



Objectives:

Review principles of disaster preparedness

Review ways to assist clients with disaster preparedness

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References:

<https://www.ready.gov/be-informed>

<https://www.cdc.gov/disability-emergency-preparedness/glossary/index.html>

<https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2023-09/ready-gov-disaster-preparedness-guide-for-older-adults.pdf>

<https://acl.gov/emergency-preparedness>

NCDHHS/DHSR/HCPEC | Home Care Aide Curriculum | July 2021 Module 12 Emergency Preparedness

https://www.weather.gov/tsa/hydro_tad

Emergency Preparedness

Emergencies can happen fast and without any warning. There are many kinds of emergencies, such as natural disasters, human-caused disasters, and public health emergencies. Emergency Preparedness involves knowing the potential emergencies that could happen in a person's area and knowing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the people living in an area. As with anyone, for older persons and persons living with chronic conditions or a disability, emergency preparedness is essential. A person with a disability may have specific needs. The term emergency preparedness includes the steps taken to reduce risk before, during, and after an emergency. One of the steps in preparing before a potential emergency is to determine what would be needed during an emergency. A person should make one plan for staying at home, and one plan for evacuating. Questions for a person to consider include:

- Are there any medical conditions or dietary requirements that require specific care or medication? Are there any mobility challenges or disabilities to plan for?
- If applicable, what is needed for the safety and well-being of a pet or service animal? Are there established communication strategies with neighbors and local emergency services?
- Will help be required to transport emergency supplies?
- Is help needed to put together an emergency plan and preparedness kit?
- Are translation services required? Is there a completed will?
- How could a person's day-to-day routine be disrupted during an emergency what is the worst that could happen, and do they have a plan to cope or adjust?
- Are there any specific assistive devices or other accommodations that are needed? Are electricity and/or batteries required to use medical devices or equipment? What are available community resources that can help during an emergency? Are there enough needed supplies, medications, food, water, and communication devices at home if unable to get supplies for a certain period? What are the potential ways to evacuate if evacuation is needed? What are the locations for emergency shelters and shelters that can accommodate special needs.
- Does the client and or family know how to connect and start a back-up power supply for their essential medical equipment or for clients on oxygen with an oxygen concentrator powered by electricity, do they know how to hook up and use oxygen tanks?
- Does the client have a medical alert system that allows them to call for help if they are immobilized in an emergency? Most alert systems require a working phone line, so is there a back-up plan, such as a cell phone, if the regular landlines are disrupted?
- If a person uses an electric wheelchair or scooter, do they have a manual wheelchair for back-up? The client may need to instruct those assisting them in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment. Also, assisting the client in labeling equipment and attaching laminated instructions for equipment use can be helpful.

Emergency Preparedness

The following are key points to keep in mind regarding inclement weather:

- ✓ Hurricanes – Secure the home the best you can. This includes closing doors and shutters. Stay inside and away from windows. Try to stay in an interior room on the lowest level.
- ✓ Tornadoes – Tornadoes can accompany hurricanes when they hit land and can be extremely destructive. Find a safe place within the home – the lowest room the furthest away from exterior walls is best, such as a closet. Mobile homes offer almost no protection from a tornado. Find a nearby structure if you can.
- ✓ Thunder/lightning storms – Lightning is unpredictable and can cause a great deal of harm and damage. Stay indoors during a storm. If you happen to be outside, avoid anything metal. It is a myth that rubber such as soles of shoes or tires will provide protection from lightening.
- ✓ Floods – Floods can take days to develop or can happen quickly without any warning signs. During a flood, move to higher ground. Turn off utilities and unplug electrical appliances. Never attempt to drive through a flooded area. It takes only a small amount of water to carry away most vehicles.
- ✓ Winter storms – Winter storms can leave you powerless and isolated for days. It is important to have supplies in the home such as water, food, source of heat, medications, and other essential supplies as applicable. Shutting off water valves can help so that pipes do not burst.

It is important as an in-home aide to go over an emergency plan with your clients. This plan should include who the emergency contacts are, what medical information will be needed by the responder, and other unique information about a client. The client should be encouraged to keep supplies in their home such as canned food, water, fuel, firewood, and other items that will be needed. An in-home aide can assist their clients with planning as directed by the nurse supervisor. Planning includes brainstorming and finding phone numbers or evacuation locations with the client. Make sure your client is prepared – ensure they have enough food, heat, medication, and other needed items for their situation. If not, contact your supervisor.

