

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 (like a hurricane, tropical storm, or risk of flooding). Other times, there may be no warning, such as a fire, or a gas, water, or CO 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:

- Do not wait for an emergency to start planning!
- 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.
- Develop a basic family emergency plan. Discuss this plan with your family to ensure everyone is familiar with it.

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, there is a good chance that you will be at increased risk during an emergency or disaster. This risk will vary depending on the type of health problems you have. Your increased risk can be from a loss of 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 or may not have prepared for your specialized care and needs, depending on where you live. Therefore, *your* planning for an emergency is also very important.

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 you be contacted?

- Is there a local plan in dealing with people who need support from a PAP device or mechanical ventilator? Who will assist you with your medical equipment and care if you cannot stay at home?
- Find out where emergency shelters are that can handle your medical needs.

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 health care 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 you are going to run out of necessary power.

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

Everyone should have a basic family emergency plan. This should include: appropriate supplies of medication, food, water, shelter and communications.

- You need to be sure you have a safe shelter or a place 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 those who need to help you. Keep your cell phone charged if you have one and see how you can charge it with a battery if needed. Make sure you have a way to reach help if your telephone is out of service.
- You need to have appropriate supplies of medication. 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 are non-perishable (that don't require refrigeration) and plan for how you will prepare and eat them.
- Always have some emergency cash on hand.

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

Equipment

Medical equipment can include anything that requires power 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 bi-level support) or a mechanical ventilator, have a home back-up plan in case you have a power outage. This may include a back-up battery, a generator, a mask attached to a bag, or advanced plans for transportation to a medical facility.
- If you use non-invasive ventilation (such as CPAP or Bilevel Pressure Support), have a back-up plan to be able to use your machine during sleep during a power outage (see www.thoracic.org/patients for information about CPAP and PAP).

Medication

- If you use an inhaled medicine by nebulizer, ask your health care 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 with you at all times an up-to-date list of all the medicines you take and why you take them.
- Ask your health care 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 that would be in a safer area.
- If you need a community shelter, find out which one can handle your medical needs.
- Do not assume that you will just go to the nearest hospital or emergency room.

- Do not expect the hospital to admit and care for you before, during, and/or after the storm unless it is a medical emergency. The hospital beds need to be kept available for the sick and injured. For some storms, the hospital might not be in a safe enough place.
- 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 to 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 to get extra medicine and any necessary forms for emergency power or equipment.
- ✓ Start as early as you can to prepare for a storm.
- ✓ 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.

Healthcare Provider's Contact Number:

Further Resources:

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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