

30 Tips for Emergency Preparedness

Here are 30 tips to help you and your family become better prepared for an emergency.

Preparedness Tip #1

Take a moment to imagine that there is an emergency, like a fire in your home, and you need to leave quickly. What are the best escape routes from your home? Find at least two ways out of each room. Now, write it down — you've got the beginning of a plan.

Preparedness Tip #2

Pick a place to meet after a disaster. Designate two meeting places. Choose one right outside your home, in case of a sudden household emergency, such as a fire. The second place you choose needs to be outside your neighborhood, in the event that it is not safe to stay near or return to your home.

Preparedness Tip #3

Choose an emergency contact person outside your area because it may be easier to call long distance than locally after a local/regional disaster. Take a minute now to call or e-mail an out-of-town friend or family member to ask him or her to be your family's designated contact in the event of an emergency. Be sure to share the contact's phone number with everyone in the family. During an emergency, you can call your contact who can share with other family members where you are; how you are doing; and how to get in contact with you.

Preparedness Tip #4

Complete an emergency contact card and make copies for each member of your family to carry with them. Be sure to include an out-of-town contact on your contact card. It may be easier to reach someone out of town if local phone lines are out of service or overloaded. You should also have at least one traditionally wired landline phone, as cordless or cellular phones may not work in an emergency. Visit www.redcross.org or www.ready.gov for sample emergency contact cards.

Preparedness Tip #5

Dogs may be man's best friend, but due to health regulations, most emergency shelters cannot house animals. Find out in advance how to care for your pets and working animals when disaster strikes. Pets should not be left behind, but could be taken to a veterinary office, family member's home or animal shelter during an emergency. Also be sure to store extra food and water for pets. For more information, visit the Animal Safety section on www.redcross.org or visit the Humane Society Web site at www.hsus.org

Preparedness Tip #6

Go through your calendar now, and put a reminder on it — every six months —

to review your plan, update numbers, and check supplies to be sure nothing has expired, spoiled, or changed. Also remember to practice your tornado, fire escape or other disaster plans.

Preparedness Tip #7

Check your child's school Web site or call the school office to request a copy of the school's emergency plan. Keep a copy at home and work or other places where you spend a lot of your time and make sure the school's plan is incorporated into your family's emergency plan. Also, learn about the disaster plans at your workplace or other places where you and your family spend time.

Preparedness Tip #8

Teach your children how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local Emergency Medical Services number for help. Post these and other emergency telephone numbers by telephones.

Preparedness Tip #9

Practice. Conduct fire drills and practice evacuating your home twice a year. Drive your planned evacuation route and plot alternate routes on a map in case main roads are blocked or gridlocked. Practice earthquake and tornado drills at home, school and work. Commit a weekend to update telephone numbers, emergency supplies and review your plan with everyone.

Preparedness Tip #10

A community working together during an emergency makes sense.

- Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together during an emergency.
- Find out if anyone has specialized equipment like a power generator, or expertise such as medical knowledge, that might help in a crisis.
- Decide who will check on elderly or disabled neighbors.
- Make back-up plans for children in case you can't get home in an emergency.

Sharing plans and communicating in advance is a good strategy

Preparedness Tip #11

What if disaster strikes while you're at work? Do you know the emergency preparedness plan for your workplace? While many companies have been more alert and pro-active in preparing for disasters of all types since the September 11, 2001 attacks, a national survey indicates that many employees still don't know what their workplace plan is for major or minor disasters. If you don't know yours, make a point to ask. Know multiple ways to exit your building, participate in workplace evacuation drills, and consider keeping some emergency supplies at the office. Visit www.ready.gov and click on Ready Business for more information about business preparedness.

Preparedness Tip #12

You should keep enough supplies in your home to meet the needs of you and your family for at least three days. Build an emergency supply kit to take with you in an evacuation. The basics to stock in your portable kit include: water, food, battery-powered radio and flashlight with extra batteries, first aid supplies, change of clothing, blanket or sleeping bag, wrench or pliers, whistle, dust mask, plastic sheeting and duct tape, trash bags, map, a manual can opener for canned food and special items for infants, elderly, the sick or people with disabilities. Keep these items in an easy to carry container such as a covered trash container, a large backpack, or a duffle bag.

