

# PREPARING FOR SPECIAL NEEDS IN AN EMERGENCY

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TIPS ON HOW TO PREPARE  
RESOURCES TO ASSIST IN PLANNING





## INTRODUCTION

Emergencies can happen at any time. Whether they are man-made or natural, the best defense is to be prepared. Being prepared can help you prevent or reduce harm during an emergency.

But, preparing for an emergency can be a more difficult process if you have special needs to address, or are caring for someone with special needs. This booklet will offer valuable tips on how to prepare for an emergency if you are:

- Living with physical impairments
- Deaf/Hard of hearing
- Blind/Low vision
- Living with mental illness
- Living with developmental/cognitive disabilities
- Non-English speaking

It will list items that should be placed in emergency kits specific to the special needs you may have, and offer resources about where you can find more information and assistance.

Our goal at the Alabama Department of Public Health is to help all people in the state prepare for emergencies. We hope this booklet will help those in Alabama with special needs do that a little bit better.

## TIPS EVERYONE SHOULD FOLLOW

### Five Steps to Emergency Preparedness

1. Create an emergency preparedness plan. This plan should include family and friends you can contact, where to store your emergency supply kit, and how to evacuate safely.
2. Stay informed. Learn about the hazards in your area and determine how you can be alerted.
3. Learn about basic injury prevention and what steps you need to take to address your special needs. Make sure that you write down how you need to be medically treated and find alternatives if you require care from facilities that may not be open during an emergency.
4. Find the most current resources that can assist you while planning for an emergency. This booklet will list many resources, but there may be other resources that you find particularly helpful based on your specific needs.
5. Know the emergency plans for your workplace and community. Be sure you are involved in the planning at your workplace, including how you will be alerted and how you will be evacuated.

## PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT

Many people are living with physical impairments that either substantially limit or totally limit their mobility. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 54.4 million men, women, and children in America are living with a disability.

During an emergency, people living with physical impairments may have concerns including how they are going to be moved during an evacuation, will they be able to maneuver in shelters, and will they have all the equipment they need if evacuated. The following are tips that can help you prepare for these situations:

### Tips to Prepare

- Decide on the proper way that you would like to be moved during an evacuation before an event occurs. For some, the “fireman’s carry” may be hazardous or uncomfortable. Make sure someone at work and home knows how you would like to be moved. If you use a wheelchair, show others how to operate and collapse it for transport.
- Contact your utility company and city or county emergency management office to ask if they keep a list of persons living with physical impairments who may need help in an emergency. They may be able to provide extra assistance in moving you in the event of an emergency. Additionally, if you require power for oxygen or other necessary life-supporting equipment, ask if they can keep your name on a list of people who need power restored immediately.
- Arrange and secure furniture so that you can maneuver easily if you have to get out of the home quickly. Ask your office to allow you to do the same at work. Practice these escape routes at least twice a year.
- You are the best provider of information about your specific disability; make sure you have instructions written out to provide to shelters or friends during an emergency.
- Make sure a trusted friend or family member has a key to your home in case you are in a situation where you are unable to get to the door and out of the home.

### Tips for Those Assisting Individuals Living with Physical Impairments

- Create barrier-free walkways throughout your facility for those using wheelchairs, walkers, and canes to easily maneuver through.
- Include those individuals with disabilities working in your business in the planning process for emergency evacuations. These living with special needs know best how they will be able to function in an emergency.
- Ask for those family members or co-workers with a disability to write down their medications and what medical procedures they require on a daily basis.
- Have extra canes and wheelchairs for those who might lose their equipment during an emergency.

- Always ask the person with the disability how you can best assist him or her. Do not assume you know how to assist. Improper assistance to their person or equipment could cause serious harm.
- Check on neighbors, friends, and co-workers you know have disabilities to ensure that they are properly evacuated if they need to be.

### Emergency Supply Kit

- If possible, lightweight manual wheelchair for backup
- Extra supply of medications and oxygen for at least 10 days
- A patch kit or can of “seal-in-air product” to repair flat tires on your wheelchair and/or an extra supply of inner tubes
- A list of the style and serial number of all medical devices you use

### Additional Resources

- Federal Emergency Management Agency [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)
- National Organization on Disability [www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)
- Inclusive Preparedness Center [www.inclusivepreparedness.org](http://www.inclusivepreparedness.org)

## DEAF/HARD OF HEARING

Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing are a large part of the population today. Approximately 36 million American adults report some degree of hearing loss. The degrees of hearing loss include the following:

- Deaf - A person with a hearing loss who, with or without amplification, cannot understand spoken language.
- Hard of Hearing - A person with a hearing loss who, with or without amplification, can understand spoken language.

