

Disaster Preparedness: Be Prepared, Not Scared

By Melissa Yates, Health Educator

We hope that it will never happen to us, but disasters can strike at any moment with little to no notice. It is essential to have a plan in place to protect your home and family in the unfortunate event of a disaster. Evacuations are also more common than people realize and may be optional or mandatory. Disasters often force people to leave their homes, neighborhoods, cities, and sometimes even states on short notice. So, knowing how to talk with your family about your plan, preparing together, and practicing your plan may help save your life and the lives of your loved ones during a disaster.

One way to prepare is to talk with your family and assign responsibilities to each family member. This will ensure less stress and better teamwork in the event of a disaster. You should develop an evacuation plan and pick a location where your family will meet outside of your home and neighborhood in case of a sudden emergency. Also, choose a few places in different directions, so you have options if you are unable to return home and have to evacuate your city. Additionally, it is a good idea to know alternative evacuation routes from your home. And do not forget to include pets in your evacuation plan!

Having a family communication plan is critical if you get separated from your loved ones during a disaster. Create a family contact sheet with the names, addresses, and phone numbers of important contacts. Keep these sheets in a purse, wallet, or child's backpack so they are readily available if needed. It is also important to include an out-of-town contact for family members to get in touch with if they are unable to contact local family members. Keep in mind, it is often easier to make long-distance calls than local calls during a disaster.

Next, your family should locate safe places in your home for different types of disasters. Each family member should know how to properly use a fire extinguisher, as well as how to shut off the water, gas, and electricity in your home. You and your family may also want to become trained in first aid and CPR. Practicing your plan with your family every six months is vital in ensuring everyone feels well prepared if faced with a disaster. Another aspect of being prepared is storing enough food and water for all family members, including pets. Stored water and food should be replaced every three months. You should store at least one gallon per person, per day, for at least three days in addition to a three-day supply of non-perishable foods that do not require refrigeration, preparation, or cooking and little or no water. Avoid salty foods, as they will make you thirsty, and choose ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits, and vegetables. Some food storage options include protein or fruit bars, dry cereal or granola, peanut or other nut butter, dried fruit, nuts, crackers, canned juices, non-perishable pasteurized milk, and milk alternatives.

Lastly, creating a disaster supply kit and checking it every three months is recommended. Below are ideas for putting together your own survival kit. Feel free to add to the checklists so that you and your family are adequately prepared. Check out the [SLCo Emergency Services](#) website to learn more about preparedness, survival kits, and food storage.

