offer the following services:

- **PSYCHOTHERAPY**  
In psychotherapy, you talk with the therapist, usually a social worker or psychologist, about your symptoms and work toward lessening or resolving them.
- **MEDICATION MANAGEMENT**  
In medication management, you talk with a psychiatrist (a medical doctor who specializes in mental health) and he or she can prescribe and adjust medicine that helps your symptoms.
- **SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT**  
We make referrals for in-patient and out-patient substance abuse treatment.
- **SUPPORT GROUPS**  
Support groups give 9/11 responders an opportunity to share their experiences with others who have similar challenges. These groups are available from time to time through the program. Please contact your clinical center for more information.

Mental health referrals in this program are made in the following ways:

1. During the annual monitoring exam, you will fill out a mental health questionnaire. Based on your responses, you may be asked to speak with a mental health provider during the exam. The provider will ask you questions about how you feel, and refer you to mental health treatment as appropriate.
2. During a medical treatment visit, your doctor may make a mental health referral, based on seeing and talking to you.
3. In between visits, if you feel that you need help, call your clinical center or the program phone bank at 1-888-702-0630.



Janet Lavelle, LCSW, Supervising Social Worker at the Long Island Clinical Center

## ASK THE THERAPIST

Sometimes responders are apprehensive about coming in for that first therapy appointment, because they don't know what to expect, or they aren't sure how it would help them feel better. So we interviewed Janet Lavelle, LCSW. She is the supervising social worker at the Long Island Clinical Center.

### *What is therapy?*

It's a healing process. If you get injured physically, you might go to a physical therapist. If you have a lot of stress, depressed mood or anxiety, you can go to a psychotherapist.

### *How does it work?*

Generally therapy involves figuring out what is causing your symptoms, and then finding ways to alleviate those symptoms. In my work, I try to give 9/11 responders tools for coping with the symptoms they're having. There are many techniques for this. There is talk therapy, where responders can work out their problems by talking about them. There are relaxation techniques, breathing exercises and also physical exercise.

### *How do you decide whether you should go to therapy?*

In general, you might consider having some therapy or

counseling if you feel you're not enjoying life or getting as much out of life as you should, or not functioning as well as you would like in your job or home life.

### *How long do you have to be in therapy to get better?*

It varies, depending on the responder's needs and goals. Some responders may have longer lasting symptoms, or more severe symptoms, and they may see ongoing therapy as necessary for their mental health. It's very individual. My goal is to get the person feeling well enough so they don't need me any more, but I will help them for as long as they need.

### *What can you expect in an initial visit?*

At the first visit, I try to get an overview of the symptoms and problems. I want to learn about their everyday life, and take a history of symptoms and prior treatment. Together, we set goals for what the responder wants to accomplish. This can take 45 minutes to an hour.

### *What can you expect in later visits?*

The responder can bring what they want to talk about. If they don't know what to say, I'll ask them questions—what went on that week, what's bothering them, what they want to work on. From week to week, I check in with the responder on how they are, and if there are new goals.

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**My goal is to get the person feeling well enough so they don't need me any more.**

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### *How do you know if it's helping?*

The short answer is that you feel better, more positive, and you feel you're functioning better.

### *How might therapy contribute to the recovery from 9/11's emotion impact?*

If your life has changed a lot as a result of 9/11, therapy can help you adapt to current realities, to your new life. It's helpful to have someone who is not part of your

everyday life to provide an outside perspective. This person may be able to see your life in a way that you can't.

*What is your advice to 9/11 responders who are unsure about therapy?*

Don't be afraid of therapists. Therapy is just one of many tools responders can use to improve overall health and well being. If it doesn't work for you, you don't have to go back. Try it out and see.

## MENTAL HEALTH MEDICATION MANAGEMENT

Q & A with Alicia Hurtado, MD, psychiatrist at the Mount Sinai Clinical Center

Many 9/11 responders decide to see a psychiatrist and use medication to lessen their trauma-related symptoms, but many others may have questions about whether this is right for them. Dr. Hurtado provides some answers here about mental health medication management.

*How are 9/11 responders in this program referred to a psychiatrist?*

9/11 responders in this program may be referred to a psychiatrist based on an interview with a mental health provider. (See p. 4) The provider will ask many questions,



Dr. Alicia Hurtado, psychiatrist at the Mount Sinai Clinical Center

some of which are about your feelings, thoughts, 9/11 exposure, past and current relationships, and sleeping and eating patterns. Based on the type and severity of symptoms, the provider might determine that you can benefit from seeing a psychiatrist.