For people who are living with limited or total hearing loss, just receiving a warning that an emergency is occurring or will occur can be a problem. This issue makes being prepared extremely vital to their safety. In addition, once people who are deaf or hard of hearing evacuate safely and arrive at shelters, most shelter workers are not prepared to communicate effectively with them.

According to the National Organization on Disability Emergency Preparedness Initiative, during Hurricane Katrina 80 percent of shelters did not have TTY access, and only 30 percent had access to an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter. Distress can be significantly increased when you cannot communicate with anyone about the emergency. The following are tips that can help those with hearing loss prepare better for an emergency event.



## Tips to Prepare

- Make special arrangements to receive emergency warnings. Consider purchasing a NOAA Weather Radio. These radios can emit a visual strobe alarm and connect to other devices to shake a pillow or bed.
- Install both audible and visual smoke alarms throughout your home.
- Make requests to your local television stations that they give all emergency warnings in ASL or closed captioning.
- Create pre-printed signs with key messages that you can use to communicate with first responders and others during an emergency.

## Tips for Those Assisting People who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

It is important to remember that many people who are deaf or hard of hearing will not be noticed at first glance. Shelters and facilities that may need to assist those who are deaf should make sure that there are visual messages and interpreter assistance available. The following are additional tips for those assisting people who are deaf/hard of hearing.

- Despite popular belief, all people who are deaf cannot lip-read (speechread). Even those who can understand only gain about 5 percent of information through speechreading. Instead, use visual forms of communication such as “picture books” which would contain pictures of commonly requested items—food, water, medicine, and restroom locations.
- Place posters and large signs containing pertinent information in picture form throughout the facility, with methods to update the information as it becomes available. Using dry erase boards may be helpful with this task.
- If possible, have a supply of assistive listening devices and hearing aid batteries available. Keep a supply of pads and pens/pencils to hand out to people who would like to communicate by writing.
- Contact local agencies and departments to recruit volunteer interpreters who will be willing to assist during an emergency. Consider using pre-positioned interpreter services which are services that provide interpreter assistance via remote access if power is available.



## Emergency Supply Kit

- Extra batteries for assistive listening and communication devices and TTY batteries
- Pencil/pen and pad to communicate with those who do not know sign language
- Battery-operated television that has a decoder chip for access to close caption

## Additional Resources

- National Association of the Deaf [www.nad.org](http://www.nad.org)
- Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network [www.cepintdi.org](http://www.cepintdi.org)
- National Organization on Disability [www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)
- Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program [www.adap.net](http://www.adap.net)
- Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind [www.aidb.org](http://www.aidb.org)
- Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services [www.rehab.state.al.us](http://www.rehab.state.al.us)

## BLIND/LOW VISION

Those living with complete or total vision loss may find the thought of maneuvering during an emergency frightful. Preparation can help ease some of this fear. People living with vision loss include the following:

- **Blind:** People are considered blind if they have severe vision loss and see only darkness. People who are also considered blind include those whose vision consists of seeing only light perception, seeing light and shadow, or those who see movement or outlines of objects but cannot make out details.
- **Low Vision:** Some people are considered “legally blind” because they can only see limited areas at a time, have patchy or no central vision, or are hypersensitive to glare. They may be able to do many tasks, but still have enough trouble with their vision that they are limited in other areas.

## Tips to Prepare

- Have a trusted friend or family member you can call on to assist you during an emergency. This is particularly important if you have to evacuate to a shelter or some other unfamiliar surroundings.
- A guide dog may become confused or frustrated during an emergency, so practice emergency drills with your guide dog to ensure that he is comfortable with the process.
- Plan an evacuation route in your home. Arrange furniture for an easy escape route and practice evacuating at least twice a year. For those with some vision, consider placing lights along the evacuation route for additional assistance.

- Advocate for your local television stations to announce warnings and important phone numbers slowly and frequently for the visually impaired.

### Emergency Supply Kit

- Medical equipment that is adapted for those with limited sight. This includes: talking thermometer, talking blood pressure machine, talking glucometer, talking medication labels.
- Guide dog supplies such as extra leash, grooming tools, food, bowls, water
- Extra cane
- If possible, a cell phone for quick contact with family members or friends

### Tips for Those Assisting Individuals Living with Blindness/Low Vision

- Place large print and Braille signs for restrooms, exits, and medical stations.
- Designate a place for individuals with blindness/low vision and make sure there is security to ensure that items are not stolen.
- Give plenty of verbal information about surroundings, safety precautions, and other pertinent information. Even better, allow guided tours so that the blind/low vision individuals are completely comfortable with surroundings.
- Make surrounding areas unobtrusive. Either close all doors, or leave all doors open. Whatever the decision, make sure that it is consistent. Additionally, make sure all chairs and tables are located in areas out of the pathway for walking.

