



Mason County Division of Emergency Management

Assisting Individuals With Special Needs to Prepare for an Emergency

One of the most important roles of local government is to protect their citizens from harm, including helping people prepare for and respond to emergencies. Making local government emergency preparedness and response programs accessible to people with special needs is a critical part of this responsibility.

Emergencies can happen at any time. Whether they are man-made or natural, the best defense is to be prepared. But, preparing for an emergency can be a more difficult process if you have special needs to address or are caring for someone with special needs. The following information offers valuable tips on how to prepare for an emergency if you are:

- Living with physical impairment
- Deaf/Hard of hearing
- Blind/Low vision
- Living with mental illness
- Living with developmental/cognitive disabilities

PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT

Many people are living with physical impairments that either substantially limit or totally limit their mobility. During an emergency, people living with physical impairments may have concerns including how they are going to be moved during an evacuation, will they be able to maneuver in shelters and will they have all the equipment they need if evacuated. The following are tips that can help you prepare for these situations:

TIPS TO PREPARE

- Decide on the proper way that you would like to be moved during an evacuation before an event occurs. For some, the “fireman’s carry” may be hazardous or uncomfortable. Make sure someone at work and home knows how you would like to be moved.

- Contact your utility company if you require power for oxygen or other necessary life-supporting equipment, ask if they can keep your name on a list of people who need power restored immediately.
- You are the best provider of information about your specific disability; make sure you have instructions written out to provide to shelters or friends during an emergency.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION VISIT:

-National Organization on Disability Emergency Preparedness Initiative:www.nod.org
-Center for Disability and Special Needs Preparedness :www.disabilitypreparedness.org
-Nobody Left Behind: Disaster Preparedness for Persons with Mobility Impairment:
www//rtcil.org/resources.htm

DEAF/HARD OF HEARING

For people living with limited or total hearing loss, just receiving a warning that an emergency is occurring or will occur can be a problem. This issue makes being prepared extremely vital to their safety. The following tips can help those with hearing loss prepare better for an emergency event:

TIPS TO PREPARE

- Make special arrangements to receive emergency warnings.
- Install both audible and visual smoke alarms throughout your home.
- Create pre-printed signs with key messages that you can use to communicate with first responders and others during an emergency.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION VISIT:

-National Association of the Deaf: www.nad.org
-Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network: www.cepintdi.org
-National Organization on Disability: www.nod.org

BLIND/LOW VISION

Those living with complete or total vision loss may find the thought of maneuvering during an emergency frightful. Preparation can help ease some of this fear. The following are tips that can help you prepare for emergencies:

TIPS TO PREPARE

- Have a trusted friend or family member you can call on to assist you during an emergency.
- A guide dog may become confused or frustrated during an emergency, so practice emergency drills with your guide dog to ensure that he/she is comfortable with the process.
- Plan an evacuation route in your home. Arrange furniture for an easy escape route and practice evacuating at least twice a year.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION VISIT:

- American Foundation for the Blind: www.afb.org
- American Red Cross: www.redcross.org

MENTAL ILLNESS

Mental illnesses are biological disorders that can affect a person's emotional, behavioral, perceptual or cognitive functioning. Specific mental illnesses include depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Most people who live through an emergency experience some form of sadness and stress. For those living with mental illness, stress can often trigger a relapse or intensify an existing mental illness. Preparation can help reduce or prevent severe reactions and improve overall functioning during a disaster.

TIPS TO PREPARE

- Create a network of friends and family you can contact to help you deal with the stress caused by an emergency.
- With the assistance of friends, family or a caregiver, anticipate the types of reactions that you may experience and discuss methods that you can take to reduce stress.
- Make a list of your doctors and all medications that you must take, including how much and how often, and keep it in your wallet, purse or emergency supply kit.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION VISIT:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Men Health Information Center at www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov.
- Mental Health America at www.nmha.org

DEVELOPMENTAL/COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

People living with developmental and cognitive disabilities can have difficulty with their ability to listen, think, speak or follow instructions. During an emergency these types of difficulties could intensify and cause stress and/or injury. Being prepared can help eliminate the confusion and panic people with developmental and cognitive disabilities may experience during an emergency.

TIPS TO PREPARE

- Practice evacuating by creating methods of escape and routes that you are comfortable with following.
- Write down instructions about evacuating including where to go, what to take and family and friends that you can contact.
- If there is specific information that you need to communicate with first responders or shelter workers about your disability, create a short phrase and practice saying it so that you are comfortable with expressing it during an emergency.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION VISIT:

-National Organization on Disability at www.nod.org

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

ALL families should have emergency plans for their children. If your son or daughter has special health care needs, your emergency plan will probably be more complicated, involve more people, and may require equipment. This will be the case if your child or youth:

- Depends on electricity – to breathe, be fed, stay comfortable;
- Cannot be moved easily because of his/her medical condition or attachment to equipment;
- Uses a wheelchair, walker, or other device to move;
- Cannot survive extreme temperatures, whether hot or cold;
- Becomes afraid or agitated when sudden changes happen;
- Cannot get out of an emergency by themselves for physical or emotional reasons.

