



Hurricane Preparedness & COVID-19

Experiencing a hurricane and its aftermath can be challenging, especially with the added considerations of the pandemic. However, planning ahead can help families get through a hurricane safely and ease some of the distress it can cause. This handout reviews steps families might consider when preparing for hurricane season or before a storm is coming in the age of COVID-19.

1. Develop an Evacuation Plan

Plan how you will leave and where you will go.

- Identify at least two places you could stay in another town, such as the house of a family or friend, or a hotel.
- Learn your evacuation zone and evacuation routes ahead of time and put your plan in writing.
- If you do not have transportation, figure out where your closest “evacuation spot” is located. Call 2-1-1 or go to www.211.org for assistance.
- Identify where you could get medical care close to your chosen evacuation sites, including the closest hospitals or medical clinics if you develop COVID-related symptoms.
- Discuss maintaining protections against COVID-19 with people you may be staying with, taking special considerations for people with a higher risk such as older adults.
- Make a plan for communicating and reuniting with loved ones and family members.
- Don’t forget to accommodate for your pets as not having a plan can add to your stress especially if you must leave them behind in an evacuation.

2. Put Together an Emergency Kit

In addition to a typical emergency kit (such as food and water, first aid supplies, flashlights and batteries, and hygiene supplies), prepare enough supplies for at least 5 days, or more if instructed. Pack your emergency kit in a way that you can take with you if you must evacuate.

- Considerations for COVID-19 include cleaning products and disinfectants, as well as washable or disposable masks/face coverings (at least 2 for each family member including children over the age of 2), and hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Shopping for an Emergency Kit can be more challenging due to changes in store hours and item availability.
 - Use home delivery options when possible.
 - Take precautions when shopping in person.
- Refer to www.ready.gov for additional ideas of items to include in your emergency kit.

3. Considerations if you Evacuate to a Public Shelter during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Practice social distancing: stay at least 6 feet away from non-family members
- Personal hygiene: wash your hands often and avoid touching your face; cover coughs and sneezes and avoid sharing food and drinks.

4. Supporting Young Children

- Be a good role model and support your children in washing their hands, wearing masks, and social distancing.
- Remain calm and comforting using age-appropriate language to support them at this stressful time.

5. Make a Plan with Your Doctor/Medical Provider

If you are considered “high risk” for COVID-19, it is important to discuss your needs with your doctor or care provider and make a plan that fits for you and your family.

- Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19:
 - Fever or chills
 - Cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

- Fatigue; muscle or body aches; headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat; Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting; diarrhea
- Look for emergency warning signs for COVID-19. If someone is showing any of these signs, seek emergency medical care or call 9-11 immediately:
 - Trouble breathing, persistent pain, pressure in the chest and/or bluish lips or face
 - New confusion, inability to wake up or stay awake

6. Create a Stress Management Plan

While it's normal to experience stress and anxiety during the pandemic the added stress and disruption of experiencing a hurricane can have negative physical and mental health effects. Here are some tips for managing and reducing stress during this time.

Know the Signs of Stress:

- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Irritability, feeling uneasy, or having a “short fuse”
- Feeling withdrawn, restless, or isolating yourself
- Lack of energy, motivation, or being unable to care for yourself
- Physical symptoms including headaches, stomach aches, racing heartbeat
- Increasing use of alcohol and/or other substances to “self-medicate”

Take These Steps:

- Identify sources of stress and talk about them with someone you trust
- Make time for adequate sleep
- Follow your doctor’s recommendations for diet and exercise
- Make time for self-care activities and doing things you enjoy
- If you need a mental health professional, call 2-1-1 to learn about the resources in your area or ask your doctor for a qualified referral

If You are Having Thoughts of Harming Yourself

- Talk to your doctor or counselor immediately
- If you need immediate medical help, go to your nearest emergency room or call **9-1-1**
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is also available 24/7 at **(800) 273-8255**

7. Identify Your Social Supports

Social support is one of the most protective factors against stress. It can be challenging to stay connected during the pandemic but virtual and phone calls, and social distanced check ins can help reduce feelings of isolation. Identifying and fostering supports ahead of time can help you feel more connected, less isolated, and confident that others will be there.

Consider who can provide the following support:

- Someone to talk to about my feelings and worries
- Someone who can support me during an evacuation.
- Someone I can trust to watch my other children.

Hurricanes can disrupt social support networks. Consider:

- How can I continue to stay in contact with my supports before, during, and after a storm?
- Are there additional supports at my evacuation sites with whom I can connect?

Additional Resources:

- American Red Cross: (866) 438-4636 or (800) 733-2767
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Preparedness Resources: www.ready.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Preventions: www.cdc.gov
- TDC4: <https://www.medschool.lsuhsu.edu/tdc>
- SAMSHA Disaster Distress Helpline: (800) 985-5990
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-7233