

Persons with Disabilities Preparedness Tips

People with disabilities need to be preparedness in a disaster or emergency. Preparation may seem like a lot of work. It is. Preparing does take time and effort. So do a little at a time, as your energy and budget permit. The important thing is to start preparing. The more you do, the more confident you will be that you can protect yourself and others.

ESTABLISH A PERSONAL SUPPORT NETWORK

A personal support network is made up of individuals who will check with you in an emergency to ensure you are O.K. and to give assistance if needed. This network can consist of friends, roommates, family members, relatives, personal attendants, co-workers and neighbours. Some people rely on personal attendants. This type of assistance may not be available after a disaster. Therefore it is vital that your personal support network consist of different people than those who are your personal attendants. If you employ a personal attendant or use the services of a home health agency or other type of in home service, discuss with these people a plan for what you will do in case of an emergency. How will you get along after an emergency or disaster strikes? A critical element to consider in your emergency planning is the establishment of an additional support network. In spite of your best planning, sometimes a personal support network must be created on the spot. For example you may find yourself in an (evacuation) reception centre and needing to assemble help for immediate assistance. Think about what you will need, how you want it done and what kind of person you would select.

Seven Important Items to Discuss, Give to and Practice with Your Personal Support Network:

- Make arrangements, prior to an emergency, for your support network to immediately check on you after a disaster and, if needed, offer assistance.
- Exchange important keys.
- Show where you keep emergency supplies.
- Share copies of your relevant emergency documents, evacuation plans and emergency health information card.
- Agree and practice a communications system regarding how to contact each other in an emergency. Do not count on the telephones working.
- You and your personal support network should always notify each other when you are going out of town and when you will return.
- The relationship should be mutual. Learn about each other's needs and how to help each other in an emergency. You could be responsible for food supplies and preparation, organizing neighbourhood watch meetings, interpreting, etc.

Travelling

When staying in hotels/motels identify yourself to registration desk staff as a person who will need assistance in an emergency and state the type of assistance you may need.

Health Card

- An emergency health information card communicates to rescuers what they need to know about you if they find you unconscious or incoherent, or if they need to quickly help evacuate you.
- An emergency health information card should contain information about medications, equipment you use, allergies and sensitivities, communication difficulties you may have, preferred treatment, treatment- medical providers, and important contact people.
- Make multiple copies of this card to keep in emergency supply kits, car, work, wallet (behind driver's license or primary identification card), wheelchair pack, etc.

Emergency Contact List

- Ask several relatives or friends who live outside your immediate area (approximately 100 miles away) to act as a clearing house for information about you and your family after a disaster. It is often easier to place an out of province long distance call from a disaster area, than to call within the area. All family members should know to call the contact person to report their location and condition. Once contact is made, have the contact person relay messages to your other friends and relatives outside the disaster area. This will help to reduce calling into and out of the affected area once the phones are working.
- Besides emergency out-of-town contacts, the list should include your personal support network, equipment vendors, doctors, utility companies, employers, and schools, day care centers, for other family or household members.

Emergency Documents

(Includes important information typically needed after a disaster).

- Store emergency documents in your home emergency supply kits. Copies of life saving information (i.e., specifications for adaptive equipment or medical devices should be in all of your emergency kits and medication lists should be on your health card) should be stored in all of your emergency kits. Other emergency documents should be kept together with your home emergency pack - family records, wills, deeds, bank accounts, etc., for access in an emergency. These should be stored in sealed freezer bags with copy sent to out-of-province contacts.

Conduct an "Ability Self -Assessment"

Evaluate your capabilities, limitations and needs, as well as your surroundings to determine what type of help you will need in an emergency.

1. Will you be able to independently shut off the necessary utilities (gas, water, electricity)?

- Do you know where shut-off valves are? Can you get to them?
 - Can you find and use the right wrench to turn those handles?
2. Can you operate a fire extinguisher?
 - Have you practiced?
 - Will extended handles make these items usable for you?
 3. Will you be able to carry your evacuation kit?
 - What do you need to do, in order to carry it; how much can you carry regularly; do you have duplicates at other locations?
 4. Have you moved or secured large objects that might block your escape path?
 5. Write instructions for the following (keep a copy with you and share a copy with your personal support network):
 - a. How to turn off utilities; color-code or label these for quick identification:
 - Main gas valve, located next to the meter - blue; electrical power circuit breaker box - red; and Main water valve - green.
 - If you have a reduced or limited sense of smell, alert your personal support network to check gas leaks.
 - b. How to operate and safely move your essential equipment. Consider attaching simple to read and understand instructions to your equipment.
 - c. How to safely transport you if you need to be carried, and include any areas of vulnerability.
 - d. How to provide personal assistance services.
 - Remind anyone who assists you to practice strict cleanliness and keep fingers out of mouth. With limited water and increased health hazards, the possibility of infection increases. Keep a supply of latex gloves in your emergency supply kit and ask people assisting you with personal hygiene to use them.
 - List all personal care assistance needs (dressing, bathing, etc.) with instructions on how best to assist you.
 - Make a map of where to find medications, aids and supplies. Share with your personal support network.
 - e. How will you evacuate?
 - Be aware of barriers and possible hazards to a clear path of exit. Change what you are able to change (clear obstacles from aisles; secure large, heavy items such as bookcases that may fall to block your path). Plan alternate exit paths. Know who can help you.

