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# A GUIDE TO PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

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How to stay prepared, informed, and safe in a crisis





If a disaster were to strike today, would you really be ready? Anything from severe weather to a full-blown pandemic can cause alarm when you least expect it, and you and your family may not be together when it does. According to the CDC, about 69 million children in the United States are separated from their parents to attend school every day. Therefore, it's vital that everyone in your family knows how to manage a crisis whether you're together or apart. And while an unexpected catastrophe can be scary, with some preparation, you and your loved ones can remain composed and vigilant enough to stay safe wherever you are.

This compact guide will help you prepare for a variety of emergencies by exploring the following:

- Creating an emergency plan
- Building an emergency kit
- Preparing your family
- Preparing your car
- Preparing your finances
- Preparing your pets
- Staying informed





# CREATING AN EMERGENCY PLAN

The key to navigating and mitigating the effects of any emergency successfully is first and foremost preparedness. You'll want to start by finding out what emergencies are most common to your area and how best to manage them. Demonstrating a sense of control in a crisis will help others follow suit so it's also important to build an action plan with the help of your loved ones. This helps everyone stay knowledgeable, calm, and connected to one another, even in the face of danger.

Follow these steps to create an emergency plan.

**Step 1** - Discuss the following questions with your family:

1. How will we stay informed about possible emergencies?
2. How will we shelter ourselves if need be?
3. How will we evacuate if need be?
4. How will we communicate with each other if we're separated?
5. Do we need to build or update our emergency preparedness kit?

**Step 2** - Tailor your plan to meet the specific needs of your family by considering the following:

- The ages of your family members (School-aged children and seniors may need special consideration.)
- Each family member's responsibilities in assisting one another
- Allergies and dietary needs
- Prescriptions and other medical needs like equipment
- Disabilities and accessibility needs
- Languages, cultural, or religious needs
- Pets

**Step 3** - Build a support network

Consider friends, family, neighbors, or anyone else who may be able to help in a crisis situation. If there is anyone in your family with specific medical needs or disabilities, it's helpful to have people in your network who know how to use lifesaving equipment, administer medication, and communicate with any members of the family with communicative disabilities.

**Step 4** - Document your emergency plan

There are templates online at [ready.gov/plan](https://www.ready.gov/plan) you can either fill out or use as a model to create your own. Make sure every member of your family is aware of this plan before an emergency occurs.

**Step 5** - Rehearse your plan with your family and support network

Like a fire drill, your family and anyone else involved in your plan should practice before a crisis to minimize potential confusion and ensure everyone is properly prepared.



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# BUILDING AN EMERGENCY KIT FOR YOUR FAMILY

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Without having to worry about basic necessities such as food and water, you and your family can remain safer and calmer in a crisis situation. For this reason, it's crucial to think ahead and prepare an emergency kit that's well stocked and easy to carry. Remember to keep all emergency supplies in airtight containers and stored in something portable like a duffel bag or backpack.

## Emergency Kit Basics

- One gallon of water per person for several days for drinking and sanitation
- At least a three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Hand crank/battery powered radio
- Flashlight
- First aid kit
- Extra batteries
- Whistle
- Dust masks
- Plastic sheeting
- Duct tape
- Baby wipes
- Garbage bags
- Wrench/pliers
- Manual can opener
- Local maps
- Non-prescription medications (pain relievers, anti-diarrhea medication, antacids, or laxatives)
- Cash or traveler's checks
- Cell phone with chargers and portable back-up battery
- Identification and important documents





## Documents and Records to Prepare

Any documents and records such as insurance policies, identification, bank records, etc. should be kept as both hard copies and electronic backups. Physical documents should be kept in waterproof containers, while electronic versions can be saved to hard drives or the cloud.

