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# Emergency Preparedness: Hold Family Meetings

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## Emergency Preparedness: Hold Family Meetings

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Yes, we can expect our lives to be impacted by an emergency event. Our daily routines will be altered, and the immediate concern will turn to protecting ourselves and our families. Since we don't know how serious the emergency may be, it pays to prepare.

Advance planning can make our homes comfortable and our families safe. It is not an overwhelming task, and there are guidelines available to help. The better we are prepared, the better we will respond and rebound.

It is important that your family plans together and brings your current emergency family plan up-to-date. To get started, set a time when everyone can meet for 30–45 minutes.

Young children may not be able to sit still for a whole meeting, so involve them early and dismiss them to play, if necessary. They will still feel they are part of the planning.

It is important to prepare your children for disasters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has excellent materials ([www.fema.gov/kids](http://www.fema.gov/kids)). The American Academy of Pediatrics also provides information (<http://www.aap.org/family/frk/frkit.htm>) to share with children that will help as you prepare your family for any emergency.

During your family meeting, discuss what types of emergencies could affect you, your family, and your community. Then discuss how to prepare for each type of emergency. Be sure all family members know what to do during different types of emergencies. Plan how children will be cared for if parents are not able to get home, or how disabled persons will be cared for if health personnel cannot reach them.

Learn about your community's plans for emergency preparedness. If you have children, learn what plans are in place at your child's school to deal with different types of emergencies during school hours. Know what actions, if any, school officials ask parents to take during these emergencies. Also, become familiar with emergency plans at work, church, or any place your family spends time.

Establish a "family contact" in another town. Be sure every family member knows the contact's telephone number. If family members are separated during an emergency, they can call the out-of-town contact and tell them where they are.

Teach responsible family members when and how to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at the main switches.

Teach children when and how to call 911.

Plan ahead for an alternate place to stay until the emergency is over, in case your home or community is affected.

Know what to do if you are told to shelter in place, to evacuate, or to just stay alert for further instructions.

Forms for creating a plan specific to your family are available at <http://www.ready.gov/america/makeaplan/index.html>. Complete, cut out, and hand the cards from the family communications plan form to each member of the family to carry. Completion of this form will ensure everyone knows how the family will communicate in the event of a disaster, and the form includes wallet-sized cards.

Designate a family member to check that all legal documents, including wills and insurances, are up-to-date. Make sure all family legal documents such as birth certificates, wills, passports, and insurance policies are in a safe place and the location known by more than one family member.

You may need to survive on your own after an emergency. This means having your own food, water, and other supplies in sufficient quantity to last for at least three days. Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone immediately. It may take hours or days. In addition, basic services such as electricity, gas, water, sewage treatment, and telephones may be cut off for days, or even a week or longer.

Schedule a second meeting to talk about the food, water, emergency supplies, special need items, and medications your family needs to gather to prepare for an emergency.

Recommended items to include in a basic emergency supply kit:

- Water – one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drink-

ing and sanitation

- Food – at least a 3-day supply of non-perishable food
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert and extra batteries for both
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Whistle to signal for help
- Dust mask to help filter contaminated air, and plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags, and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- Can opener for food (if kit contains canned food)
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers

Additional items to consider adding to an emergency supply kit:

- Prescription medications and glasses
- Infant formula and diapers
- Pet food and extra water for your pet
- Important family documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification, and bank account records placed in a waterproof, portable container
- Cash
- Emergency reference material such as a first aid book or information from [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person. Additional bedding will be needed during cold weather months.
- Complete change of clothing including a long sleeved shirt, long pants and sturdy shoes. Also add warm clothes—a must during winter months.
- Household chlorine bleach and medicine dropper—when diluted 9 parts water to 1 part bleach, bleach can be used as a disinfectant. Or in an emergency, you can use it to treat water by using 16 drops of regular household liquid bleach per gallon of water. Do not use

scented, color-safe, or bleaches with added cleaners.

- Fire extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Feminine supplies and personal hygiene items
- Mess kits, paper cups, plates and plastic utensils, paper towels
- Paper and pencil
- Books, games, puzzles, or other activities for children

When you have completed the planning steps and your family knows what to do, practice and maintain your plan. Every six months, hold another family meeting and review your plan. Make changes as your family's needs and circumstances change. Conduct emergency evacuation drills of your home, so everyone knows what to do and where to meet outside in case of a fire or other home emergency.

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**EXEX13002 Access at <http://agbiopubs.sdstate.edu/articles/ExEx13002.pdf>.**