### Guide Dogs

Federal law (Americans with Disabilities Act) allows people with blindness/low vision to bring their guide dogs into a shelter. Below are some tips of how to ensure that guide dogs are properly maintained at a shelter.

- Instruct those in the shelter not to pet, play, or feed guide dogs. This may cause dogs to become distracted or irritated and unable to assist the person they are guiding.
- Make sure that guide dogs and their owners have their own designated location to ensure that those allergic to dogs are not disturbed. Designate a relieving area for the dogs that is equipped with plastic bags and trash cans.





## Additional Resources

- American Foundation for the Blind [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)
- Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind [www.aidb.org](http://www.aidb.org)
- Alabama Lions Sight Conservation Association [www.lionsmd34.org/alsca](http://www.lionsmd34.org/alsca)
- Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services [www.rehab.state.al.us](http://www.rehab.state.al.us)
- American Red Cross [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

## MENTAL ILLNESS

Mental illnesses are biological disorders that can affect a person's emotional, behavioral, perceptual, or cognitive functioning. Specific mental illnesses include depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, mental disorders are common in the United States. The Alabama Department of Mental Health serves more than 100,000 Alabamians living with mental illness. Many individuals in the state live independently with mental illness and receive assistance from professionals, support organizations, or family and friends.

Most people who live through an emergency experience some form of sadness and stress. For those living with mental illness, stress can often trigger a relapse or intensify an existing mental illness. Emotional, perceptual, and behavioral reactions may become more severe during an emergency. Preparation can help reduce or prevent severe reactions and improve overall functioning during a disaster.

### Tips to Prepare

- Create a network of friends and family you can contact to help you deal with the stress caused by an emergency. Have their names and numbers listed on cards that you can place in your wallet or purse for quick access.
- Practice evacuation routes so that you are comfortable with the process. Many people find it difficult to act during the panic of an emergency. Practice helps reduce some of that stress.
- With the assistance of friends, family, or a caregiver, anticipate the types of reactions that you may experience and discuss methods that you can take to reduce stress.
- Make a list of your doctors and all medications that you must take, including how much and how often, and keep it in your wallet, purse, or emergency supply kit. Share this list with close family members and caregivers who might assist you during an emergency.
- Develop and keep an emergency kit on hand that includes your medications and other items as recommended by this publication and [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).



## Emergency Supply Kit

- Prescription medication for at least 10 days
- Familiar items that can provide comfort and help relieve stress
- If possible, a cell phone for quick contact with family members or friends

## Tips for Those Assisting People Living with Mental Illness

- Have repeated discussions about the types of emergencies that could occur and how the person living with a mental illness should respond. Practice evacuating so that people with mental illness are comfortable with the process.
- Create or adapt stress-relieving techniques that can be used for calming purposes in an emergency. Practice these techniques frequently.
- Assist the person living with a mental illness in assembling an emergency supply kit filled with items they need in case they have to evacuate to a shelter. This kit should include familiar items that can give them comfort during a stressful time, as well as their medication and other items recommended in this publication.
- Organizations or facilities that may assist people during an emergency should partner with their local mental health authority for assistance or mental health or crisis counseling training for their employees and volunteers.

## Additional Resources

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Mental Health Information Center  
[www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov)
- Alabama Department of Mental Health [www.mh.alabama.gov](http://www.mh.alabama.gov)
- Mental Health America [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness [www.namialabama.org](http://www.namialabama.org)
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)

## DEVELOPMENTAL/COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

People living with developmental and cognitive disabilities can have difficulty with their ability to listen, think, speak, or follow instructions. During an emergency, these types of difficulties could intensify and cause stress and/or injury. According to the National Organization on Disability, people with developmental or cognitive disabilities can include persons who have mental retardation, autism, neurological disorders such as Tourette's syndrome, and those who have experienced strokes. Some may live independently, while others require caregivers to assist with daily living activities. Being prepared can help eliminate the confusion and panic people with developmental and cognitive disabilities may experience during an emergency.

