

# 4 Get Involved

In addition to your personal preparedness, consider getting involved in neighborhood and community emergency preparedness activities. Assist emergency planners and others in considering the preparedness needs of the whole community, including people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. Communities are stronger and more resilient when everyone joins the team. People with disabilities often have experience in adapting and problem solving that can be very useful skills in emergencies. To find out more about potential volunteering and emergency response training opportunities, go to <http://www.ready.gov/volunteer>.

This information was developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in consultation with AARP, the American Red Cross and the National Organization on Disability and updated by the FEMA Office of Disability Integration and Coordination..



## Prepare for Emergencies Now: Information for People with Disabilities



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Your ability to recover from an emergency tomorrow may depend on the planning and preparation you do today. This guide provides tips which individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, and the people who assist and support them, can take to prepare for emergencies before they happen.

#### 1 Be Informed

It is important to know what types of emergencies are likely to affect your region. For more information about specific types of emergencies, visit [www.ready.gov/be-informed](http://www.ready.gov/be-informed).

Be prepared to adapt this information to your personal circumstances and make every effort to follow instructions received from authorities on the scene. Above all, stay calm, be patient and think before you act. With these simple preparations, you can be ready for the unexpected.

#### 2 Make a Communications Plan

A disaster can interfere with your ability to communicate with your family, friends and coworkers. It is vital to have backup plans for staying in touch with your support network, and for your network to be aware of where you will shelter or evacuate.

**Create a Personal Support Network**  
Everyone should make a list of family, friends and others who will be part of your plan. Include a relative or friend in another area who would not be affected by the same emergency, and who can help if needed. Make sure everyone knows 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 personal 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 medicine in case of an emergency. If you use a wheelchair, oxygen or other medical equipment, show friends how to use these devices so they can move you or help you evacuate. Practice your plan with your personal support network.

If you undergo routine treatments at a clinic or hospital, or if you receive regular services at home such as home health care, meals, oxygen, or door-to-door transportation, talk to your service provider about their emergency plans. Work with them to identify back-up service providers within your area and the areas you might evacuate to. If you use medical equipment in your home that requires electricity to operate, talk to your health care provider about a back-up plan for its use during a power outage.

### **Create a Personal Support Network (con't)**

Talk to your employer and co-workers about the assistance you might need in an emergency. This is particularly important if you need to be lifted or carried. Talk about any communication difficulties, physical limitations, equipment instructions and medication procedures that might arise during an emergency. Always participate in exercises, trainings and emergency drills offered by your employer or in your community.

### **Develop a Family Communications Plan**

Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another and review what you will do in different situations. For more information on how to develop a family communications plan, visit <http://www.ready.gov/family-communications>.

### **Deciding to Stay or Evacuate**

Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the emergency, the first important decision is whether to 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 not immediately be able to provide information on what is happening and what you should do. However, you should monitor television, radio, Internet, or social media news reports for information or official instructions as they become available. If you're specifically told to evacuate or seek medical treatment, do so immediately. If you require additional travel time or need transportation assistance, consider ways you might make these arrangements in advance.

### **Staying Put**

Whether you are at home or elsewhere, there may be situations when it's simply best to stay where you are and avoid any uncertainty outside. Consider what you can do to safely shelter-in-place alone or with friends, family or neighbors. Also consider how a shelter designated for the public would meet your needs. Work with local emergency managers and others in your community on preparing shelters in advance to meet access and functional needs (go to [www.fema.gov/about/odc](http://www.fema.gov/about/odc) to learn more about functional needs support services in general population shelters). If you have options and decide to stay put and shelter in place, consider that you may be without electricity, phone service and accessible roads for days or longer.

### **Evacuation**

There may be situations in which you decide to leave, or are ordered to leave. Plan how you will get away and anticipate where you will go. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency. Ask about evacuation plans at the places where you spend time including work, school, community organizations, and other places you frequent. If you typically rely on elevators, work with others to develop back-up plans for evacuation in case they are not working. When traveling, consider alerting hotel or motel workers if you will need help in a disaster situation. Keep your equipment with you in an evacuation, if at all possible. If you must leave your wheelchair, bring your cushion.

