

Preparing for Emergencies

A Checklist for People with Neuromuscular Diseases

For the millions of Americans with limited mobility, natural disasters such as fires and floods present a special challenge. Protecting yourself and your family when disaster strikes requires advanced planning. This checklist will help you get started. Discuss these ideas with your family, friends or a personal care attendant, and prepare an emergency plan. Post the plan where everyone will see it and prepare to practice so that you are ready in case the unthinkable happens to you.



Emergency Checklist

Ask questions

Call your local Federal Emergency Management Agency office or American Red Cross chapter.

- Ask about what disasters occur in your area and how you should prepare.
- Ask how you would be warned of an emergency.
- Ask about special assistance that may be available to you in an emergency.
- Find out how to register with the local police, fire or emergency management department using their non-emergency numbers, so help can be provided quickly in an emergency.
- Ask your supervisor about emergency plans at your workplace.
- Ask your children's teachers and caregivers about emergency plans for schools and daycare centers.
- If you currently 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).

Create a plan

Meet with household members and/or your personal care attendant. Discuss the dangers of fire, severe weather, earthquakes and other emergencies that might occur in your community.

- Determine what you will need to do for each type of emergency. For example, people head for a basement when there is a tornado warning, but most basements are not wheelchair accessible. Determine in advance what your alternative shelter will be and how you will get there.
- Post emergency telephone numbers near telephones or save in cell phones. Teach your children how and when to call for help.
- Learn what to do in case of power outages and personal injuries. Know how to connect or start a backup power supply for essential medical equipment. If you use a ventilator, share this information with your power company, as they may be able to prioritize power to your area first.
- Plan and practice how to escape from your home in an emergency. If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, have more than one exit plan from your home in case the primary exit is blocked in a disaster.
- Teach those who may need to assist you in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment.
- Arrange for a friend or neighbor to check on you in an emergency and help provide backup assistance in case your primary care assistant is not able to assist you.
- Call your local Federal Emergency Management Agency office or American Red Cross chapter.
- Store backup equipment, such as a manual wheelchair, at a neighbor's home, school or your workplace.
- Learn how to turn off the water, gas and electricity at main valves or switches. Consider getting a medical alert system that will allow you to call for help if you are immobilized in an emergency.
- If you live in an apartment, ask the management to identify and mark accessible exits.
- Learn your community's evacuation routes.
- Pick one out-of-state and one local friend or relative for family members to call if separated by disaster.
- Pick two meeting places:
 - 1) A place near your home in case of fire.
 - 2) A place outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home after a disaster.
- Keep family records in a water-tight, fire-proof container.
- Visit mda.org for additional information.

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Prepare for a Disaster

Supply kit

Assemble supplies you might need in an evacuation. Store them in an easy-to-carry container such as a backpack or duffel bag. Include:

- A battery-powered radio (NOAA weather radio), flashlight and plenty of extra batteries
- A first-aid kit, prescription medications and an extra pair of glasses
- A supply of water (one gallon daily per person for three to seven days); store water in sealed unbreakable containers, identify the storage date and replace every six months
- A supply of nonperishable food for three to seven days and a nonelectric can opener, plus any special dietary foods
- Cooking tools/fuel and paper plates/utensils
- Special elderly/baby items, including extra diapers and other care items
- Toiletries — hygiene items and wet wipes
- Extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen, bi-pap machine and supplies, catheters, or other special equipment needed
- Medications — be sure to have a seven- to 14-day supply as a backup
- Service dogs, pet care items, dry food, a carrier or cage, a muzzle/leash and immunization records/ identifications
- A change of clothing, rain gear and sturdy shoes
- Blankets, pillows, sleeping bags, etc.
- A list of family physicians and the relative or friend who should be notified if you are injured
- A list of the styles and serial numbers of medical devices
- An extra set of car keys
- A power generator and fuel tanks
- A whistle so that rescuers can locate you



Home Hazard Hunt

In a disaster, anything that can move, fall, break or cause a fire is a potential hazard.

