

Emergency Preparedness

Information for families of Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs (CYSHCN)

When an emergency occurs, there is a possibility that families will need to become self-sufficient and perhaps spend several days without utilities, medical aid, or communications. Being a parent of a child with special needs brings additional uncertainties and concerns.

Jan Labas, an American Red Cross volunteer, states that “the most important rule is to have a plan.” To begin formulating a plan, ask yourself the following:

1. **Will I need to leave my home?** You may choose to stay at home, if possible, without water, phone, and/or electricity. Think about what your family would need to be self-sufficient and safe. Water, food, and food preparation, warmth, and medical supplies would need consideration.
2. **If I must leave or choose to leave, where will I go and how will I get there?** Wheelchairs, beds, and other medical equipment may require electricity or special accommodations. Consider that modes of transportation or usual routes of travel may be inaccessible.
3. **What will I need while I am there?** Basic necessities are usually provided within a short time in a shelter setting, but what might your child need that may not be readily available, such as refills for prescriptions, health products, or special foods.
4. **What will I do while I am there?** Confinement to a shelter would make for a miserable time in my case if I did not take some comforting items and something for my child to do. A deck of cards, books, and small toys for distraction and play would certainly help to pass the time and help with the adjustment.

“Everyday” emergencies occur more frequently than large-scale disasters, but it is important to think through and prepare for both.

Practical Information for Parents

The CDC says, “**Planning is key.** It is important for families to have an [emergency care plan](#) in place in case a public health emergency like a natural disaster, act of terrorism, or disease outbreak occurs. If there is a child with special healthcare needs in your family, you and your family can prepare by developing a written emergency care plan and practicing your plan. For example, a plan can include medicines or [assistance devices](#) that your child needs. If possible, let your child help make the plan. Healthcare providers can work with families of children with special healthcare needs to make sure the child’s needs are covered in the family emergency plan and to identify support networks in your community.” (<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/children-with-special-healthcare-needs.html>)

Additional practical ideas include:

- Use a flash drive with your child’s medical information on your keychain.
- Consider giving a copy of important paperwork (medical records, birth certificates, etc.) to a trusted family member or friend in another location in case you experience a total loss.
- When you take your child out in public, consider given them an ID or medical alert bracelet or ID system that can be attached to their shoe. Temporary tattoos with phone numbers are also available for use when in crowds and/or on school trips.
- Notify local emergency officials of your child’s special needs. Some towns offer a form for families of CYSHCN to complete so that the child and their needs can be identified immediately by the 911 system.

- Local emergency management officials can also be informed of the need for special accommodations in the event of a disaster.
- Considering contacting your utility company to make them aware of any CYSHCN in the home that may require electricity for their medical equipment. Priority may be given in the case of a power outage.

Emergency Preparedness Resources for Families

1. [Caring for Children in a Disaster](#) (CDC, 2022)
2. [Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs \(CYSHCN\) in Emergencies](#) (CDC, 2021)
3. [Emergency Kit Checklist for Kids and Families](#) (CDC, 2020)
4. [Emergency Kit Checklist for Families with Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs CYSHCN](#) (CDC, 2020)
5. [Emergency Preparedness for Families with Special Needs](#) (CDC, 2013)
6. [Keeping Children with Disabilities Safe in Emergencies](#) (CDC, 2019)
7. [Ready Kids: Disaster and Emergency Planning](#) (FEMA, 2022)
8. [Lista de Equipo de Emergencia para Niños](#) (en español, FEMA, 2022)

It would be impossible to plan for every scenario, but having prepared in advance for an emergency situation allows for families to maintain some sort of order in the chaos could otherwise ensue. In fact, for families with children with special needs, it could mean the difference between life and death. Begin taking steps to complete or update your family's plan today!

For more information on emergency preparedness and for comprehensive plans, visit the FEMA website: <https://www.ready.gov> or the American Red Cross website: <https://www.redcross.org/>

Programs and systems change often. It is important to ensure that you are using the most current information. This fact sheet was updated December 2022. Please check <https://www.inf2f.org/fact-sheets.html> for the most recent edition.

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