



How Can I Prepare  
For Emergencies  
And Disasters?



## How Can I Prepare For Emergencies & Disasters?

Being prepared for emergencies and disasters is **VERY** important and could mean the difference between life and death. When a hurricane, tornado, flood, pandemic, or other emergency situation arises, you need to be prepared to either evacuate or sometimes “shelter in place.” To be sure you are as prepared as possible, you should develop an emergency / disaster plan, make a supply kit, and stay informed.

Some resources you can use:

- There are many resources available on-line on “Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities.” One great source is: [www.readyvirginia.gov/](http://www.readyvirginia.gov/), and another [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).
- Virginia offers an annual **Tax-Free Holiday for disaster preparedness** supplies in the month of **May**, which makes this a good time to get weather alert radios, generators, and other high dollar items. For more information, go on-line at: [www.tax.virginia.gov/salestaxholiday](http://www.tax.virginia.gov/salestaxholiday).
- If you have a disability, you should consider completing a personal assessment to identify what you will need for assistance in the event of a disaster before a disaster happens. Information and planning tools can be found in the “Preparing for Disaster for People with Disabilities and other Special Needs” (FEMA476, A4497) available on-line at <http://www.redcross.org/www-files/Documents/Preparing/A4497.pdf>.
- Also there is a **File of Life** on-line at [www.folife.org](http://www.folife.org), which you can fill out and keep with you. It alerts emergency medical personnel who arrive at your home of your personal medical information. This allows any emergency rescue team to instantly know your medical history. In an emergency, every second counts!
- CVS pharmacies offer something similar to the File of Life, which is called a “Personal Medication Record.”

FILE OF LIFE	
Name:	
Address:	
Doctor:	Phone#:
EMERGENCY CONTACTS	
Name:	Phone#:
Address:	
Name:	Phone#:
Address:	

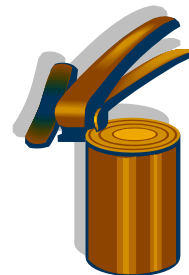
The information below is from “Preparing Makes Sense for People with Disabilities and Special Needs. Get Ready Now,” which is available on the [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) website.

## Make A Kit Of Emergency Supplies

Be prepared to improvise and use what you have on hand to make it on your own for **at least three days** or longer. While there are many things that might make you more comfortable, think first about fresh water, food and clean air.

*Recommended Supplies to Include in a Basic Kit:*

- ✓ Water: One gallon per person per day, for drinking and sanitation
- ✓ Non-perishable food: at least a three-day supply
- ✓ Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert and extra batteries for both
- ✓ Flashlight and extra batteries
- ✓ First aid kit
- ✓ Whistle to signal for help
- ✓ Filter mask or cotton t-shirt, to help filter the air
- ✓ Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- ✓ Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- ✓ Manual can opener if your kit contains canned food
- ✓ Plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place
- ✓ Important family documents
- ✓ Items for unique family needs, such as daily prescription medications, infant formula, diapers or pet food.
- ✓ If you use eyeglasses, hearing aids, and hearing aid batteries, wheelchair batteries or oxygen, be sure you always have extras in your kit.
- ✓ Also have copies of your medical insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid cards readily available.
- ✓ If you have a service animal, be sure to include food, water, collar with ID tag, medical records and other emergency pet supplies.



*Special Note on Emergency Documents:*

- ⇒ Include copies of important documents in your emergency supply kits such as family records, medical records, wills, deeds, social security number, charge and bank account information, and tax records. It is best to

keep these documents in a waterproof container.

- ⇒ Include any information related to operating equipment or life-saving devices that you rely on, if applicable.
- ⇒ If you have a communication disability, make sure your emergency information lists notes on the best way to communicate with you.
- ⇒ Also be sure you have cash or travelers checks in your kits in case you need to purchase supplies

*Special Note on 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, and keep a copy of your prescriptions, dosage and 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 have routine treatments at 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 within your area and other areas to which you might evacuate.
- If you use a respirator or other electric-powered medical equipment, make prior arrangements with your physician and check with your supplier about emergency plans and about electrical back-up for the equipment.

*Consider two kits.* In one, put everything you will need to stay where you are and make it on your own. The other should be a lightweight, smaller version you can take with you if you have to get away.

## Make A Plan For What You Will Do In An Emergency

The reality of an emergency or 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. Preparing ahead of time will help ensure that you will have what you need in the crucial first few days of a natural disaster or emergency. Here are the basics:

- **Develop a Family Emergency Plan.** Your family or friends may not be together when disaster strikes, so plan on how you will contact one another and review what you will do in different situations. Consider a plan where each family member or friend calls, or e-mails, the same friend or relative in the event of an emergency.

