

How to Prepare for an Emergency or Disaster When You Have Lung Disease or a Sleep Disorder

Emergencies and disasters can happen to anyone. Sometimes there will be advanced warning about the event, such as when a severe storm is coming your way, or there is an outbreak of an illness that could affect you or your community. Other times, there may be no warning, such as a fire, earthquake, or a gas, water, or carbon monoxide leak in your home. It helps to PLAN AHEAD for these situations, especially if you or a family member has a lung problem or other health conditions.



Planning ahead includes the following steps:

- Start planning BEFORE an emergency happens!
- Develop a basic family emergency plan. Discuss this plan with your family to ensure everyone is familiar with it.
- Develop an emergency medical plan and have it handy at all times. Make this plan together with your healthcare providers, homecare company, nursing service, and medical equipment company.

If I have a lung disease, am I at more risk during an emergency or disaster?

If you have lung disease or a sleep disorder that requires therapy, you may be at increased risk during an emergency or disaster. This risk will vary depending on the type of health problems you have. If you already have a lung problem, respiratory infections such as the flu or COVID-19 can be especially dangerous. To reduce your risk of these infections, wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, do not touch your mouth, nose or eyes with your hands, and stay away from those who are sick. If you are sick, cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and discard the tissue, and clean frequently touched surfaces and objects with a household cleaning spray or wipe.

During an emergency or disaster, you may lose access to health care, medications, electrical power, oxygen, and other medical supplies. Local authorities (officials) try to plan to provide special services for everyone who is at increased risk. These people are described as having “special needs” or a “vulnerable” population. You may be included in this group if you are a child or elderly, have a chronic problem like lung disease, or do not speak English. Your local officials may not be prepared for your specialized care and needs, depending on where you live. Therefore, *your* planning for an emergency is also very important.

What should I have at home to help me prepare for an emergency?

Everyone should have a basic family emergency plan. This plan should include how you will communicate with one another and obtain medication, food, water, and shelter.

The following list includes items that are important to have if you have a lung disease or sleep disorder:

- Be sure you have a safe place to go and way to evacuate if needed. Figure out how you will travel. If you are driving, be sure you have a full tank of gas in your car and get this as early as possible when you learn of an impending storm.
- You need to have a way to communicate with local authorities or emergency personnel. Keep your cell phone charged if you have one and see how you can charge it with a power pack if needed. Make sure you have a way to reach help if your telephone is out of service.
- You need to have enough medication to last several weeks. Don't let your medicine run low, even if it is a medicine that you use just as needed.
- You will want to plan for enough food and water for you and those who are with you. You should plan on ideally 1 gallon per person per day of drinking water. Choose foods that don't require refrigeration and plan for how you will prepare and eat them.
- Always have some emergency cash on hand and hidden in a safe location.

How can local officials help me prepare for an emergency?

A relationship with local officials and public health providers is helpful in making sure you get the care you need during an emergency. The local officials include your public health office, the local emergency provider office (such as an emergency agency or fire department), and your hospital. Contact these agencies before an emergency and find out the following:

- Is there a local or regional plan for oxygen delivery in case of emergency or disaster?
- Is there a local plan for dealing with and contacting “vulnerable populations” in the event of a disaster? If so, how will I be contacted?
- Is there a local plan in dealing with people who need support from a PAP device or mechanical ventilator? Who will assist me with your medical equipment and care if I cannot stay at home?

Power

- Contact your local power/utility companies and notify them if you have a critical need for electricity to power medical equipment and/or heat/air conditioning. Complete a power

saving or sustaining form together with your healthcare provider, asking the company to help be sure your power stays on. Make a back-up plan for emergency power as well.

- Get on the priority list for having your power restored in case of a power outage.
- Plan for a safe alternative source such as portable battery or generator if electricity is not available.
- Plan to get to a health care facility should your health worsen or if you are going to run out of necessary power.

Equipment

Medical equipment can include anything that requires electricity such as a ventilator, suction, or a medical air compressor. Think about what you use everyday and what you need when you are having symptoms.

- Keep a list of all your medical equipment, including settings, type, model and make of equipment, and your suppliers' phone numbers and addresses.
- If you use an oxygen concentrator, ask for an emergency portable oxygen supply that does not require electricity (such as an emergency oxygen tank).
- If there is a power outage, ask how to contact your oxygen supplier in case of an emergency.
- If you use a PAP device (CPAP or BPAP) or a mechanical ventilator, have a home back-up plan in case you have a power outage. This may include a back-up battery or a generator. Ask your healthcare provider if you need a self-inflating resuscitator (a mask attached to a bag to use if ventilator is not working—example brand Ambu®). Have an advanced plan in case you may need transportation to a medical facility.
- Find out which emergency shelters nearby can handle your medical needs.

Medication

- If you use an inhaled medicine by nebulizer, ask your healthcare provider if there is an inhaler of the same or similar medicine that you could have as an alternative if your nebulizer does not work or you have no power. There are also some medical air compressors (for nebulizers) that can run by back-up battery.
- Have an up-to-date list of all the medicines you take and why you take them with you at all times.
- Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacy how you can get an extra supply of your medicines to keep on hand in case there is a delay in getting refills.
- If you have medicines that require refrigeration, make a plan for how you will keep them cold.
- Make a plan if you have intravenous medicines or need other special medication delivery support.

Evacuation Plan

- If you find that you cannot stay in your home, you need to have a plan on where you can go and how to get there.
- You may have family or friends who are in a safer area.
- If you need a community shelter, find out which one can handle your medical needs.
- Do not expect the hospital to admit and care for you before, during, and/or after the event unless it is a medical emergency. In some cases, hospitals may be closed.
- If you do get sicker, find out what health care facilities are close to where you will be.

Location

Choose a location that is far enough away (such as inland in the case of a hurricane) so it will not likely be affected by the storm.

- Relatives or friends are usually best first option to try.
- If you are booking a hotel room, figure out which one you want to try and call early! Have a list of alternatives as well.
- If you need to stay in a public shelter, call 2-1-1 and make sure you know it will be able to handle your medical equipment.
- If you have pets make sure to find a hotel that is pet friendly. Most shelters do not accept pets. Check with your local vet about shelters for pets. You can find more about caring for your pets at the Center for Disease Control webpage (<http://www.cdc.gov/disasters/petshelters.html>)

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Rx Action Plan

Remember, you need to watch out for your health and family and prepare ahead for a possible emergency.

- ✓ Have an emergency plan and keep informed.
- ✓ Talk to your healthcare provider, pharmacy and durable medical equipment company to get extra medicine and any necessary forms for emergency power or equipment.
- ✓ Start planning as early as you can.
- ✓ Figure out where you can go if you cannot stay at home and how you will get there.
- ✓ Keep a list of important phone numbers and call early if you need help.
- ✓ Talk to your healthcare provider and take precautions to avoid exposure to infection in a major outbreak.

If you have been exposed to an illness such as COVID-19 or the flu and have symptoms such as fever, cough, difficulty breathing, contact your healthcare provider to check if you need medical care.

Healthcare Provider's Contact Number:

Further Resources:

American Thoracic Society

- www.thoracic.org/patients/

American Red Cross

- <http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem>

FEMA

- http://www.fdem-mediacycenter.org/PDF/Family_Disaster_Plan.pdf

2-1-1 National Help Line to local public resources

- www.211.org

Centers for Disease Control

- <http://emergency.cdc.gov/>

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