IHA Hosts Emergency Preparedness Exercise to Prevent Cybersecurity Disruptions at Illinois Hospitals
Simulated Training to Test Defense Against Malicious Cyber Actors, Strengthen Response Plans to Ensure Continuity of Care

NAPERVILLE – With the healthcare sector ranking as a top target for cyber-attacks, the Illinois Health and Hospital Association (IHA) this week hosted a live interactive webinar for hospitals and health systems to test their defense against malicious cyber actors and strengthen preparedness efforts.

The virtual event entitled, "IHA Emergency Preparedness Exercise – Cyber Disruption," attracted more than 100 hospitals and health systems from across the state, providing a unique opportunity to test their cybersecurity plans during a live exercise simulating a cyber disruption scenario. Participants also received instruction on maintaining clinical operations when patient care equipment and resources are impacted; identifying alternate strategies to maintain strong internal and external communication; and restoring services to operational functionality in the aftermath of a cyber disruption.

"Cyber security and protecting patient data are among the top priorities for Illinois hospitals and health systems," said A.J. Wilhelmi, IHA President and CEO. "In this ever-evolving digital world, every industry must stay vigilant and prepared to defend against cyber threats. IHA and the Illinois hospital community are committed to keeping our healthcare institutions strong, agile, and prepared for the unexpected, to protect the patients and communities we serve."

According to Check Point Research, healthcare ranks third in global cyber-attacks. Researchers say education/research and government/military are the top two prime targets for cyber criminals. In 2023, an unprecedented number of healthcare data breaches were reported to the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, with worldwide ransomware attacks nearly doubling from the year before. Ransomware attacks have increased in recent years due to healthcare's reliance on network and internet-connected technology, resulting in the disruption and delay of healthcare delivery and risk to patient safety and outcomes, according to the American Hospital Association.

In response to the growing cyber threats facing healthcare, Illinois hospitals are taking proactive and comprehensive measures to strengthen cybersecurity and ensure continuity of patient care. Hospitals are not only investing in staff training, but also implementing strategic protocols that safeguard critical systems and protect patient information. Hospitals across the state have developed and regularly update robust business continuity plans, which ensure essential

operations can proceed seamlessly if disruptions occur. These plans encompass downtime procedures that outline specific workflows for staff, enabling them to deliver uninterrupted care despite any technical challenges. Additionally, hospitals employ multiple communications systems to maintain coordination across teams and facilities, reinforcing their ability to respond quickly and effectively if a cyber incident occurs.

The live webinar was held on Nov. 6 and led by IHA's Keneatha Johnson, MPH, Senior Director, Safety and Emergency Preparedness and Stephen Weiler MS, MEP, CPP, CPD, Manager of Resiliency Services, Risk, Consulting and Training with HSS, Inc.

About IHA
The Illinois Health and Hospital Association, with offices in Chicago, Naperville, Springfield, and Washington, D.C., advocates for Illinois' more than 200 hospitals and nearly 40 health systems as they serve their patients and communities. IHA members provide a broad range of services— not just within their walls, but across the continuum of healthcare and in their communities. Reflecting the diversity of the state, IHA members consist of nonprofit, investor-owned and public hospitals in the following categories: community, safety net, rural, critical access, specialty, and teaching hospitals, including academic medical centers. For more information, see www.team-iha.org. Like IHA on Facebook. Follow IHA on X (formally known as Twitter).

###