

People with Special Needs

Those who have family members with special needs must take extra measures to ensure their preparedness. Some people cannot be accommodated in regular shelters because of special medical needs. Special Needs Shelters are available that provide a higher level of medical support than regular public shelters, but they are not for everyone. You must pre-register and have a caregiver to accompany you to use a Special Needs Shelter. Qualifications vary from county to county, but there are specific requirements and procedures to register as a Special Needs client. Consult your physician and local Emergency Management office to see if you qualify for Special Needs Shelter.

Supplies to consider for special needs individuals:

- For respirators, other electric-dependent medical equipment or oxygen---- make prior arrangements with your physician or check with your oxygen supplier about emergency plans.
- Thirty day stock of disposable supplies such as dressings, nasal cannulas, suction catheters, etc.
- Thirty day supply of medications, prescription and non-prescription.
- Electrical backup for medical equipment.
- Copies of prescriptions for medical equipment, supplies and medications; ask your physician or pharmacist about proper storing of prescription medications.
- Contact lenses and supplies.
- Extra eyeglasses.
- Extra batteries for hearing aids, communication devices.

Considerations for people with disabilities:

Those with disabilities or other special needs often have unique needs that require more detailed planning in the event of a disaster. Consider the following actions as you prepare:

- Learn what to do in case of power outages and personal injuries. Know how to connect and start a back-up power supply for essential medical equipment.
- Consider getting a medical alert system that will allow you to call for help if you are immobilized in an emergency. Most alert systems require a

working phone so have a back-up plan, such as a cell phone or pager, if the regular landlines are interrupted.

- If you use an electric wheelchair or scooter, have a manual wheelchair for a backup.
- Teach those who may need to assist you in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment. Also, label equipment and attach laminated instructions for equipment use.
- Store back-up equipment (mobility, medical, etc.) at your neighbor's home, school, or your workplace.
- Arrange for more than one person from your personal support network to check on you in an emergency, so there is at least one back-up if the primary person you rely on cannot.
- If you are vision impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, plan ahead for someone to convey essential emergency information to you if you are unable to use the TV or radio.
- If you use a personal care attendant obtained from an agency, check to see if the agency has special provisions for emergencies (e.g. providing services at another location should an evacuation be ordered).
- If you live in an apartment, ask the management to identify and mark accessible exits and access to all areas designated for emergency shelter or safe rooms. Ask about plans for alerting and evacuating those with sensory disabilities.
- Have a cell phone with an extra battery. If you are unable to get out of a building, you can let someone know where you are and guide them to you. Keep the numbers you may need to call with you if the 9-1-1 emergency number is overloaded.

Make a Plan

Because a disaster can disrupt your primary emergency plan, it is also important for you to develop a back-up plan to ensure your safety.

- Meet with your family/personal care attendants/building manager. Review the information you gathered about community hazards and emergency plans.
- Choose an "Out-of-Town" Contact. Ask an out-of-town friend or relative to be your contact. Following a disaster, family members should call this person and tell them where you are. Everyone must know the contact's phone numbers. After a disaster, it is often easier to make a long distance call than a local call from a disaster area.
- Decide Where to Meet. In the event of an emergency, you may become separated from household members. Choose a place right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency. Choose a location outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home.

- Complete a Communications Plan. Your plan should include contact information for family members, members of your support network, caregivers, work, and school. Your plan should also include information for your out-of-town contact, meeting locations, emergency services, and the National Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222). A form for recording this information can be found at www.ready.gov – or at www.redcross.org/contactcard. These websites also provide blank wallet cards on which contact information can be recorded and carried in a wallet, purse, backpack, etc. for quick reference. Teach your children how to call the emergency phone numbers and when it is appropriate to do so. Be sure each family member has a copy of your communication plan and post it near your telephone for use in an emergency.

Complete a Personal Assessment

Decide what you will be able to do for yourself and what assistance you may need before, during, and after a disaster. This will be based on the environment after the disaster, your capabilities, and your limitations. Think about daily living, getting around, and evacuating.

- Is there a need for regular daily assistance with personal care, such as bathing and grooming? Is adaptive equipment needed to help you dress?
- What will you do if water service is cut off for several days or if you are unable to heat water?
- Do you use a shower chair, tub-transfer bench or other similar equipment?
- Do you use special utensils that help you prepare or eat food independently?
- How will you continue to use equipment that runs on electricity, such as dialysis, electrical lifts, etc.? Do you have a safe back-up power supply and how long will it last?
- How will you cope with the debris in your home or along your planned exit route following a disaster?
- Do you need a specially equipped vehicle or accessible transportation?
- Do you need help to get groceries, medications and medical supplies? What if your caregiver cannot reach you because roads are blocked or the disaster has affected him or her as well?
- Do you need help to leave your home? Will you be able to evacuate independently without relying on auditory cues (such as noise from a machine near the stairs—these cues may be absent if the electricity is off.
- Are there other exits if elevators are not working? Do emergency alarms have audible and visible features (marking escape routes and exits)?
- How will you call or summon for the help you will need to leave the building?
- What will you do if you cannot find your mobility aids? What will you do if your ramps are shaken loose or become separated from the building?
- Include your child's IEP with your personal papers and any other authorization paperwork that needs to be kept safe.

- Make up an emergency list of all your medical professionals and their emergency contact information.
- Notify Coast Guard Special Needs program if you have to relocate.
- Contact Special Needs if you have questions or concerns regarding special needs hurricane preparedness.
- Check in with the HEAT and identify yourself as a special needs family.
- If the HAT is deployed to your area, immediately check in with the team to identify yourself as a special needs family.