Here are some of the documents you should consider when preparing for an emergency:

### Identification

- Photo ID
- Birth certificate
- Social Security card

### Legal/Financial

- Housing payments
- Insurance policies/agent information
- Sources of income
- Tax statements
- Banking information

### Medical

- Health insurance
- Vaccination records
- Medication
- Physician information



## Additional Items to Consider

Aside from the basic necessities, there are a few other items to consider based on the needs of you and your family, some of which the CDC recommends to avoid the spread of infectious diseases. These recommended items include the following:

- Face masks, soap, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes
- Prescription medications
- Prescription eyeglasses and/or contact lens and solution
- Sleeping bags or blankets for each person
- Sturdy shoes and spare clothing relative to your climate
- Fire extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Menstrual products
- Paper and plastic products, such as cups, plates, towels, and utensils
- Paper and pencil in waterproof container
- Child-friendly activities such as books, games, puzzles, etc.

## Maintaining Your Emergency Kit

A kit filled with expired food and outdated necessities won't do you or your family any good. So make sure your kit is ready when you are by maintaining and storing it properly:

- Canned food should be kept somewhere cool and dry.
- Boxed food should be sealed tightly in metal or plastic containers.
- Update your kit annually to maintain the changing needs of your family over time.
- Designate a specific spot for your kit and make sure everyone knows where it is.
- Keep a small kit of emergency essentials like food, water, medicines, and comfortable shoes in something portable and convenient at work.

# HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CAR

## Creating an Emergency Kit for Your Car

When planning to be on the road for long periods of time, stay aware of driving conditions and the weather and be sure to stay off the road if things become unsafe. It's also a great idea to keep an additional emergency kit in your car in case you're ever stranded. Your car kit should include a few extras specific to car safety like:

- Jumper cables
- Flares or reflective triangle
- Ice scraper
- Cell phone charger
- Blankets
- Maps
- Cat litter or sand for better tire traction
- Spare tire

## Before You Get on the Road

While an emergency kit is helpful in a worst-case scenario, there are many steps you can take to avoid a car crisis altogether. Make sure your car is in good working condition by having it checked before leaving and always use proper car safety. In the event of an impending weather event, it's good to have the following checked as well:

- Antifreeze levels
- Air bags
- Battery and ignition system
- Brakes
- Exhaust system
- Fuel and air filters
- Heater and defroster
- Lights and flashing hazards
- Oil
- Thermostat
- Windshield wipers/washer fluid



## General Car Safety in an Emergency

- Your gas tank should always be full to avoid the fuel line freezing. Also, in the event of evacuation or power outage, you won't be stranded.
- Make sure your tires have proper tread for winter weather.
- Avoid driving in a flooded area. According to ready.gov, six inches of water can cause the car to stall, while a foot can make it float.
- Keep in mind that roads may also be weakened due to floods, so avoid driving in areas where floodwaters have recently receded.
- Do not risk electrocution by attempting to exit your vehicle if a power line falls on top of it. Wait for a trained professional to remove it before trying to leave.
- If you're unable to control your vehicle, pull over, turn the car off, and set the parking brake.
- Avoid overpasses, bridges, power lines, signs, or other hazards in the event of an emergency that can negatively impact roadway stability.



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## HOW TO PREPARE YOUR PETS

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Your pets are a part of the family. It's just as important to know how to keep them safe in an emergency. Staying informed, having a plan in place, and building an emergency kit are all key ways to help minimize stress for both you and your animals. Additionally, the moment you're warned about a potential storm or disaster, it's important to bring pets inside. If you're evacuating your home, your pets should not be left behind.

### Questions to Consider When Creating a Plan:

**Where will my pets go?** Will your pet be allowed in the same place you plan to evacuate to? Research which shelters or hotels are animal friendly or where else pets may be able to go. The best place for your pet is somewhere that has access to water, food, and veterinary care. Whenever possible, evacuate your pets well in advance of a crisis.

**How will pets get to safety?** You may need to consider specific kinds of vehicles or handlers to safely transport your pets, especially if you have larger animals. In the event that evacuation isn't possible, pet owners may need to consider moving them to an available barn or letting them loose.