## Tips to Prepare

- Practice evacuating by creating methods of escape and routes that you are comfortable with following. Often, emergency evacuations are accompanied by noise and shouting, so include these elements in your practice to become familiar with responding with these distractions.
- Write down instructions about evacuating including where to go, what to take and family and friends that you can contact. Post this information in a familiar place for quick access during an emergency.
- If there is specific information that you need to communicate with first responders or shelter workers about your disability, create a short phrase and practice saying it so that you are comfortable with expressing it during an emergency. Create pre-printed message cards with this information to hand out.
- If you are not comfortable around large groups of people, make plans to stay with friends in the event of an emergency so that you do not have to go to a shelter. While planning, be sure to include what transportation methods you will use.

## Emergency Supply Kit

- Prescription medication for at least 10 days
- Familiar item(s) that can provide comfort and help relieve stress
- If possible, a cell phone for quick contact with family members or friends

## Tips for Those Assisting People Living with Developmental and Cognitive Disabilities

- Provide signage about important information such as food locations, restrooms, and evacuation procedures in shelters and community centers.
- Caregivers should have repeated discussions about the types of emergencies that could occur and proper response. Practice giving instructions and assisting the person with developmental/cognitive disabilities in following the instructions. It may be necessary to repeat the instructions during practice more than once so that the person with developmental or cognitive disabilities can fully grasp the procedures.
- Write down a plan for evacuating and traveling to safe locations. Keep the plan simple and clear and place it in a location that is readily accessible. Include family and friends' contact numbers in the plan.
- Create an emergency supply kit and store it in a location that both you and the person(s) you are assisting know about. If the person also uses equipment, decide how that equipment will be transported and used in an alternate location.
- Include familiar and favorite items in an emergency supply kit that can be used to help relieve stress and assist in focusing during long waiting periods in shelters or emergency sites that could be crowded and noisy.



## Additional Resources

- National Organization on Disability [www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)
- Autism Society of Alabama [www.autism-alabama.org](http://www.autism-alabama.org)
- Alabama Department of Mental Health [www.mh.alabama.gov](http://www.mh.alabama.gov)

## NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING

As with the rest of the country, Alabama is increasingly becoming more diverse. According to the 2010 Census, 19.2 percent of the state is identified as being a part of a minority group. The population growth in the state for Hispanics during the years between 2000 -2010 was 144.8 percent, and 70.8 percent for Asians.

Our state now has a population that includes the following:

- Hispanic/Latino
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Asian Indian
- Chinese
- Filipino
- Japanese
- Korean
- Vietnamese

As a result, English is no longer the only language spoken in the state. For those residents living in Alabama who do not speak or understand English, receiving emergency warnings and preparing effectively can be a problem. Below are tips for those who do not speak English and those assisting non-English speaking persons prepare for emergency situations.

### Tips for Non-English Speaking Persons

- Partner with someone who is able to read English to help you develop your emergency plan, create your emergency supply kit, and understand the dangers that could occur in your area.
- Keep a contact list of relatives and friends who are able to speak English for quick contact to help you communicate in an emergency with those who do not speak your language.
- Create pre-printed signs with key messages that you can use to communicate with first responders and others during an emergency.

## Tips for Those Assisting Non-English Speaking Persons

- Provide signage in as many languages as possible about important information in shelters and community centers. Picture boards of such things as food, water, and restrooms that non-English speaking persons can point to can also help them communicate with you.
- Find community persons and professional translators who would be willing to volunteer to assist during an emergency event.
- Include non-English speaking representatives in emergency planning for your workplace, community organization, or shelter.
- Make sure preparedness information is provided to non-English speaking outlets such as radio stations, churches, and community centers/organizations.

## Additional Resources

- Spanish Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Hispanic)  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- Alabama Department of Public Health's Office of Minority Health  
[www.adph.org/minorityhealth](http://www.adph.org/minorityhealth)
- Boat People SOS, Inc. (Vietnamese)  
[www.bpsos.org](http://www.bpsos.org)
- Alabama Latin American Association (Hispanic)  
[www.alasweb.org](http://www.alasweb.org)
- March of Dimes  
[www.nacersano.org](http://www.nacersano.org)
- National Alliance for Hispanic Health (Hispanic)  
[www.hispanichealth.org](http://www.hispanichealth.org)
- Alabama Latinos (Hispanic)  
[www.alabamalatinos.com](http://www.alabamalatinos.com)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health  
[www.omhrc.gov](http://www.omhrc.gov)

## GENERAL EMERGENCY SUPPLY LIST

There are some items that all people should have in their emergency supply kit. In addition to the items specific for you, include the following in your kit.