- Repair defective electrical wiring. Smell for leaky gas connections. If you smell gas, turn it off and call a professional to repair the supply line.
- Keep the shut-off switch for oxygen equipment near your bed or chair so you can get to it quickly if there is a fire.
- Fasten shelves securely to the wall. Place large, heavy objects on lower shelves or the floor.
- Hang pictures and mirrors away from beds. Bolt large pictures or mirrors to the wall.
- Secure a water heater by strapping it to a nearby wall.
- Repair cracks in ceilings or foundations. Brace overhead light fixtures.
- Store weed killers, pesticides and flammable products away from heat sources.
- Have chimneys, flue pipes, vent connectors and gas vents cleaned and repaired by a professional.
- Have lifts and/or ramps inspected twice a year.

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If You Need to Evacuate

- Listen to a battery-powered radio for the location of emergency shelters. Know in advance the location of wheelchair-accessible shelters. Follow instructions of local officials.
- Wear appropriate clothing and sturdy shoes.
- Take your disaster supplies kit.
- Lock your house.
- Use the travel routes specified or utilize special assistance provided by local officials.

If you are sure you have time...

- Shut off water, gas and electricity if instructed to do so.
- Let others know when you leave and tell them where you are going.
- Make arrangements for pets. Animals other than service animals may not be allowed in public shelters.

Prepare a car kit

- Battery-powered radio, flashlight, extra batteries and maps
- Blanket and first-aid kit
- Shovel

Prescription drugs

During times of natural disasters, many families are forced to evacuate to safety in a hurry with little more than they can carry. With so much to worry about, prescription medicines may be left behind.

For those forced to flee, not having essential medicines can be a health threat. At the very least, their absence can add to the sense of distress that people feel during a crisis.

Here are some ways to find help if you are without your prescription drugs during a natural disaster:

- If you are unsure whether pharmacies are open in your area or in an area to which you have relocated, visit RxOpen.org. This website keeps track of open and closed pharmacies during disasters, as well as information on American Red Cross shelters and infusion centers in affected communities.
- The American Red Cross can provide assistance with getting access to medications during disasters and has health service volunteers who can be of assistance with refilling prescriptions.
- Some states relax rules regarding refills when a state of emergency has been declared.
- You may also want to reach out to the manufacturer of your medicine for help, especially if you were receiving your medicine through a manufacturer's patient assistance program.

- Tire repair kit, booster cables, pump and flares
- Fire extinguisher (5-pound, A-B-C type)
- Bottled water and nonperishable foods such as granola bars, raisins and cookies

Fire safety

- Plan two escape routes out of each room. If you cannot use the stairways, make special arrangements for help in advance. Never use the elevators.
- Install smoke detectors. Clean and test smoke detectors once a month. Change batteries at least once a year.
- Consider installing home sprinklers.
- If there is a fire, do not try to put it out yourself. Get out fast. Do not stop for pets or possessions. Call the fire department after you are outside. Never go back into a burning building.
- Feel the bottom of a door with the palm of your hand. If it's hot, find another way out.
- Replace smoke alarms every 10 years, carbon-monoxide alarms every five years and fire extinguishers every 12 years after the manufacture date, according to the National Fire Prevention Association.

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Escape Plan

You may need to evacuate on a moment's notice. Be ready to get out fast.

Develop an escape plan by drawing a floor plan of your residence. Show the location of doors, windows, stairways, large furniture, emergency supplies (disaster supplies kit), fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, collapsible ladders, first-aid kits and utility shut-off points. Indicate at least two escape routes from each room and mark a place outside the home where household members and/or your personal care attendant should meet in case of fire. If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, make more than one exit from your home wheelchair accessible in case the primary exit is blocked in a disaster.

Include important points outside, such as garages, patios, stairways, elevators, driveways and porches.

If your home has more than two floors, use an additional sheet of paper. Practice emergency evacuation drills at least twice each year.

School/employee emergency response

Employees, students, faculty and administrators can prepare themselves for emergencies at school and in the workplace in a number of ways, from conducting regular, emergency-specific drills to making sure the building's infrastructure is up to code. When emergencies do happen, peers need to know how to respond appropriately and recover as quickly and effectively as possible. Be sure you discuss an emergency response plan with your employer or child's school.

Have more questions?

If you have more questions regarding preparing for emergencies, please reach out to the MDA Resource Center at 1-833-ASK-MDA1 or 1 (833) 275-6321 and trained staff will be available to assist you.