Preparedness Tip #13

Preparing for emergencies needn't be expensive if you're thinking ahead and buying small quantities at a time. Make a list of some foods that:

- Have a long shelf-life and will not spoil (non-perishable).
- You and your family like.
- Do not require cooking.
- Can be easily stored.
- Have a low salt content as salty foods will make you more thirsty.

Keep the list in your purse or wallet and pick up a few items each time you're shopping and/or see a sale until you have built up a well-stocked supply that can sustain each member of your family for at least three days following an emergency.

Preparedness Tip #14

Take a minute to check your family's first aid kit, and note any depleted items — then, add them to your shopping list. Don't have a first aid kit? Add that to the list or build a kit yourself. Just add the following items to your shopping list and assemble a first aid kit. Consider creating a kit for each vehicle as well:

First Aid Kits - Assemble a first aid kit for your home and one for each car.

- (20) adhesive bandages, various sizes
- (1) 5" x 9" sterile dressing
- (1) conforming roller gauze bandage
- (2) triangular bandages
- (2) 3 x 3 sterile gauze pads
- (2) 4 x 4 sterile gauze pads
- (1) roll 3" cohesive bandage
- (2) germicidal hand wipes or waterless alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- (6) antiseptic wipes
- (2) pair large medical grade non-latex gloves
- Adhesive tape, 2" width
- Anti-bacterial ointment

- Cold pack
- Scissors (small, personal)
- Tweezers
- CPR breathing barrier, such as a face shield
- First Aid Manual

Non-Prescription and Prescription Drugs

- Aspirin or non-aspirin pain reliever
- Anti-diarrhea medication
- Antacid (for stomach upset)
- Syrup of Ipecac (use to induce vomiting if advised by the Poison Control Center)
- Laxative
- Activated charcoal (use if advised by the Poison Control Center)
- Prescription drugs, as recommended by your physician, and copies of the prescriptions in case they need to be replaced

For more information about first aid kits, visit www.redcross.org.

Preparedness Tip #15

Keep at least a three-day supply of water per person. Store a minimum of one gallon of water per person per day (two quarts for drinking, two quarts for food preparation and sanitation). Store water in plastic containers such as soft drink bottles. Avoid using containers that will decompose or break, such as milk cartons or glass bottles. A normally active person needs to drink at least two quarts of water each day. Hot environments and strenuous activity can double that amount. Children, nursing mothers, and people who are sick will also need more.

Preparedness Tip #16

One of the easiest ways you can prepare for emergencies is to keep some supplies readily available. Every kit is unique and can be tailored to meet the specific needs of your family, but below is a general list of supplies you may want to consider:

Tools and Supplies (Essential Items are Marked with an Asterisk *)

- Mess kits, or paper cups, plates, and plastic utensils
- Emergency preparedness manual and a copy of your disaster plan, including your emergency contacts list
- Battery-operated radio and extra batteries*
- Flashlight and extra batteries*
- Cash or traveler's checks, change*
- Non-electric can opener, utility knife*

- Fire extinguisher: small ABC type stored near where fires are likely to occur such as a kitchen, or near a fireplace. It should not be kept in the disaster supplies kit.
- Tube tent
- Duct Tape*
- Compass
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Aluminum foil
- Plastic storage containers
- Signal flare
- Paper, pencil*
- Needles, thread
- Medicine dropper
- Shut-off wrench or pliers, to turn off household gas and water
- Whistle*
- Plastic sheeting*
- Map of the area (for locating shelters and evacuation routes)

(Continued in the next tip)

Preparedness Tip #17

Also include items for sanitation in your emergency supply kit. Consider the following:

Sanitation (Essential Items are Marked with an Asterisk *)

- Toilet paper, towelettes*
- Soap, liquid detergent*
- Feminine supplies*
- Personal hygiene items*
- Plastic garbage bags, ties (for personal sanitation uses)*
- Plastic bucket with tight lid
- Disinfectant
- Household chlorine bleach

(Continued in the next tip)

Preparedness Tip #18

Include at least one complete change of clothing and footwear per person in your emergency supply kit. We suggest long pants and long sleeves for additional protection after a disaster.

Clothing and Bedding (Essential Items are Marked with an Asterisk *)

- Sturdy shoes or work boots*
- Rain gear*

- Blankets or sleeping bags*
- Hat and gloves
- Thermal underwear
- Sunglasses

Preparedness Tip #19

You should also keep a smaller version of your emergency supply kit in your vehicle, in case you are commuting or traveling when disaster strikes.

