



## Preparing for Disaster: Special Needs Populations

Protecting yourself and your family when disaster strikes requires planning ahead. Some individuals may require additional preparedness planning due to their unique special needs. Special needs populations are those who may have significant challenges or difficulties if an emergency strikes. This group includes, but is not limited to, children, people who have physical, mental or developmental disabilities, and the elderly.

### Children

Infants, toddlers and children need special attention during and after a disaster—not just physically, but emotionally as well. Below are some basic emergency planning tips for families with children.

- Make sure your emergency kit includes enough baby formula, baby food, diapers, bottles, toys and games to keep your children safe and comfortable after a disaster.
- If children go to preschool, daycare or school, it is important for parents or guardians to know the school's emergency plan.
- Review and update information on your child's school emergency contact card as needed.
- Allow a trusted friend or relative that lives near you to pick up your children from school in case you are unable to travel to the school after a disaster. The name of the trusted individual should be provided to the school in advance.
- Tell trusted neighbors when your children are home alone so they can take care of them if you are not there when a disaster strikes.



### Before an Emergency

- Teach your children about emergencies and natural disasters at a level they can understand.
- Strive to teach the importance of preparedness without causing fear or anxiety.
- Include your children by asking them to help with the building of your family emergency supply kit.
- Role-play what you would do during a disaster.
- Hold fire drills in your home.



### After an Emergency

- Encourage children to talk about their fears. Let them ask questions and tell you how they're feeling. Listen to what they say, as a family group, when possible.
- Reassure them with love.
- Reassure them that they are safe and answer their questions honestly.
- Tell them, in simple language, what is happening. Tell them that they are not responsible for what happened. Limit the amount of news they hear on the radio or see on TV.
- Hold and hug them often.
- When they go back to school, encourage them to also talk about their problems with teachers or school counselors and to play games, ride bikes and do all of the other things they did before the disaster.



## Disabled

For people with disabilities, disaster preparedness planning is all the more important because they have special needs that must be addressed. The normal systems of support and assistance may not be available during, and in many cases, for some time after, an emergency. The more effort you put into planning and practicing for an emergency situation, the better prepared you will be in the event of a disaster.

If you or someone you know has a medical condition or disability, keep the following guidelines in mind as you prepare your emergency preparedness plan:



- Create a support network to help in an emergency. Tell the people in your support network where you keep your emergency supplies. Give one member of your support network a key to your house or apartment.
- Make an emergency plan that includes the following:
  - ◆ An emergency information list to let others know whom to call if they find you unconscious, unable to speak or if they need to help you evacuate quickly. Besides emergency out-of-town contacts, your list should include the names and numbers of everyone in your support network. If you have a communication disability, make sure your emergency information list notes the best way to communicate with you.
  - ◆ A medical information list with information about your medical providers. This should include the names of medications you take and their dosages, when you take a medication, the condition for which you take a medication, the name of the doctor who prescribed it, the doctor's phone number, and your pharmacy location and phone number. It is important to record any adaptive equipment you use, your allergies and sensitivities, and communication or cognitive difficulties you may have. Attach copies of health insurance cards and related information.
- Maintain several copies of your emergency plan. Keep copies in your emergency supply kit, car, wallet, wheelchair pack, etc. Share your emergency plan with your support network.
- Keep at least a seven-day supply of essential medications with you at all times—longer, if possible. Work with your doctor(s) to get extra supplies of medications and extra copies of prescriptions. Determine how often you should replace stored medication. This helps ensure that a medicine's effectiveness does not weaken because of long storage time.
- Keep your service animals with you in a safe place at home, or take them with you to a shelter.
- Install at least one smoke detector on each level of your home, outside sleeping areas. If you are hearing impaired, install a system that has flashing strobe lights to get your attention.
- Identify as many exits as possible from each room and from the building you are in. Make sure that people in your support network are familiar with the floorplan of your home and where exits are located.
- Plan how you would evacuate if necessary. If you have to leave your home or workplace, you may need someone's help, especially down stairwells. Give your support network (or other people who may be there to help) instructions on what you need and how they can help you evacuate.
- Be ready to give brief, clear, and specific instructions and directions to rescue personnel, either orally or in writing.
- If you do not drive, talk with your support network about how you will leave the area if the authorities advise an evacuation. In some communities, local government agencies offer transportation for persons needing assistance during an evacuation. Contact them in advance, if you believe you will need assistance.
- Become familiar with the emergency or disaster/evacuation plan for your office, school, or any other location where you spend a lot of time. If the current plan does not make arrangements for people with disabilities, make sure the management at these sites knows your needs.
- Have a care plan for your service animal. Service animals are allowed in hotels or motels and Red Cross shelters. However, these places cannot care for your animal. When you leave your home, remember to take a collar, harness, identification tags, records of vaccinations, medications, and food for your service animal with you.
- Contact your city or county government's emergency management office. Many local offices keep lists of people with disabilities so they can be located quickly in a sudden emergency.
- Wear medical alert tags or bracelets to help identify your disability.
- If you are dependent on dialysis or other life sustaining treatment, know the location and availability of more than one facility. Show others how to operate your wheelchair. Also, know the size and weight of your wheelchair, in addition to whether or not it is collapsible, in case it has to be transported.