- **Talk to your neighbors** and let them know what you might need in the event of an emergency.
- **Put “ICE”** (it stands for “in case of emergency”) next to any contacts on your cell phone (or have a list of those contacts next to your land line phone) showing who should be called if you are unable to communicate.
- **Check with your city or town** to see if they have a program that will let you register important information with them in case of an emergency. For example, your locality may be able to set up a “Premises File” for you in case of at-home emergencies. A Premises File will flag your address to alert fire, rescue, and the police of any medical condition you may have that could inhibit your ability to exit in case of an emergency. You can also note in the Premises File what bedroom you use or the best way to evacuate you in emergencies.
- **Identify which shelter in your area can best meet your needs in case of evacuation.** Some shelters may be limited in the accommodations available to meet some of the needs of individuals with disabilities. Contact your local office for emergency preparedness / disaster planning for this information.
- It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an **out-of-town contact** may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members. Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the emergency, the first important decision is whether you stay put or get away. You should understand and plan for both possibilities.
- **Watch television and/or listen to the radio** for official instructions as they become available.
- **Create a Personal Support Network.**
  - If you think you will need assistance during a disaster, **ask family, friends, and others to be part of your plan.** Share each aspect of your emergency plan with everyone in your group, including a friend or relative in another area who may not be impacted by the same emergency who can help if necessary. Include the names and numbers of everyone in your personal support network, as well as your medical providers in your emergency supply kit. Make sure that someone in your personal support network has an extra key to your home and knows where you keep your emergency supplies. If you use a wheelchair or other medical equipment, show friends how to use these devices so they can move you if necessary, and teach them how to use any lifesaving equipment or administer medicine in case of an emergency. Practice your plan with those who have agreed to be part of your personal support network.
  - **Inform your employer and co-workers** about your situation and let them know specifically what assistance you will need in an emergency. Talk about communication difficulties, physical limitations, equipment instructions and medication procedures. Always participate in trainings and emergency drills offered by your employer.
- **Create a Plan to Shelter-in-Place.**



- There are circumstances when staying put makes the most sense, for example, in a bad winter storm or if you need to create a barrier between yourself and potentially contaminated air outside, when sealing the room can be a matter of survival.
- **If you see large amounts of debris in the air, or if local authorities say the air is badly contaminated, you may want to shelter-in-place and seal the room.** Consider precutting plastic sheeting to seal windows, doors, and air vents. Each piece should be several inches larger than the space you want to cover so that you can duct tape it flat against the wall. Label each piece with the location of where it fits. Immediately turn off air conditioning, forced air heating systems, exhaust fans, and clothes dryers. Take your emergency supplies and go into the room you have designated. Seal all windows, doors and vents. Understand that sealing the room is a temporary measure to create a barrier between you and the contaminated air.
- **Listen to the radio** for instructions from local emergency management officials.
- **Create a Pan to Evacuate or Get Away.**  
Plan in advance:
  - How you will assemble your family or loved ones
  - Where you will go. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency.
  - For special assistance or make arrangements for accessible transportation, as needed. If you do not have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to. If you typically rely on elevators, have a back-up plan in case they are not working.
  - Become familiar with alternate routes as well as other means of transportation out of your area. If you do not have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to.
  - Know in advance where the nearest shelter is that can support your needs.
  - Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together.
  - If all of your efforts to plan a safe evacuation have been unsuccessful, call your local emergency or disaster planning office to find out if they can assist.

- **Consider your Service Animal or 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 possible. However, if you are going to a public shelter, make sure that they allow pets. Some only allow service animals. Contact your local emergency planning office to find out.



- **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.

- **Contact Your Local Emergency Information Management Office**  
Some local emergency management offices maintain registries of people with disabilities and other special needs so it may be possible to locate you and assist you more quickly in a disaster. Contact your local emergency management agency to see if these services exist where you live. **It is very important that this be only one part of your plan, because in some emergencies or disasters, local officials may not be able to reach you.** In addition, wearing medical alert tags or bracelets that identify your special needs can be a crucial aid in an emergency situation.
- **Be informed** about what might happen.  
Some of the things you can do to prepare for the unexpected, such as assembling an emergency supply kit and making an emergency plan, are the same regardless of the type of emergency. However, it's important to stay informed about what might happen and know what types of emergencies are likely to affect your region. 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.*

## Other Related Resources

For more information, visit the [www.readyvirginia.gov](http://www.readyvirginia.gov) or [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) website or call 1-800-BE-READY. A list of items eligible for the 2009 sales tax exemption is at: <http://www.tax.virginia.gov/index.cfm> or <http://www.tax.virginia.gov/site.cfm?alias=HurricanePreparednessEquipmentHoliday>