**Who can help if I can't?** Consider friends, family, or neighbors who might be able to bring your pet to safety in the event that you're unable to. Be sure to discuss this with them before a disaster strikes.

**Is my pet microchipped?** All animals should have some form of identification in the event of an evacuation. If your pet is lost in the middle of an emergency, having a way to contact you if they're found could be critical to returning them to safety. Be sure your information is properly updated and provide an additional emergency contact.

**Who can I contact?** For additional information about caring for your pet in an emergency, try contacting your local emergency management office, animal shelter, or animal control office with any questions.

### Building an Emergency Kit for Your Pet:

When building an emergency kit for your family, don't forget about your pets. Making sure your animals are well stocked with their basic necessities in the face of a disaster can help keep everyone calm and avoid potential injuries or worse. Your kit should include:

- Several days' supply of food in an airtight, waterproof container
- Several days' supply of water and a water bowl
- Regularly taken medicines in a waterproof container
- A first-aid kit tailored to your pet's medical needs
- A collar, backup leashes, and harnesses
- Pet toys
- Registration information, other relevant documents, and ID tags in a waterproof container as well as available electronically
- A crate or sturdy carrier for each pet
- Shampoo, conditioner, and other grooming items
- Sanitation needs, including pet litter, and a litter box, newspapers, towels, trash bags, and household cleaning agents
- A photo of you and your pet to prove ownership and identify pet if separated

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# STAYING INFORMED

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While preventing disasters may not always be within your control, maintaining awareness can help you know if and when to put your emergency plan into action. Researching what emergencies may be more likely to occur in your area is a great place to start and knowing where and how to be notified in the event of a crisis is just as crucial to your safety.

## **Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs)**

In the event of an emergency, these short, free messages are sent out via cell towers by local alerting authorities briefly explaining what's happening and any action you should take. While they look like text messages, they have their own sound and vibration pattern. There's no need to subscribe to these messages as they're automatically sent to any device capable of receiving WEAs. Check your settings or ask your phone provider if your device is WEA enabled.