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**Medications that psychiatrists use to treat mental health conditions can help you feel less depressed, less anxious, improve sleep and appetite, and have fewer ups and downs with your mood.**

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*What is a visit with a psychiatrist like?*

The first visit usually lasts 45 minutes to an hour. The psychiatrist will ask specific details regarding your symptoms, thoughts and feelings, and daily life. The doctor will ask when your symptoms started, how severe they are, and how long they've lasted. They will also ask about your medical history, current medications, and explore whether your psychiatric symptoms are related to medications currently used, a medical condition or a substance use problem. You may be asked to get follow-up blood work or other medical tests.

Based on the interview, and a discussion of treatment options, the doctor decides with you whether to start medication treatment. After you first start the medication, the doctor will likely ask to see you every other week to see whether the treatment is working. Once you've found something that works for you, you might be asked to go back every four to six weeks. During the follow-up visits, the doctor will ask you whether your symptoms have improved, and about any side effects.

*What do these medications do? Are there side effects?*

In general, most psychiatric medications are well-tolerated. But sometimes, as with other medications, there are side effects. They can range from mild to serious.

**Most side effects are temporary, but it is very important for you to report all of them to your doctor.** This way he or she can adjust it or change it to make sure you feel better and you are safe. The good news is that usually these side effects are temporary and happen in the beginning while your body adjusts to the medication. Medications that psychiatrists use to treat mental health conditions can do help you feel less depressed, less anxious, improve sleep and appetite, and have fewer ups and downs with your mood.

It's important to remember that everyone reacts to drugs differently. Some people may find a drug that works for them right away. For many others, **it may take a few tries before finding the right medication—this does not mean your condition is not treatable.**

#### *How long do I have to take them?*

It varies from person to person, and it's decided between you and your doctor. It is very important to let your doctor know if you want to decrease or stop a medication, because doing so on your own, or abruptly, can sometimes be dangerous.

#### *How is taking medicine different from going to psychotherapy?*

Many factors can influence how a person responds to medication alone, therapy alone, or both combined. Factors such as a person's commitment to the treatment can make a great difference. Depending on your symptoms, medication treatment can sometimes provide more immediate relief than psychotherapy. At this program, if you are seeing a psychiatrist for only medication management, he or she would usually manage symptoms through medication treatment. In therapy, there is an opportunity to learn about how your mind works, learn coping skills or improve ones you already have. You learn to deal with your symptoms in a way that works for you.

Psychiatrists and psychotherapists usually work together in caring for a patient. They communicate with each other, with your permission, so they both know how you're doing. In this program, they may work very closely together to make sure responders are getting what they need to feel better.

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Alan Brown, wearing his New York State Senate Liberty Award medal, given in recognition of his 9/11 response work

## 9/11 Responder on His Experience with Mental Health Treatment: “I Want to be Part of the World Again”

**THE NIGHT OF** September 11, 2001, was supposed to be the most romantic of Alan Brown's life—he had plans to propose to his girlfriend in the Windows of the World restaurant at the top of World Trade Center's North Tower. Of course, by the time night fell, the restaurant was gone, and Mr. Brown, a construction worker, was a volunteer in the rubble searching for survivors instead of toasting his engagement.

On the second day Mr. Brown was there, his right arm was impaled by a steel bar, but he continued to toil in hopes of finding someone alive. His arm recovered soon after he left Ground Zero, but the time he spent

there left a lasting mark on his mind and emotions.

“At Ground Zero, I was numb to the goings on around me. Protecting the man next to you was more important than how you felt,” he said. “Afterward was when it all hit.”

For two years after 9/11, Mr. Brown felt depressed, anxious, and agitated. He had graphic nightmares every time he slept. He would try to stay awake as long as possible, lasting two days before finally falling asleep, only to wake up from his nightmares drenched in sweat, his hands shaking.

Mr. Brown’s new marriage was strained by his post-traumatic symptoms. He had more arguments with his wife, and felt a distance between them that had never been there before.

“I wasn’t really the same person anymore,” he said.

And it wasn’t just his marriage that had problems. “All relationships suffered. I got into it with everyone—friends, family, and working relationships,” he said.

