

A Health Campaign of Uniformed Services University, www.usuhs.edu, and the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Bethesda, Maryland, www.CSTSonline.org

FAMILY PLANNING FOR DISASTERS: *How to Plan For and Protect Your Family's Health*

Major events such as Typhoon Haiyan which impacted the Philippines and other regions make us think about the impact of such disasters on our family and loved ones and how prepared we would be. Whether we live in areas that are vulnerable to certain natural disasters or not, we all need to plan for the kinds of disasters, including terrorism, bioterrorism, and pandemic

We need to plan for disasters that could require us to evacuate our homes.

threats, that could require us to evacuate our homes. This fact sheet provides information on three aspects of family preparedness planning for disasters. The first pertains to the *special health needs* of your family. The second involves specific *tips around evacuation*. The third provides steps for *creating a family communication plan*.

Special Health Needs

Health Concerns to Consider in Disaster Planning for Your Family

- Do you or any of your family members have medical conditions that require medication, special medical equipment, or diets?
- What might you or members of your family need to do about these health issues in an environment away from home?
- Family members spend a significant portion of the day away from home. Have you communicated your family members' health issues to their supervisors, teachers, or day care professionals?

Steps Families Can Take to Prepare for Disasters around Health Issues

During disasters, health medications and health supplies may be temporarily disrupted.

- At home, have an extra supply of medications available.
- Away from home, provide instructions and training (if possible) to a primary caregiver who would be responsible for your family member at the time of a disaster.
- If that caregiver expresses reluctance or discomfort to administer help, have them identify a person within that environment who would be able to provide assistance with such procedures as injections or other medical requirements.

- Make sure adult children away from home, such as college students, are prepared. Make sure elderly members of your family are also prepared.

Evacuation Planning

Having a prepared plan for evacuation can save valuable time.

- Have a 'ready to go' kit. Essential items include extra water, food, batteries, first aid kit, a flashlight, wind up radio, contact numbers, and medications.
- Plan ahead for family pets by contacting area shelters and have provisions stored for self-care if possible.
- Determine a planned evacuation destination. This includes knowing the location or numbers to call to get such information, having maps, and knowing alternate routes.
- Have at least a half tank of gas in your vehicles at all times. This can be a time saver and help families leave immediately.
- Turn off the gas and water to your home, if possible, prior to evacuating. Remember to call the gas company to turn back on the gas once your family returns.

Family Communication Plan

A good communication plan is essential in disaster planning and evacuation. Knowing where your family is or how to locate them are critical factors for reducing anxiety. To create a disaster communication plan, families must:

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- Establish a primary contact and number (preferably a relative or friend in another part of the region or out of state) who family members can call in case of emergencies.
- Every member of the family should know this number.
- In the event that family members are separated, it is also important that daycare, work, school, and neighbors know this number.
- Prepare a list of phone numbers where each family member can be reached during the day. Include a list of relatives, friends, and business associates that would or should know your whereabouts in case of emergency.
- During disasters, phone communications may be disrupted. Provide an alternative means for making calls, such as a special ‘emergency’ calling card or cell phone. Other vehicles of communication are important such as the Internet, e-mail communication, and HAM radio. The Red Cross is also a resource to help contact loved ones.
- Leave a note at your residence to let others know where you are and how you can be contacted.

Involve Your Entire Family in the Planning and Practice

- Select a time and conduct your own family emergency drill. A good time might be around a family or national holiday.
- Make it fun. Consider asking young children to help create the ‘ready to go’ kit, including favorite foods with long shelf lives.
- Instill in family the importance of disaster planning as a way to alleviate anxiety, foster family cohesion, and be a responsible citizen.

Helpful Web Links:

- <http://www.ready.gov>
- <http://www.redcross.org/>

What if my family doesn’t have an evacuation plan at the time of a disaster?

If a family does not have an established plan, there are some items to take if one has little time:

- Any bottled beverages
- Pre-packaged, non-perishable food items
- Flashlights
- Batteries
- Medications

Courage to Care is a health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University and its Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS). CSTS is the academic arm and a partnering Center of the Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.



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