Emergency Kit For Your Vehicle

- Bottled water and non-perishable high energy foods, such as granola bars, raisins and peanut butter
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Blanket
- Booster cables
- Fire extinguisher (5 lb., A-B-C type)
- First aid kit and manual
- Maps
- Shovel
- Tire repair kit and pump
- Flares or other emergency marking devices

Preparedness Tip #20

Teach children how to dial 9-1-1 in an emergency. Review emergency action steps with all family members:

- Check the scene and the victim
- Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number posted by the telephone
- Care for the victim

Help your children learn more about emergencies. Download this [preparedness coloring book](#). or visit Red Cross' "[Masters of Disaster](#)."

Preparedness Tip #21

Read the information on your city, county and/or state government Web sites as well as the "Be Prepared" section of www.redcross.org or Ready.gov and print emergency preparedness information. Be sure to keep a copy with your disaster supplies kit. It can provide telephone numbers, addresses and other information you need when electronic connections are not available options for obtaining the information.

Preparedness Tip #22

When water is of questionable purity, it is easiest to use bottled water for drinking and cooking if it is available. When it's not available, it is important to know how to treat contaminated water. In addition to having a bad odor and taste, water

from questionable sources may be contaminated by a variety of microorganisms, including, bacteria and parasites that cause diseases such as dysentery, cholera, typhoid, and hepatitis. All water of uncertain purity should be treated before use. Use one or a combination of these treatments:

- Filter: Filter the water using a piece of cloth or coffee filter to remove solid particles.
- Boil: Bring it to a rolling boil for about one full minute. Cool it and pour it back and forth between two clean containers to improve its taste before drinking it.
- Chlorinate:
 - Add 16 drops (1/8 teaspoon) of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Stir to mix. Sodium hypochlorite of the concentration of 5.25% to 6% should be the only active ingredient in the bleach. There should not be any added soap or fragrances. A major bleach manufacturer has also added Sodium Hydroxide as an active ingredient, which they state does not pose a health risk for water treatment.
 - Let stand 30 minutes.
 - If it smells of chlorine. You can use it. If it does not smell of chlorine, add 16 more drops (1/8 teaspoon) of chlorine bleach per gallon of water, let stand 30 minutes, and smell it again. If it smells of chlorine, you can use it. If it does not smell of chlorine, discard it and find another source of water.

Flood water can also be contaminated by toxic chemicals. Do NOT try to treat flood water.

Preparedness Tip #23

In some emergencies you may be required to turn off your utilities. To prepare for this type of event:

- Locate the electric, gas and water shut-off valves.
- Keep necessary tools near gas and water shut-off valves
- Teach adult family members how to turn off utilities.

If you turn off the gas, a professional must turn it back on. Do not attempt to do this yourself.

Preparedness Tip #24

Understand that during an emergency you may be asked to “shelter-in-place” or evacuate. Plan for both possibilities and be prepared to listen to instructions from your local emergency management officials. Visit [Ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) and www.redcross.org/preparedness for more information on sheltering-in-place.

Preparedness Tip #25

A disaster can cause significant financial loss. Your apartment or home may be severely damaged or destroyed. You may be forced to live in temporary housing.

Income may be cut off or significantly reduced. Important financial records could be destroyed. Take the time now to assess your situation and ask questions.

To help you, consider using the Emergency Financial First Aid Kit (EFFAK), a tool developed by Operation Hope, FEMA and Citizen Corps or contact your local Red Cross chapter for [Disasters and Financial Planning: A Guide for Preparedness](#).

Preparedness Tip #26

Learn if earthquakes are a risk in your area by contacting your local emergency management office, local American Red Cross chapter, or state geological survey or department of natural resources. Information about earthquake risk is also available from the [U.S. Geological Survey National Seismic Hazards project](#).

Preparedness Tip #27

Floods are among the most frequent and costly natural disasters in terms of human hardship and economic loss. As much as 90 percent of the damage related to all natural disasters (excluding draught) is caused by floods and associated debris flow. Most communities in the United States can experience some kind of flooding. Melting snow can combine with rain in the winter and early spring; severe thunderstorms can bring heavy rain in the spring or summer; or hurricanes can bring intense rainfall to coastal and inland states in the summer and fall. Regardless of how a flood occurs, the rule for being safe is simple: head for higher ground and stay away from floodwater. Even a shallow depth of fast-moving floodwater produces more force than most people imagine. You can protect yourself by being prepared and having time to act. Local radio or television stations or a NOAA Weather Radio are the best sources of information in a flood situation.