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**“Now, if something bad happens, or I see something about Ground Zero in the news, I don’t get upset. I don’t react negatively. I fold it up and take it to therapy. I look forward to it.”**

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Mr. Brown owned a business before 9/11. But now, burdened by his post-9/11 stress, he could barely get up to go to work.

He decided to seek professional help, and visited marriage counselors and psychiatrists in Westchester County, where he lives. His problems lessened, but he felt these professionals didn’t understand his 9/11 experience. Then he found out about this program.

“When you walk in, everyone knows about Ground Zero,” Mr. Brown said. “When I walked in there, it was like a glove fitting perfectly.”

Mr. Brown saw a psychiatrist and began psychotherapy with a social worker at the Mount Sinai clinical center in 2008. He said it has helped him enormously. The medication he was prescribed lessened his depression and helped him sleep. He has since stopped taking the medication, but he continues his weekly therapy sessions because they allow him to talk about his experience.

“The opportunity to get these things off your chest with professionals is invaluable. Friends—they mean well but they can’t understand. With professionals, their only interest is making you better.”

The benefits of therapy for Mr. Brown extend into many parts of his life.

“My relationship with my wife couldn’t be better. I sleep at night now. I get up and go to work. I want to be part of the world again,” he said.

Mental health treatment has also helped Mr. Brown deal with unexpected situations that would have upset him in the past.

“Now, if something bad happens, or I see something about Ground Zero in the news, I don’t get upset, or have a drink, or fight with my wife. I don’t react negatively. I fold it up and take it to therapy. I look forward to it.”

For fellow 9/11 responders who might still be feeling the emotional effects of 9/11, he has this advice.

“Come here to the program and try it. I felt lost in the woods, not sure what was wrong or what to do about it. Coming here felt like a step in the right direction.”

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## Things You Can Do to Help Yourself Feel Better

- Exercise regularly, stay active—you can also do this with others and help build or strengthen relationships
- Eat healthy, regular meals
- Volunteer or find a way to help others
- Communicate—you can talk to someone you trust about your daily experience, or your memories of trauma. This can help you make sense of the emotions and thoughts you have.
- Keep a journal
- Keep a daily routine as much as possible
- Get little things done—accomplishing even small, everyday things can make you feel better
- Do a relaxation exercise—there are many ways to do this. There are books and tapes on how to do this. Even 10 minutes a day can help.
- Engage in a hobby
- Do something creative such as play music, sing, taking photos, or drawing.

## Things You Can Do to Help Yourself and Your Loved Ones Feel Better

- Play with children in your family
- Plan fun activities with your family, partner, or friends
- Try talking to people you care about in a caring, open and honest way—tell them how you feel.

# In Their Own Words: How Responders Cope with the Emotional Impact of 9/11

**WE SENT AN** email to our e-newsletter mailing list asking for responders' stories of what they have done to help themselves and their families feel better, and what tips and advice they had for other responders. An overwhelming number of you responded and we are sharing just a few excerpts below. Responders' names, when listed, are accompanied by their roles in 9/11 response work, and their current locations. Longer versions of these messages, plus more stories from responders, are available on [www.wtcexams.org](http://www.wtcexams.org).

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## SELF-EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION

One of the things I have found that helps me to get more clarity on my feelings [about 9/11] and sort them out is by drawing or painting. By putting these feelings on paper and making decisions on how to portray them I think there is a process of acceptance and a feeling of things being finished.

*Joseph McCauley*  
Computer Technician for the Office of Emergency Management  
Brooklyn, NY

I have since retired in 2005 and I am working in a High School in Florida as Head of Security. I have the poster the NYPD distributed of the members of the service that made the ultimate sacrifice that morning. I tell their stories to the students and the parents.... Telling their stories help keep them alive in my mind.

*Richard Wentz*  
NYPD Detective  
Coral Springs, FL

I found that by writing my experience down my mind no longer needed to visualize or review the events of that day. By writing my story down, I didn't repress my

feelings, rather I "filed" it in a healthy place thus allowing me to move forward with my life.

*David Sutton*  
Paramedic  
Brooklyn, NY

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## PHYSICAL EXERCISE/WELL-BEING

I started to practice breathing exercises every day.