TIPS TO PREPARE

- Prepare simple, one-page emergency instructions, and update as things change. Place them where they can be seen.
- Make sure your child's medicine, medical records, and important equipment are easy to grab if you have to leave suddenly.
- Tell your local utilities that your child depends on electricity. Ask them to "flag" your household and to bring power back quickly to your home.

- Visit your nearest emergency center (fire department, rescue squad, 911 facility). Tell them about your child. Invite them to your home to become familiar with the situation and to give you emergency tips.
- For some children or youth, the nearest hospital might be the safest place to be in a disaster, so you and your doctor should work out admitting procedures to avoid an ER wait.
- Keep a box or backpack containing flashlight, water blankets, with necessities and comforts for your child close to an exit.
- Every student with special health care needs, whether physical or emotional, must have a school emergency plan. Make sure your child's school bus staff also knows what to do in an emergency—and has practiced it.
- Every place your child goes should have an emergency plan for your child. This includes child care center, summer camp, hospital, grandparent's house, recreation program, as well as the glove compartment in each of your cars, and your child's backpack.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION VISIT:

- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) at www.aap.org
- Emergency Medical System for Children/EMSC at www.ems-c.org
- Family Voices at www.familyvoices.org
- Independent Living Center of San Francisco at www.ilrcsf.org
- The Center for Children with Special Needs, Seattle Children's Hospital at <http://cshcn.org/planning-record-keeping/emergency-preparedness-children-special-needs>

Older Adults and Caregivers

Disasters present a special challenge for caregivers. Some care recipients fare as well as other family members during power outages and other disaster related disruptions. However, **some care recipients require specialized care** that is difficult to manage during a disaster situation. Additionally, if your family member is disabled, heavily dependent on others for care, or has Alzheimer's or dementia, the lack of control over the disaster situation can be particularly intrusive and can promote reactions based on fear. Emergency preparedness for yourself or your loved one doesn't have to be complicated. Think of it as a simple, three-step process:

- **Know the Basics.** Knowing what risks you face will help you prepare.
- **Have Your Emergency Supplies Ready.** Being ready for an emergency means having the supplies you would need. Remember, the goal here is to give yourself a margin of preparedness to see you through until help can arrive, or to get you safely through an evacuation. So, think about what other items you might need, given your situation.
- **Make a Personal Plan.** No one knows your situation better than you. So, you are in the best position to plan ahead.

TIPS TO PREPARE

- If you undergo routine treatments at a clinic or hospital, or if you receive regular services such as home health care, treatment or transportation, talk to your service provider about their emergency plans. Work with them to identify back-up service providers and incorporate them into your personal support network.
- If you live in a retirement community, assisted living facility, or adult family home, learn about emergency planning and procedures. How will you be kept informed? What will the facility or community expect of you and your fellow residents?
- Regardless of medical or physical condition, everyone should pre-plan for evacuation, should the need arise. The best and safest evacuation choices include staying with relatives or friends out of the area, checking into a hotel/motel, or pre-admission into a medical facility if medically necessary.
- Participate in the Special Needs Registry program if you have special medical needs or have physical disabilities that would make it difficult to evacuate independently if the need arose.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION VISIT:

- American Red Cross at www.redcross.org
- National Alliance on Mental Illness at www.nami.org
- Alzheimer's Association at www.alz.org

Mason County Special Needs Registry

The **Mason County Special Needs Registry** is a voluntary registry of individuals who would require assistance in the event of an emergency. This assistance could be as simple as advising a person of a situation in the vicinity of their residence to those who need evacuation assistance in the event of a natural or man-made disaster. This registry alerts emergency responders as to a resident's address and gives them the vital information they need to better meet the resident's needs. It is important that emergency personnel know where to find you, and how best to meet some of your requirements during a disaster requiring evacuation.

Participation in the registry is **voluntary** and all information is strictly confidential, used only for emergency purposes.

Individuals are eligible to be registered with the **Special Needs Registry** if they are frail, elderly, medically needy, and/or disabled and are not served in or by a residential facility program (i.e. nursing home, retirement apartments, etc.) Eligible persons need only to complete the **Special Needs Registry** form and return it to the Mason County Division of Emergency Management office.

Mason County Division of Emergency Management (DEM) has the mission to assess and plan for hazards and emergencies and work with other public safety and local government agencies to ensure public welfare. As a pre-planning tool, the **Special Needs Registry** should be considered strongly for all people who have special medical needs (i.e. oxygen or life support systems that are dependent upon electrical power) or have physical disabilities that would make it difficult to evacuate independently if the need arose.

For more information on this service, contact the Mason County Division of Emergency Management (DEM), 100 W. Public Works Drive, Shelton, WA 98584, by phone at 360-427-7535, by fax at 360-427-7756 or by e-mail at <http://www.co.mason.wa.us/questions.php>