Communication: Practice Assertiveness Skills

Take charge and practice how to quickly explain to people how to move your mobility aids or how to move you safely and rapidly. Be prepared to give clear, specific and concise instructions and directions to rescue personnel, i.e., “take my oxygen tank,” “take my wheelchair,” “take my gamma globulin from the freezer,” “take my insulin from the refrigerator,” “take my communication device from under the bed.” Practice giving these instructions with the least amount of words in the least amount of time. For example: the traditional “fire fighter’s carry” may be hazardous for some people with some respiratory weakness. You need to be able to give brief instructions regarding how to move you.

Be prepared to request an accommodation from disaster personnel. For example, if you are unable to wait in long lines for extended periods of time, for such items as water, food, and disaster relief applications, practice clearly and concisely explaining why you cannot wait in the line.

Carry-On/Carry-With-You Supplies/Supplies to Keep with You at All Times

Packing/Container suggestions: a fanny pack, back pack or drawstring bag which can be hung from a wheelchair, scooter or other assistive device.

1. Emergency Health Information Card.
2. Instructions on personal assistance needs and how best to provide them.
3. Copy of Emergency Documents.
4. Essential medications/copies of prescriptions (at least a week's supply).
5. Flashlight on key ring.
6. Signalling device (whistle, beeper, bell, and screecher).
7. Small battery-operated radio and extra batteries

Disability-Related Supplies to Add to Regular Emergency Kits

Store supplies in areas you anticipate will be easy to reach after a disaster.

Others may be able to share traditional emergency supplies, but you need these so store on top and in separate labelled bag! If you have to leave something behind, make sure you get these.

Plan for enough disability-related supplies for up to two weeks (medication, syringes, colostomy, respiratory, catheter, padding, distilled water, etc.). If you have a respiratory, cardiac or multiple chemical sensitivities condition, store towels, masks, industrial respirators or other supplies you can use to filter your air supply. Do not expect recreation centres, group lodging facilities or first aid stations to be able to meet your surly needs. In an emergency supplies may be limited.

If you are unable to afford extra supplies consider contacting one of the many disability-specific organizations such as the Multiple Sclerosis Society, Arthritis Foundation, United Cerebral Palsy Association, etc. These organizations may be able to assist you in gathering extra low cost or no cost emergency supplies or medications.

Medication

It is best if you are able to maintain at least a 7 to 14 day supply of essential medications (heart, blood pressure, birth control, diabetic, psychiatric orphan drugs, etc.) and keep this supply with you at all times. If this is not possible, even maintaining a three day supply would be extremely helpful.

Work with your doctor(s) to obtain an extra supply of medications, as well as extra copies of prescriptions. Ask if it would be safe to go without one dosage periodically, until an adequate supply has been accumulated? Make several copies of your prescriptions and put one copy in

each of your survival kits, car kit, wallet, with your Emergency Documents and your evacuation plan.

Ask your provider or pharmacist about the shelf life and storage temperature sensitivities of your medication. Ask how often you should rotate stored medication to ensure that the effectiveness of the medication does not weaken due to excess storage time. If you are on medications which are administered to you by a clinic or hospital (such as methadone, or chemo or radiation therapy) ask your provider how you should plan for a 3- 14 day disruption.

If you are a smoker, be aware that smoking will not be allowed in Reception Centres or Group Lodging facilities. If getting to an outside smoking area may be difficult for you, consider stocking your evacuation kit with nicotine gum or patches available by prescriptions.

Equipment and Assistive Devices

Keep important equipment and assistive devices in a consistent, convenient and secured place, so you can quickly and easily locate them after the shaking. Make sure these items such as teeth, hearing aids, prosthesis, mobility aid, cane, crutches, walker, respirator, service animal harness, augmentative communication device or electronic communicator, artificial larynx, wheelchair, sanitary aids, batteries, eye glasses, contacts including cleaning solutions, etc., are secured. For example: keep hearing aid, eye glasses, etc., in a container by bedside which is attached to night stand or bed post using string or Velcro, oxygen tank attached to the wall, wheelchair locked and close to bed. This helps prevent them from falling, flying or rolling away during a disaster. If you use a laptop computer as a means of communication, consider purchasing a power converter. A power converter allows most laptops (12 volts or less) to run from a cigarette lighter on the dashboard of a vehicle.

PERSONAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

DATE COMPLETED ACTIVITIES

- Establish a personal support network.
- Customize an emergency health information card.
- Keep copies in wallet, purse and emergency supply kits.
- Complete an emergency contact list.
- Collect important documents
- Store emergency documents in emergency supply kits, wallet, safe deposit box and give copies to personal support network and out of area contact (see Tips for Collecting Emergency Documents).
- Conduct an ability self-assessment.
- Collect Grab and Go supplies to keep with you at all times.
- Collect disability-related supplies for emergency kits.
- Maintain a seven day supply of essential medications.

- Keep important equipment and assistive devices in consistent, convenient and secured place.
- Write out Instructions for items you will need help with in an emergency.
- If you use a service animal (see Tips for Service Animal and Pet Owners).

(Important documents may include: Health Cards, Medical Documents for People with Visual Disabilities, Deaf or Hard of Hearing, Communication and Speech Related Disabilities, Psychiatric Disabilities, Developmental or Cognitive Disabilities, Mobility Disabilities, Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, People Who Use Life Support Systems, and Service Animals.)