*Marcial Rosado, Jr.*  
Parole Officer  
Bronx, NY

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## SPIRITUALITY

What saved me, both emotionally and spiritually is my fellowship. I'm a member of a 12-step fellowship and I was able to attend meetings... while at Ground Zero.... I have continued to attend meetings and talk about what is happening in my life.

*Pablo Torres*  
Telephone Splicer  
Bronx, NY

Prayer.

*Anonymous*

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## THERAPY AND/OR MEDICATION

I have my up and downs during the times of the memorials every year it seems to come back and I relive it all over again. I still see a social worker and a doctor and take my medications as prescribed and some how try to push on every day never forgetting the pain I still feel inside of me.

*Gregory Lella*  
Technical Services Department Employee  
Staten Island, NY

## VOLUNTEERING AND SERVING OTHERS

I found through helping others my problems were no longer centered on myself. I reached out to people in pain volunteering in a hospital trauma emergency department working directly with patients and their families, doctors, nurses, and law enforcement. It is my job as a volunteer liaison to comfort and calm those in pain and filled with fear. I understand fear and I understand pain. I also volunteer for the local police department driving a squad car and working on the streets helping to bring safety to our community. My sense of safety destroyed thus I reach out to bring safety to others....

It is all about reaching out to others and learning from what we endured and are still enduring. In the smallest way I work every day to make a difference and to recover slowly from 9/11. This isn't going to happen overnight but it will happen and through it I have gained a lot of wisdom and hope that we can in some small way make a difference in this time of so much hate and fear.

*Patch Guglielmino*  
*Volunteer*  
*Healdsburg, CA*

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### **MULTIPLE STRATEGIES—keeping positive memories and thoughts about 9/11, family support, expressing grief, positive thinking, and therapy.**

I believe that the two most important things that got me past that ill-fated day were my wife's ability and strength to be by my side on, during and after 9/11. The 2nd most important thing was that I finally realized that I was emotionally drained and needed help. For me help came in the way of reaching out to WTC Medical treatment program and getting the help I needed. Talking with doctors and coming to terms with what really happened that day was very beneficial to my mental stability and recovery.

*G. R.*  
*NYPD Detective*  
*New York City*

That July or August [after 9/11], I went with my son who was about 12 and his friend to the Grand Canyon. We hiked down to the river and got on a raft and spent the next 8 or 9 days in the canyon. It was really nice there and I got a lot of time to myself. I cried a lot and thought about friends I had lost in the attack but there were times down there when it was the most quiet and peaceful place in the world. It really did help me get on with life.

*David Howard*  
*Electrical Superintendent*  
*Greenlawn, NY*

- Practice mindfulness throughout any part of my day by using all my senses to be in the current moment.
- Regularly spend time focusing on a positive outlook of my future.
- Remember what I am grateful for.

*Dr. Michael Libertazzo*  
*Volunteer*  
*Princeton, NJ*

Cognitive therapy, strong family values, positive thinking, & most of all bringing a higher power into our lives if we have not already.

*Adam Cuniglio*  
*Verizon Field Technician and Volunteer*  
*Brooklyn, NY*

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## WTC Medical Monitoring & Treatment Program Participating Clinical Centers

Mount Sinai – Irving J. Selikoff Center for Occupational & Environmental Medicine

Bellevue Hospital Center/NYU Occupational & Environmental Medicine Clinic

Long Island WTC Medical Monitoring and Treatment Program, SUNY Stony Brook

The World Trade Center Medical Monitoring and Treatment Program, Queens Clinical Center

UMDNJ Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences Institute

These Clinical Centers offer medical monitoring exams, medical and mental health treatment, and social services assistance at locations in Manhattan, Queens, Staten Island, the Hudson Valley, Long Island (Suffolk and Nassau counties), and Piscataway, New Jersey.

For more information, to make an appointment, or to register, call 888-702-0630.



### WTC Medical Monitoring and Treatment Program

Mount Sinai School of Medicine  
One Gustave L. Levy Place, Box 1059  
New York, NY 10029

*Address Service Requested*

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#### The World Trade Center Medical Monitoring and Treatment Program

Data and Coordination Center  
Mount Sinai School of Medicine  
One Gustave Levy Place, Box 1059  
New York, NY 10029  
Phone: 888-702-0630

We welcome feedback.

To update contact information or clinical center preference, call us or visit [www.wtcexams.org](http://www.wtcexams.org) and click on "Forms."

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