

Seniors Should Plan Ahead to be Ready for Disasters

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ALBANY, N.Y. -- Senior citizens, especially those with medical issues and limited mobility, can be vulnerable in the event of a disaster. But even if you have physical limitations, you can still protect yourself by having a personal disaster plan in place.

Local, state and federal officials are urging all Americans, especially senior citizens, to review, update and rehearse their disaster plans. By looking ahead, seniors can be prepared for any disaster, natural or manmade.

Senior citizens living in a group setting such as a nursing home or adult living facility should contact the administrator to learn about the specific disaster/evacuation plan for that facility.

But no matter where you are evacuating from, all seniors need to be aware of their own unique needs. By evaluating your own personal and medical needs and making an emergency plan, seniors can be better prepared for any situation no matter where they live.

There are three simple steps to disaster preparation: Make a kit, plan ahead and stay informed.

Make an Emergency Kit or ‘Go Bag’

Your Disaster Emergency Kit should include the following supplies to last at least three days:

- Water – at least one gallon per day per person for drinking and sanitation
- Food and utensils – foods that do not need to be cooked and will not spoil are ideal
- Blankets and extra clothing
- First Aid kit – include medical insurance and Medicaid cards
- Battery powered AM/FM radio and/or a NOAA weather radio receiver
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Prescription medicines – these should be rotated frequently and kept up to date
- Medical supplies –an extra pair of glasses, hearing aid batteries, or other medical devices
- Emergency contact list – information about family, friends and emergency numbers
- Extra cash – access to banks may be limited for a time.

Make a Disaster Plan

- If you are a senior who lives alone, talk to your family or friends about preparing for emergencies, getting help in the event of an evacuation and dealing with the aftermath of a disaster. Create a network of neighbors, relatives, friends and co-workers who can help in an emergency. Discuss needs and make sure everyone knows how to operate necessary medical equipment.
- If you live in an assisted living facility or nursing home, you should contact the administrator to learn about the disaster plan for that facility.
- Be aware of the possibility that you may temporarily not have access to your doctor's office or a drug store.
- Arrange for electronic payments of federal benefits. A disaster can disrupt mail service for days or even weeks. Switching to electronic payments also eliminates the risk of stolen checks. The U.S. Department of the Treasury recommends two safer ways to get federal benefits:
 - Direct deposit to a checking or savings account is the best option for people with bank accounts. Federal benefit recipients can sign up by calling (800) 333-1795 or at www.godirect.org/.
 - 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 or sign up online at www.usdirectexpress.com/edcfdtclient/index.html
- Disaster assistance grants are not considered taxable income and will not affect eligibility for Social Security, Medicaid, welfare assistance, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

Stay informed

Learn about what kinds of disasters, both natural and man-made, are most likely to occur in your area and how you will be notified. Find out if your area will be served by emergency radio and TV broadcasts. Other emergency alert methods might include a special siren, a telephone call or a visit from emergency workers.

In addition, learn about the emergency plans that have been established in your area by your state and local government.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

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