### **Consider Your Service Animal and Pets**

Whether you decide to stay put or evacuate, you will need to make plans in advance for your service animal and pets. Keep in mind that what's best for you is typically what's best for your animals. If you must evacuate, take your pets with you if you can. However, if you go to a public shelter, it is important to remember that by law only service animals must be allowed inside. Plan in advance for shelter alternatives that will work for both you and your animals. For more information about service animal/pet preparedness, visit <http://www.ready.gov/animals>.

### **Fire Safety**

Plan two ways out of every room in case of fire. Check for items such as bookcases, hanging pictures, or overhead lights that could fall and block an escape path. For more fire safety tips, go to <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/disability/>.

### **Contact Your Local Emergency Information Management Office**

Some local emergency management offices maintain registries for people with disabilities. Some registries are only used to collect planning information; others may be used to offer assistance in emergencies. If you add your name and information to a registry, be sure you understand what you can expect. Be aware that a registry is NEVER a substitute for personal preparedness. Even if the registry may be linked to first responders, assistance may not be available for hours or days after a disaster. Contact your local emergency management agency to see if these services exist where you live, or visit [www.ready.gov/](http://www.ready.gov/) to find links to government offices in your area.

## **3 Build an Emergency Kit**

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. You should include the following in your planning:

### **Basic Supplies**

Think first about survival basics - food, water, first aid, and tools. Plan to make it on your own for at least three days. Consider two kits. In one kit put everything you will need to stay where you are and make it on your own for a period of time. The other kit should be a lightweight, smaller version you can take with you if you have to leave your home. For more information on what should go into a basic kit, please refer to [www.ready.gov/basic-disaster-supplies-kit](http://www.ready.gov/basic-disaster-supplies-kit).

The second step is to consider how an emergency might affect your individual needs. During emergencies, you may not have access to disaster assistance, a medical facility or even a drugstore. It is crucial that you and your family think about what kinds of resources you use on a daily basis, and what you might do if those resources are limited or not available.

### **Include Important Documents in Your Kit**

Include copies of important documents in your kit, such as family records, medical records, wills, deeds, social security number, charge and bank account information, and tax records. Also be sure you have cash or travelers checks in your kits in case you need to purchase supplies. 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. Also make sure that a trusted friend or family member has a copy of these documents. Include the names and numbers of everyone in your personal support network, as well as your medical and disability service providers. If you have a communication disability, make sure your emergency information includes instructions for the best way to communicate with you. Even if you do not use a computer yourself, consider putting important information onto a portable thumb drive for easy transport in an evacuation.

### **Finances**

Signing up for direct deposit or the Direct Express card is a simple but important step that can help

protect your family's access to funds in case an emergency happens. If you or those close to you are still receiving Social Security or other federal benefits by check, please consider switching to one of these safer, easier options today.

- ▶ Arrange electronic payments for your paycheck and federal benefits.
- ▶ The Direct Express® prepaid debit card is designed as a safe and easy alternative to paper checks for people who don't have a bank account. Sign up is easy, call toll-free at (877) 212-9991 (phone), (866) 569-0447 (TTY) or sign up online at [www.USDirectExpress.com](http://www.USDirectExpress.com).

Depending on your needs, additional items for your Go Kit might include:

- ▶ Copies of medical prescriptions, doctors' orders, and the style and serial numbers of the assistive devices you use
- ▶ At least a week's supply of any medication or medical supplies you use regularly, or as much as you can keep on hand
- ▶ Medical alert tags or bracelets or written descriptions of your disability and support needs, in case you are unable to describe the situation in an emergency
- ▶ Medical insurance cards, Medicare/Medicaid cards, physician contact information, list of your allergies and health history.
- ▶ A list of the local non-profit or community-based organizations that know you or assist people with access and functional needs similar to yours.
- ▶ Extra eyeglasses; backup supplies for any visual aids you use
- ▶ Extra batteries for hearing aids; extra hearing aids if you have them (or if you have insurance coverage for them)
- ▶ Battery chargers for motorized wheelchairs, or other battery-operated medical/assistive technology devices
- ▶ Supplies for your service animal. You can find more tips at <http://www.ready.gov/animals>
- ▶ A laminated personal communication board, if you might need assistance with being understood or understanding others
- ▶ If you use a motorized wheelchair, have a light weight manual chair available for emergencies. Know the size and weight of your wheelchair, in addition to whether or not it is collapsible, in case it has to be transported.
- ▶ If you have allergies or chemical sensitivities, be sure to include items that you are able to use for personal hygiene and for cleanup.