## **Emergency Alert System (EAS)**

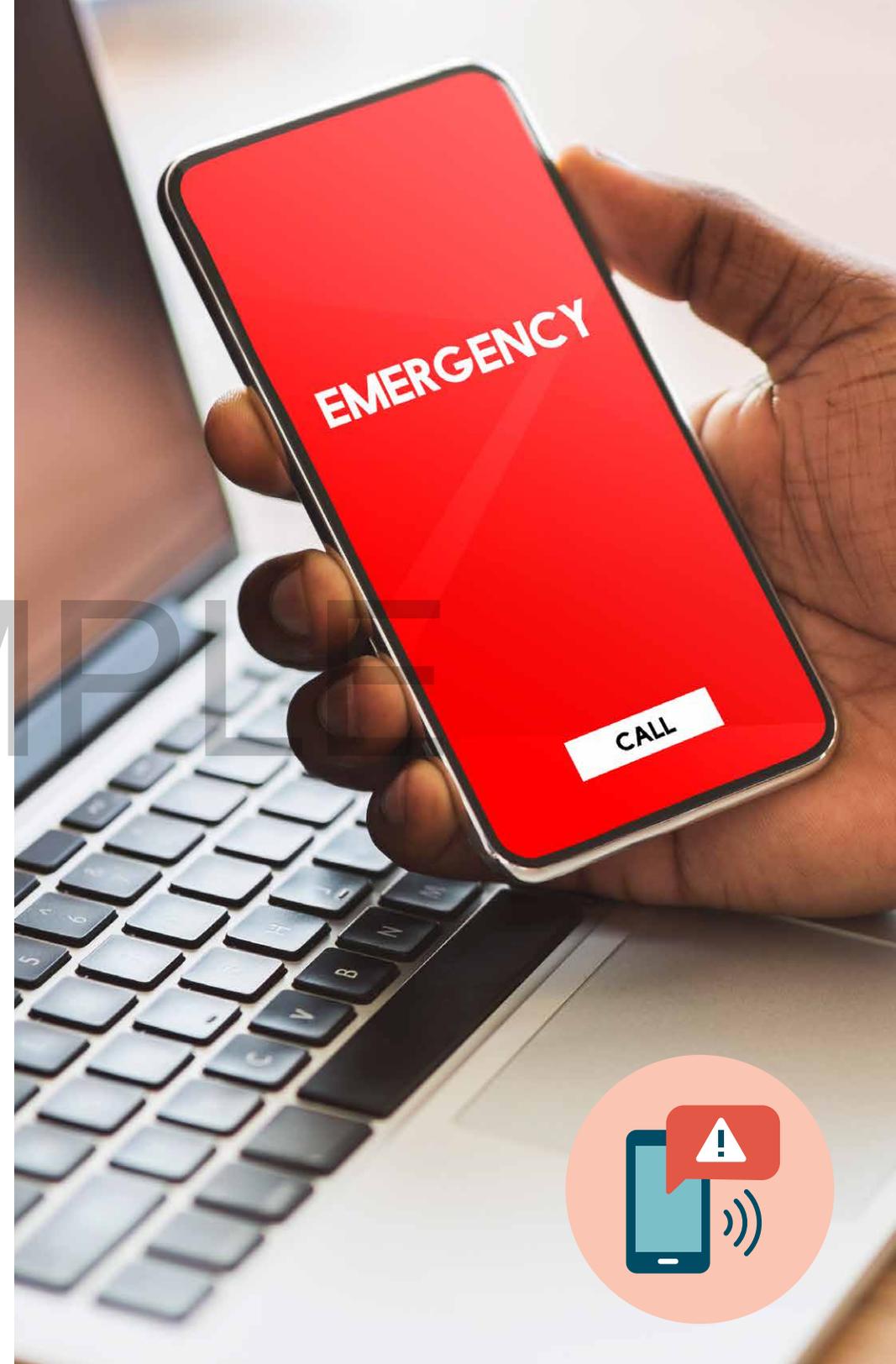
This system is used by the president and both state and local authorities through broadcasters, cable television, and satellite systems to inform the population of national emergencies or threats, weather, and AMBER alerts. This may also be used if no other forms of public communication are available. While FEMA and the FCC may use the EAS for testing, the president is the only one able to activate the system in the event of a true emergency.

## **NOAA Weather Radio (NWR)**

Official potentially hazardous weather information is constantly broadcasted through this network of radio stations, including forecasts, warnings, and watches. This information is based off the National Weather Service closest to your physical location and can be accessed 24 hours a day 7 days a week. In some cases, NWR may also be used to share national security threats or other emergency information unrelated to weather via the EAS.

## **FEMA App**

To receive real-time alerts, safety tips, disaster assistance, and more for a variety of locations and disasters, try downloading the FEMA app to your mobile device. This can also assist you in making family plans and emergency kits or finding local shelters in your area.





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# RESOURCES

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For additional assistance in preparing for and staying informed about emergencies, explore these websites and articles.

## FEMA

Federal Emergency Management Agency site aimed at helping people before, during, and after disasters.

[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

## READY.GOV

A public service campaign helping people prepare for, respond to, and mitigate disasters.

[www.ready.gov/plan](http://www.ready.gov/plan)

[www.ready.gov/kit](http://www.ready.gov/kit)

[www.ready.gov/alerts](http://www.ready.gov/alerts)

[www.ready.gov/financial-preparedness](http://www.ready.gov/financial-preparedness)

## REDCROSS

A network of volunteers, donors, and employees dedicated to alleviating suffering in the face of emergencies.

[www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies.html](http://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies.html)

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