

Emergency Planning

You should **plan in advance** what you will do in an emergency. Be prepared to assess the situation, use common sense and whatever you have on hand to take care of yourself and your loved ones. Think about the places where your family spends time: school, work and other places you frequent. Ask about their emergency plans. Find out how they will communicate with families during an emergency. If they do not have an emergency plan, consider helping develop one.

Develop a Family Communications Plan

Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another and review what you will do in different situations. Consider a plan where each family member calls, or e-mails, the same friend or relative in the event of an emergency. It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-state contact may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members. Be sure each person knows the phone number and has coins or a prepaid phone card to call the emergency contact. You may have trouble getting through, or the phone system may be down altogether, but be patient.

Deciding to Stay or Go

Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the attack, the first important decision is whether you stay put or get away. You should understand and plan for both possibilities. Use common sense and available information, including what you are learning here, to determine if there is immediate danger. In any emergency, local authorities may or may not immediately be able to provide information on what is happening and what you should do. However, you should watch TV, listen to the radio or check the Internet often for information or official instructions as it becomes available. If you're specifically told to evacuate or seek medical treatment, do so immediately.

Staying Put and "Shelter-in-Place"

Whether you are at home, work or elsewhere, there may be situations when it's simply best to stay where you are and avoid any uncertainty outside. In fact, there are some circumstances where staying put and creating a barrier between yourself and potentially contaminated air outside, a process known as "shelter-in-place," is a matter of survival. Plan in advance where you will take shelter in this kind of an emergency. Choose an interior room or one with as few windows and doors as possible. Consider precutting plastic sheeting to seal windows, doors and air vents. Each piece should be several inches larger than the space you want to cover so that it lies flat against the wall. Label each piece with the location of where it fits. Use available information to assess the situation. If you see large amounts of debris in the air, or if local authorities say the air is badly contaminated, you may want to "shelter-in-place." Quickly bring your family and pets inside, lock doors, and close windows, air vents and fireplace dampers. Turn off air conditioning, forced air heating systems, exhaust fans and clothes dryers. Take your emergency supplies and go into the room you have designated. Seal all windows, doors and vents with plastic sheeting and duct tape or anything else you have on hand. Listen to the TV, the radio or check the Internet for instructions.

Getting Away

There may be conditions under which you will decide to get away, or there may be situations when you are ordered to leave. Plan in advance how you will assemble your family and anticipate where you will go. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency. If you have a car, keep at least a half tank of gas in it at all times. Become familiar with alternate routes as well as other means of transportation out of your area. If you do not have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to. Take your emergency supply kit, unless you have reason to believe it has been contaminated, and lock the door behind you. Take pets with you if you are told to evacuate, however, if you are going to a public shelter, keep in mind that they may not be allowed inside. If you believe the air may be contaminated, drive with your windows and vents closed and keep the air conditioning and heater turned off.

Working Together

Schools, daycare providers, workplaces, neighborhoods and apartment buildings, like individuals and families, should all have site-specific emergency plans. Ask about plans at the places where your family spends time: work, school and other places you frequent. If none exist, consider volunteering to help develop one. You will be better prepared to reunite your family and loved ones safely during an emergency if you think ahead, and communicate with others in advance.

Schools and Daycare

If you are a parent, or guardian of an elderly or disabled adult, make sure schools or daycare providers have emergency response plans. Ask how they will communicate with families during a crisis. Do they store adequate food, water and other emergency supplies? Find out if they are prepared to “shelter-in- place” if need be, and where they plan to go if they must get away.

Employers

If you are an employer, make sure your workplace has a building evacuation plan that is regularly practiced. Take a critical look at your heating ventilation and air-conditioning system to determine if it is secure or if it could be feasibly upgraded to better filter potential contaminants. Be sure you, and others, know how to turn off the system if necessary. Think about what to do if your employees can't go home, and make sure you have appropriate supplies on hand.

Neighborhoods and Apartment Buildings

A community working together during an emergency also makes sense. Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together. Find out if anyone has specialized equipment, like a power generator, or expertise such as medical knowledge, that might help in a crisis. Decide who will check on elderly or disabled neighbors. Make backup plans for children in case you can't get home in an emergency. Sharing plans and communicating in advance is a good strategy.