
The likelihood that you and your family will recover from an emergency tomorrow often depends on the planning and preparation done today. While each person’s abilities and needs are unique, every individual can take steps to prepare for all kinds of emergencies from fires and floods to potential terrorist attacks. By evaluating your own personal needs and making an emergency plan that fits those needs, you and your loved ones can be better prepared.

This guide outlines commonsense measures individuals with disabilities, special needs and their caregivers can take to start preparing for emergencies before they happen. Preparing makes sense for people with disabilities and special needs.

Get Ready Now.
Include Medications and Medical Supplies: If you take medicine or use a medical treatment on a daily basis, be sure you have what you need on hand to make it on your own for at least a week. You should also keep a copy of your prescriptions as well as dosage or treatment information. If it is not possible to have a week-long supply of medicines and supplies, keep as much as possible on hand and talk to your pharmacist or doctor about what else you should do to prepare.

If you undergo routine treatments administered by a clinic or receive regular services such as home health care, treatment or transportation, talk to your provider about their emergency plans. Work with them to identify back-up service providers within your area and the areas you might evacuate to. Keep written copies of these emergency plans in your home that requires electricity to operate, talk to your health care provider about what you can do to prepare in case of power outages.

Additional Items: In addition, there may be other things specific to your personal needs that you should also have on hand. If you use eyeglasses, hearing aids and hearing aid batteries, wheelchair batteries, and oxygen, be sure you always have extras in your home. Also have copies of your medical insurance, Medicare and Medicaid cards readily available. If you have a service animal, be sure to include fresh food, water, collar with ID tag, medical records and other emergency pet supplies.

Include Emergency Documents: Include copies of any medical emergency supply kits such as family records, medical records, wills, deeds, social security numbers, charge and bank accounts information, and tax records. It is best to keep these documents in a waterproof container. If there is any information related to operating equipment or life-saving devices that you rely on, include those in your emergency kit as well, and also make sure that a trusted friend or family member is aware of copies of these items. The kit should include the names and numbers of everyone in your personal support network, as well as your medical providers. If you have a communication disability, make sure your emergency information list notes the best way to communicate with you. Also be sure you have cash or travelers checks in your kit in case you need to purchase supplies.

Make a Plan

For What You Will Do in an Emergency:
The reality of a disaster situation is that you will likely not have access to everyday conveniences. To plan in advance, think through the details of your everyday life. If there are people who assist you on a daily basis, list who they are and how you will contact them in an emergency. Create your own personal support network by identifying others who will help you in an emergency. Think about what modes of transportation and what alternative modes could serve as back-ups. If you require handicapped accessible transportation be sure your alternatives are also accessible to you and specific to your disability, plan how you would cope without them. For example, if you use a communication device, mobility aid, or animal, what will you do if these are not available? If you are dependent on life-sustaining equipment or treatment such as a dialysis machine, find out the location and availability of more than one facility. For every aspect of your daily routine, plan an alternative procedure. Make a plan and write it down. Keep a copy of your plan in your emergency supply kits and a list of important information and contacts in your wallet. Share your plan with your family, friends, care providers and others in your personal support network.

Create a Personal Support Network: If you anticipate needing assistance during a disaster, make a list of family, friends and others who will be part of your support network. Talk to these people and ask them to be part of your support network. Share each aspect of your emergency plan with everyone in your group, including a friend or relative in another area who would not be impacted by the same emergency who can help if necessary. Make sure they know how you plan to evacuate your home, school or workplace and where you will go in case of a disaster. Make sure that someone in your emergency support network has an extra key to your home and knows where you keep your emergency supplies. Teach them how to use any lifesaving equipment or medical equipment in case of an emergency. If you use a wheelchair, oxygen or other medical equipment show friends how to use these devices so you can move if necessary or help you evacuate. Practice your plan with those who have agreed to be part of your personal support network. Inform your employer and co-workers about your dis- ability and let them know specifically what assistance you will need in an emergency. This is particularly important if you need to be lifted or carried. Talk about communication difficulties, physical limitations, equipment instructions or procedures. If you are hearing impaired, discuss the best ways to alert you in an emergency. If you have a cognitive disability, be sure to work with your employer to determine how to best notify you of an emergency and what instruction methods are easiest for you to follow. Always participate in exercises, trainings and emergency drills offered by your employer.

Develop a Family Communications Plan: Your family may be separated when disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another and review what you will do in a disaster. Consider a plan where each family member calls or e-mails the same friend or relative in the event of an emergency. It may be easier to make a directory of family members and keep it handy. You may have family trouble getting through, or the phone system may be down altogether, but be patient. For more information on how to develop a family communications plan, visit www.ready.gov.

Deciding to Stay or Go: Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the emergency, the first important decision is whether you stay or go. You should understand and plan for both possibilities. Use common sense and available information to determine if there is immediate danger. In any emergency, local authorities may agree to provide you with information on what is happening and what you should do. However, you should monitor television or radio news reports for different situations. Consider a plan where each family member calls or e-mails the same friend or relative in the event of an emergency. It may be easier to make a directory of family members and keep it handy. You may have family trouble getting through, or the phone system may be down altogether, but be patient. For more information on how to develop a family communications plan, visit www.ready.gov.

Fire Safety: Plan two ways out of every room in case of fire. Have smoke detectors, each with a battery back-up, and other fire safety devices such as fire extinguishers, hanging pictures, or overhead lights that could fail and block an escape path. Check hallways, stairwells, doorways, windows and other areas for hazards that may keep you from safely leaving a building during an emergency. Secure or remove furniture and objects that may block your path. If there are aspects of preparing your home or workplace that you are not able to do yourself, enlist the help of your personal support network.

Contact Your Local Emergency Information Management Office: Some local emergency management agencies go beyond just providing information to people with disabilities so you can be located and assisted quickly in a disaster. Contact your local emergency management agency to see what services they can offer. Check with the Emergency Management Agency in your area or online where you live or visit www.ready.gov for links to find links to government offices in your area. In addition, wearing emergency bracelets that identify your disability can be a crucial aid in an emergency situation. When traveling, consider alerting hotel workers if you will need help in a disaster situation.