Along with disaster preparedness, your clients should be encouraged to have a fire safety plan. This plan would include having smoke detectors in the home and knowing what exits to use, keeping exits and paths to exits clear, and practicing getting out of the house quickly. If the client is hard of hearing or vision impaired, are there smoke detectors with lights or vibrating pads to alert the client of danger.

To assist your clients with disaster preparedness, review local resources in your client's area. Your supervisor will assist you in preparing for disasters with your clients. Resources include the police department, fire department, local Red Cross, Salvation Army, shelters, and evacuation sites. Being aware of potential dangers and knowing how to react in the event of a disaster can make all the difference. Even if you are not with your client at the time of a disaster, if you have pre-planned with them, the outcome will be better.

Review this CDC video on Preparedness for All: Emergency Planning for People with Disabilities:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phzNF4wwLs0>

Think about any added information you learned from the video on assisting clients with disabilities in emergency planning and reflect on that information.

Some disasters, like lightning strikes, home fires and windstorms can occur anywhere. Others, like earthquakes and hurricanes are more common in certain regions. Click on the map below to learn about possible disasters in your area. <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/common-natural-disasters-across-us.html>

Emergency Preparedness

Always inform your office of changes to your (or your client's) phone number(s) and address to keep information up to date. If you are with a client when a natural (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, wildfires), or man-made (e.g., chemical disaster, explosions, nuclear disasters) disaster occurs, it is important to remain calm. Put your agency's emergency plan into action – do you need to call 911 first? When do you call the office? Is there a call tree to follow? What about the client's emergency contacts? Talk with the client on arranging for more than one person from their personal support network to check on them in an emergency, so there is at least one back-up if the primary person they rely on cannot. Also keep a radio, internet, or television news show on for more information on local developments of the disaster if there is availability of radio, internet, and television. Do not leave your client until it is safe to do so. This may require you to stay longer, until their emergency contact is able to arrive, or until the disaster passes and you can safely leave the house/drive again. It is important to have an emergency plan in your personal life. This plan should include care for your own family in the event of an emergency or the event that you are delayed in leaving your client's home or if you are unable to leave.

Follow your agency policies and procedures for planning for a disaster and for what to do during and after a disaster- the following may be the type of guidance within your agency policies. Keep in mind that emergencies and disasters can unfold in unpredictable ways, and even carefully made plans may need to adapt to changing circumstances therefore it is important to stay in contact with your agency regarding emergency plans.

- ✓ If you and your client must evacuate, first locate the closest shelter or evacuation site. If you have discussed emergency preparedness with your client ahead of time, you will already have this information.
- ✓ Be sure to bring along medical supplies and/or equipment that are necessary for the client.
- ✓ Secure the home. Lock the doors and if you have time, move essential items to a higher level. If you can, write the word EVACUATED on a piece of paper and put it on the door. This information will help rescue crews working in the area.
- ✓ Turn off the utilities at the breaker box. Unplug electrical appliances; *however*, if you are wet or are standing in water, *do not touch* electrical items.
- ✓ Avoid any moving water. The water could have a current and you and your client could fall.
- ✓ Never drive through flooded areas. Water can rise quickly and can easily make driving impossible or even carry a car away. The road may be washed out under flood waters. Turn around don't drown when you encounter a flooded road. According to the National Weather Service- six inches of water will reach the bottom of most passenger cars causing loss of control and possible stalling. A foot of water will float many vehicles. Two feet of rushing water can carry away most vehicles including sport utility vehicles (SUV's) and pick-ups. Flood waters may contain snakes and insects; sharp objects and debris; and oil, gasoline, industrial waste, or raw sewage.
- ✓ Once at the evacuation site, call your office/designated point person. Do not attempt to talk on your cell phone while driving in a disaster. Please remember that an emergency will take precedence over agency policy. Work closely with your supervisor to ensure your role in an emergency.

Climate change is causing more frequent and extreme weather events. This increases our risk of death, injury, property loss and disruption.

According to the National Council on Aging- In 2023, at least 23 separate weather-related events costing \$1 billion each struck the U.S., this shows the need for disaster preparedness.