## Elderly

In the event of an emergency, you may have to survive on your own for an extended period of time. For older Pennsylvanians, this can present serious challenges, especially for those who need special care or services. Nevertheless, you can take control by planning in advance for emergencies. By evaluating your own personal needs and making an emergency plan, you will be better prepared for disasters.



### Create a Support Network

- Talk to family and friends about being part of your support network in case of an emergency.
- Talk with local emergency management officials about the types and locations of shelters available to you. If you have special medical needs you may not be able to stay at the shelter closest to you.
- Write down and share each aspect of your emergency plan with everyone in your support network.
- Make sure everyone knows how you plan to evacuate your home or workplace and where you will go in case of a disaster.
- Make sure that someone in your local network has an extra key to your home and knows where you keep your emergency supplies.
- Teach those who will help you how to use any lifesaving equipment or administer medicine in case of an emergency.

### Emergency Supplies

Get an emergency supply kit that includes enough provisions for you and your family to live on for a minimum of three days. Consider any special dietary needs you have and consider storing additional water.

#### Additional Supplies and Support Documents

##### Medications and Medical Supplies

- If you take medicine or use a medical treatment or equipment on a daily basis, be sure you have what you need to make it on your own for at least one week.
- Make a list of prescription medicines including dosage, treatment and allergy information and keep it with your other emergency supplies.
- Talk to your pharmacist or doctor about what else you need to prepare.
- If you undergo routine treatments administered by a clinic or hospital or if you receive regular services such as home health care, treatment or transportation, talk to your service provider about their emergency plans. Work with them to identify back-up service providers and incorporate them into your personal support network.
- Consider other personal needs such as eyeglasses, hearing aids and hearing aid batteries, wheelchair batteries and oxygen.



##### Emergency Documents

- Include copies of important documents (such as family records, medical records, wills, deeds, etc.) in your emergency supply kit.
- Have copies of your medical insurance and Medicare cards readily available.
- Keep a list of the style and serial number of medical devices or other life-sustaining devices. Include operating information and instructions. Make sure that a friend or family member has copies of this information.
- List the names and contact information of your support network, as well as your medical providers. If you have a communication disability, make sure your emergency information notes the best way to communicate with you.
- Keep these documents in a water proof container for quick and easy access.



### Additional Resources

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency: [www.pema.pa.gov](http://www.pema.pa.gov)

ReadyPA: [www.readypa.org](http://www.readypa.org)

Federal Emergency Management Agency: [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)

American Red Cross: [www.redcross.org/prepare](http://www.redcross.org/prepare)

