Family Emergency Planning Guide

A few clear decisions today can make an unfamiliar day easier to manage.

Use this guide to build a household plan, put essential supplies together and practise the steps with the people who will use them. Keep a printed copy somewhere everyone can find it.

Start with three actions

Choose an out-of-area contact. Pick two meeting places. Build a basic kit for at least three days, then adapt it to local guidance and your household.

Make the plan fit your people

Include children, older adults, pets, accessibility needs and anyone who may need help getting information, taking medication or leaving home.

Household / plan owner

Plan completed on / next review date

Where the printed plan and kit are kept

This workbook supports planning. During an emergency, follow local officials and utility instructions. It is not a product test report or a substitute for a filter manufacturer's instructions.

Know how to reach each other

Choose one shared contact

Agree on an out-of-area friend or relative who can relay short updates if people are separated. Save the number on phones and on paper. Tell that person they are your contact.

Agree on a simple message

Send your name, whether you are safe, your location and the next planned step. Keep communications brief when networks are busy. Use the communication method available to you; do not assume mobile data will work.

Out-of-area contact / phone

Local emergency and utility contacts

School, childcare or workplace collection arrangements

Person who may need assistance / agreed helper

Practise once

Ask everyone to locate the contact card and explain whom they would call. Make sure children can use their own copy without needing an internet connection.

Meet, leave or stay

Choose two meeting places

Pick a nearby place for a sudden household evacuation and a second place outside the neighbourhood if you cannot return. Discuss safe routes and a backup route.

Decide what changes the plan

Local evacuation orders, unsafe buildings and official warnings matter more than the original plan. Identify where you can get trusted alerts and where your household could stay.

Nearby meeting place

Meeting place outside the neighbourhood

Primary route / backup route

Accessible transport / driver / alternative

Place to stay / pet arrangements

Do not drive or walk into floodwater. If a route is unsafe, follow official route information and find another way. Plan for pets before an evacuation rather than assuming every shelter accepts them.

Store water. Know its limits.

Start with a stored supply

Ready.gov recommends at least one gallon of water per person per day for several days, for drinking and sanitation. A three-day starting supply is 3 gallons for one person, 6 for two or 12 for four. Heat, illness, pregnancy, pets and local conditions can increase needs.

Keep it usable

Use appropriate food-safe containers. Follow the container and water supplier's storage instructions. Label stored water and set a date to inspect or replace it. Keep drinking water separate from cleaning supplies and other chemicals.

A filter is one tool

Portable filters vary. Do not assume a filter removes viruses, chemicals or heavy metals. Follow the exact device instructions and local water advisories; additional treatment may be needed. Do not choose a water source just because it looks clear.

When water is chemically contaminated

Water containing fuel, toxic chemicals or radioactive material cannot be made safe by boiling or disinfecting it. Use an approved alternative supply and follow official advice.

People / pets to provide for

Starting water quantity / storage location

Water inspection date

Sources: CDC, Make Water Safe During an Emergency; Ready.gov, Emergency Supply List. Links are on the final page.

Build a kit you can actually use

Cover everyday essentials

Pack water, ready-to-eat food, a manual can opener if needed, a flashlight, batteries, radio or another way to receive alerts, first aid supplies, sanitation items, local maps and phone power supplies.

Personalise the kit

Include glasses, hearing-aid batteries, essential medication arrangements, infant supplies, pet food and items that help people move or communicate. Discuss medication storage and emergency refills with the relevant healthcare professional.

Prepare for power loss

Know which essential devices depend on electricity and arrange a backup plan. Keep lighting easy to reach. Use generators and outdoor fuel-burning equipment only as directed by the manufacturer and local safety authorities; never run them inside enclosed living spaces.

Use more than one location

Keep a home supply and a smaller bag you can carry. Add a practical kit to your vehicle or workplace where useful. Avoid a bag so heavy that the intended person cannot carry it.

Kit location / person responsible

Missing essentials to buy or arrange

Special equipment / backup power plan

Use a short action sequence

First actions

- ☐ Check an official local alert or utility notice and follow its instructions.
- ☐ Account for the people and animals in your household.
- ☐ Charge available devices if safe and send a short update to your contact.
- ☐ Bring essential supplies, documents and medication arrangements together.
- ☐ If told to evacuate, use the agreed route unless officials direct otherwise.
- ☐ If staying, keep alerts available and agree on the next check-in time.

Keep information simple

Write down instructions that may be hard to remember under pressure. Assign manageable tasks: one person checks alerts, another gathers supplies, another helps anyone who needs assistance.

After the immediate danger

Follow official return-to-home and utility advice. Inspect your supplies, replace what was used and record what the plan missed. Do not enter damaged buildings or restart unsafe utilities on your own.

Household check-in time / information source

What we would change after a practice or event

Review, practise, repeat

A quick maintenance routine

- ☐ Review contacts and meeting places when household circumstances change.
- ☐ Check food, water, batteries and medicine arrangements on a regular schedule.
- ☐ Practise locating the kit and leaving with everyone who would need help.
- ☐ Update school, work, pet and transport arrangements.
- ☐ Keep paper copies of essential information securely and limit unnecessary personal details.
- ☐ Use the companion 16 checklists to divide preparation into small tasks.

Official sources

These resources informed the general planning guidance. Advice can change; check the current version and your local authority's instructions.

Ready.gov - Emergency Supply List

CDC - Make Water Safe During an Emergency

Ready Iowa - Make a Plan

Ready Army - Preparedness

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