- Food and drink that does not have to be refrigerated
- Pet supplies
- Water – one gallon per person, per day; include enough for pets
- Portable, battery-powered radio or weather radio, extra batteries
- Flashlights, extra batteries



- Matches and waterproof container
- Whistle, air horn, or other noisemaker (to signal for help)
- Basic personal hygiene items (toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, feminine products, baby wipes, etc.)
- Heavy-duty trash bags
- First aid kit
- Non-electric can opener and basic kitchen accessories (salt, sweeteners, non-dairy creamers, foil, plastic storage bags, paper plates, plastic spoons, etc.)
- Bathroom tissue, paper towels, facial tissue
- Extra clothing, shoes, socks
- Waterproof coats, ponchos, boots, gloves
- Towels, blankets, small or inflatable pillows, air mattresses, sleeping bags
- Chlorine bleach (pure, unscented)
- Prescription medications (include pet medication also)
- Non-prescription pain relievers, antacids, anti-diarrhea items, etc.
- Small repair kit (screwdriver, hammer, nails, duct tape)
- Pens, pencils, paper, tape, needles, thread, safety pins
- Important documents (birth certificates, Social Security cards)
- A reminder list of things to turn off, cover up, find and include; people to call; plans for pets
- Pet items – dishes, leashes, cat litter, food
- Recreational items – books, toys, small games

Check your items in the spring and fall and replace items such as food, drinks, batteries, hand wipes, and medicines to keep them fresh.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### State

- Alabama Department of Public Health  
[www.adph.org](http://www.adph.org) (800) 252-1818 (voice)
- Alabama Department of Mental Health  
[www.mh.alabama.gov](http://www.mh.alabama.gov) (800) 367-0955 (voice)
- Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services  
[www.rehab.state.al.us](http://www.rehab.state.al.us) (334) 281-8780 or (800) 441-7607 (voice)  
(800) 499-1816 (TTY)
- Alabama Department of Senior Services  
[www.AlabamaAgerline.gov](http://www.AlabamaAgerline.gov) (334) 242-5743 or (877) 425-2243 (voice)
- Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program  
[www.adap.net](http://www.adap.net) (205) 348-4928 (voice/TDD local) or (800) 826-1675 (TDD)
- Autism Society of Alabama  
[www.autism-alabama.org](http://www.autism-alabama.org) 877 4 AUTISM or (877) 428-8476 (voice)
- Alabama Head Injury Foundation  
[www.ahif.org](http://www.ahif.org) (205) 823-3818 or (800) 433-8002 (voice)
- United Cerebral Palsy of Greater Birmingham  
[www.ucpbham.com](http://www.ucpbham.com) (205) 944-3900 or (800) 654-4483 (voice)
- Cystic Fibrosis Association—Alabama Chapter  
[www.cff.org/chapters/Alabama](http://www.cff.org/chapters/Alabama) (205) 870-8565 or (800) 523-2357 (voice)
- Alabama Institute for the Deaf and the Blind  
[www.aidb.org](http://www.aidb.org) (256) 761-3200 (voice/TTY)
- Alabama Emergency Management Agency  
<http://ema.alabama.gov> (205) 280-2200 (voice)
- Volunteer and Information Center, Inc.  
<http://volunteer-info.org> 2-1-1 (voice) or (866) 869-4921
- Alabama’s Governor’s Office on Disability  
[www.good.state.al.us](http://www.good.state.al.us) (888) 879-3582 (voice)



## National

- Americans with Disabilities Act Information Line  
[www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov) (800) 514-0301 (voice) or (800) 514-0383 (TTY)
- Federal Communications Commission  
[www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov) (888) 225-5322 (voice) or (888) 835-5322 (TTY)
- American Red Cross  
[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) (800) RED-CROSS or (800) 733-2767 (voice)
- Easter Seals Disability Services  
[www.easterseals.com](http://www.easterseals.com) (800) 221-6827 (voice) or (312) 726-4258 (TTY)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency  
[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) (800) 621-FEMA or (800) 462-7585  
[www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) (800) BE READY (voice) or (202) 447-3543 (TTY)
- U.S. Fire Administration  
[www.usfa.fema.gov](http://www.usfa.fema.gov) (301) 447-1000 (voice)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) (800) 311-3435 (voice)
- Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc.  
[www.tdi-online.org](http://www.tdi-online.org) (301) 589-3786 (voice) or (301) 589-3006 (TTY)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) (800) 950-NAMI (voice) or (703) 516-7227 (TDD)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) (800) CDC INFO or (800) 232-4636 (voice)
- Alzheimer's Association  
[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) (800) 272-3900 (voice)

For additional copies of this booklet, please visit [www.adph.org](http://www.adph.org).



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