Preparedness Tip #28

When there is concern about a potential exposure to a chemical or other airborne hazard, local officials may advise you to "shelter-in-place " and "seal the room." This is different from taking shelter on the lowest level of your home in case of a natural disaster like a tornado. If you believe the air may be badly contaminated or if you are instructed by local officials, follow the instructions below to create a temporary barrier between you and the contaminated air outside.

To shelter-in-place and seal-the-room:

- Close and lock all windows and exterior doors.
- Turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems.
- Close the fireplace damper.
- Get your disaster supplies kit and turn on your battery-powered radio.
- Go to an interior room that is above ground level and without windows, if possible. In the case of a chemical threat, an above-ground location is

- preferable because some chemicals are heavier than air, and may seep into basements even if the windows are closed.
- If directed by local authorities on the radio, use duct tape to seal all cracks around the door and any vents into the room. Tape plastic sheeting, such as heavy-duty plastic garbage bags, over any windows.
 - Listen to your radio or television for further instructions. Local officials will tell you when you can leave the room in which you are sheltering, or they may call for evacuation in specific areas at greatest risk in your community

Preparedness Tip #29

If There is an Explosion:

- Take shelter against your desk or a sturdy table.
- Exit the building immediately.
- Do not use elevators.
- Check for fire and other hazards.
- Take your emergency supply kit if time allows.

If There is a Fire:

- Exit the building immediately.
- If there is smoke, crawl under the smoke to the nearest exit and use a cloth, if possible, to cover your nose and mouth.
- Use the back of your hand to feel the upper, lower, and middle parts of closed doors.
- If the door is not hot, brace yourself against it and open slowly.
- If the door is hot, do not open it. Look for another way out.
- Do not use elevators.
- If your clothes catch on fire, stop-drop-and-roll to put out the fire. Do not run.
- If you are at home, go to your previously designated outside meeting place.
- Account for your family members and carefully supervise small children.
- GET OUT and STAY OUT. Never go back into a burning building.
- Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number.

Preparedness Tip #30

Unlike an explosion, a biological attack may or may not be immediately obvious. Most likely local health care workers will report a pattern of unusual illness or a wave of sick people seeking medical attention. The best source of information will be radio or television reports.

Understand that some biological agents, such as anthrax, do not cause contagious diseases. Others, like the smallpox virus, can result in diseases you can catch from other people.

In the event of a biological attack, public health officials may not immediately be able to provide information on what you should do. It will take time to determine exactly what the illness is, how it should be treated, and who may have been exposed. You should watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news including the following:

- Are you in the group or area authorities believe may have been exposed?
- What are the signs and symptoms of the disease?
- Are medications or vaccines being distributed?
- Where? Who should get them and how?
- Where should you seek emergency medical care if you become sick?

During a declared biological emergency:

- If a family member becomes sick, it is important to be suspicious.
- Do not assume, however, that you should go to a hospital emergency room or that any illness is the result of the biological attack. Symptoms of many common illnesses may overlap.
- Use common sense, practice good hygiene and cleanliness to avoid spreading germs, and seek medical advice.
- Consider if you are in the group or area authorities believe to be in danger.
- If your symptoms match those described and you are in the group considered at risk, immediately seek emergency medical attention.

If you are potentially exposed:

- Follow instructions of doctors and other public health officials.
- If the disease is contagious expect to receive medical evaluation and treatment. You may be advised to stay away from others or even deliberately quarantined.
- For non-contagious diseases, expect to receive medical evaluation and treatment.

If you become aware of an unusual and suspicious substance nearby:

- Quickly get away.
- Protect yourself. Cover your mouth and nose with layers of fabric that can filter the air but still allow breathing. Examples include two to three layers of cotton such as a t-shirt, handkerchief or towel. Otherwise, several layers of tissue or paper towels may help.
- Wash with soap and water.
- Contact authorities.
- Watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news and information including what the signs and symptoms of the disease are, if medications or vaccinations are being distributed and where you should seek medical attention if you become sick.

- If you become sick seek emergency medical attention.

Resources

- [Ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov)