



Emergency Preparedness for People With Disabilities

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Are you ready for when disaster strikes?

According to the [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#), approximately 57 percent of American households in 2024 were not prepared for disasters like floods, fires, floods, or extended power outages that threaten health and safety.

For people with disabilities, the need for preparation is especially critical. After a disaster, access to medical facilities, pharmacies, and electricity may be limited. Planning ahead helps keep you or your loved ones safe and cared for when those essential resources are disrupted.

Here are a few things you can do to be ready — just in case.

Establish a Network

Building a network of family, friends, and neighbors who can help in an emergency is an important first step. Consider who you can call for help, as well as those who may be caregiving during an emergency. Don't rely on just one or two people — they may be unavailable or affected by the same disaster. Include neighbors who live nearby for immediate help, as well as family or friends in other areas who can assist from a distance.

Your support team should know where to find your emergency kit and contact list and understand the assistance you might need. Provide trusted network members with keys, security codes, or information about how to enter your home if you cannot let them in during an emergency. Consider where to store a spare key that's accessible but secure.

Create an Emergency Kit

Having an emergency kit ready can make a significant difference during a crisis. Be sure that those in your support network know where it's stored and how to access it. You'll need:

- *Basic survival supplies:* Include water, food, a flashlight or lantern, extra batteries, a pen and paper, chargers for electronic devices, and copies of essential documents like insurance cards and identification.
- *Medications:* Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about creating an emergency supply of all prescriptions. If any medication requires refrigeration, keep a cooler with chemical ice packs. If oxygen is needed, maintain a backup supply. Keep a list of all medications, dosages, and allergies, including over-the-counter medicines.

- *Medical and assistive devices:* If you use medical or communication devices, note their make, model, and serial numbers and keep written instructions on how to operate them. If possible, have backup equipment or a plan for replacement if yours is lost or damaged.
- *Mobility support:* Keep canes, walkers, and wheelchairs in an easily accessible spot. If the support is powered, consider having an extra manual option with your kit.
- *Hearing or communication support:* Keep extra batteries for hearing aids or other battery-powered devices. If you are hearing impaired, choose a weather radio with text display and flashing alerts.
- *Sensory support:* For individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, include noise-canceling headphones and a small tent or sheet to help reduce visual and auditory stimulation.
- *Service animal supplies:* If you have a service animal, pack food, water, a leash, a collar with an ID tag, and veterinary records.

Plan for Power Outages

If you rely on equipment that requires electricity, contact your power provider to be added to the list for priority power restoration. Talk with your doctor about battery options or other ways to keep equipment running during an outage.

Determine how long your critical medical equipment can run on battery power and how much backup power you'll need. This helps you know whether you need a generator, additional batteries, or should plan to relocate during extended outages.

Identify hospitals, medical facilities, or community centers in your area that have generator power and can accommodate people with medical equipment needs. Some communities designate special needs shelters with electrical outlets and medical support.

Check with your local city or county emergency management agencies as well. Some maintain registries for people with disabilities to receive special assistance during a disaster.

Prepare for Heat and Other Health Risks

Heat can be dangerous for people with disabilities and older adults. In addition, some conditions and medications can interfere with the body's ability to cool itself. If this applies to you or a loved one, take extra precautions:

- Ask someone to check in during heat waves.
- Keep extra water for hydration and cooling.
- Store additional chemical ice packs to help regulate body temperature.
- Find local public spaces with air conditioning where you can go to cool down if needed.

- Educate yourself on symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke, such as dizziness, nausea, and confusion, so you can seek prompt medical attention.

Stay Informed and Connected

When disasters strike, timely information is essential. Use battery-powered or hand-crank radios, phone alerts, and communication apps that meet your accessibility needs. Know which local radio and TV stations provide closed captioning, audio description, or ASL interpretation during emergencies. FEMA's mobile app offers accessible emergency information and can work without cell service for some features.

Sign up for your county or city's emergency notification system, which can send texts, emails, or phone calls about evacuations, shelter locations, and other critical updates. Many systems allow you to specify accessibility preferences.

Keep backup power for communication devices. Stock portable phone chargers, power banks, or solar chargers specifically for phones and communication devices. Consider the charging needs of any speech-generating devices or other assistive technology.

Keep your contact list current, including relatives, friends, and healthcare providers, and make sure your support team knows how to reach one another.

Taking Steps Now

Emergency preparedness requires time and planning, but it can bring peace of mind knowing that you and your loved ones are ready to respond. Taking simple, proactive steps today — creating an emergency kit, making a contact list, and planning for power and medical needs — can make all the difference when unexpected events occur.

Need help planning for emergencies or protecting benefits? Contact a [Special Needs Alliance](#) attorney near you.

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