

# Facts:

from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment



## Preparedness: Tips for People with Disabilities

Being ready for an emergency is a part of maintaining your independence. Although you may not know when a disaster or crisis will strike, if you are prepared ahead of time, you will be better able to cope with the disaster and recover from it more quickly.

### What should I expect during emergencies?

When an emergency occurs, the disaster responders and government agencies first provide the basic needs of food, water, and safe shelter to everyone who needs them. Replacing your medicines and adaptive equipment, restoring power for equipment, and restoring your regular ways of support for daily living activities may take some time.

Be prepared to meet your own basic needs by storing enough food and water for at least three days. Be ready to take care of your special needs by storing enough oxygen, medicines, battery power, or other important supplies for at least seven days after an emergency.

### Why might I need extra help during emergencies?

- Just like anyone else, people with disabilities who are self-sufficient under normal circumstances may have to rely

on others in a disaster.

- People with disabilities or older adults may need more time than others to make necessary preparations in an emergency.
- Because disaster warnings are often given by audible means, such as sirens and radio announcements, if you are deaf or hearing-impaired, you may not receive early disaster warnings and emergency instructions.
- If you are blind or visually impaired, especially older people, you may be extremely reluctant to leave familiar surroundings when the request for evacuation comes from a stranger.
- Your service dog could become confused or disoriented in a disaster. People who are blind or partially sighted may have to depend on others to lead them, as well as their dog, to safety during a disaster.
- In most states, service dogs will be allowed to stay in emergency shelters with owners. Check in advance with your local emergency management officials for more information.
- You may be concerned about being dropped when being lifted or carried.
- If you have developmental or

mental disabilities, you may be unable to understand the emergency and could become disoriented or confused about the proper way to react.

- Many respiratory illnesses can be aggravated by stress. In an emergency, your oxygen and equipment may not be readily available.
- People with epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, and other conditions often have very individualized medication regimes that cannot be interrupted without serious consequences. You might not be able to tell the emergency workers about this in an emergency.

### What should I do in advance?

The best way to cope with an emergency is to learn about the challenges you might face if you could not use your home, office, and personal belongings. You can meet your basic personal needs by preparing in advance. You also may have to deal with a service animal that is unable to work or is frightened, or pets that need care and assistance.

### How can I prepare for power failures?

- If you use a battery-operated wheelchair, life-support system,

or other power equipment, call your power company now, before blackouts happen. Many utility companies keep a list and map of the locations of power-dependent customers in case of an emergency. Ask them what may be available in your area.

- If you use a motorized wheelchair or scooter, keep an extra battery fully charged. A car battery also can be used with a wheelchair, but it will not last as long as a wheelchair's deep-cycle battery. If available, store a lightweight manual wheelchair for backup.
- If you are blind or have a visual impairment, store a talking or Braille clock, or a large-print timepiece, and extra batteries.
- If you are deaf or have a hearing loss, consider getting a small, portable, battery-operated television set. Emergency broadcasts may give information in American Sign Language or open captioning.

## How can I help people with disabilities during a crisis?

- **Offer assistance.** If a disaster warning is issued, check with neighbors or coworkers who are disabled. Learn how to transfer or move someone in a wheelchair and what exit routes from buildings are best.
- **Prepare an emergency plan.** Work with neighbors who are disabled to prepare an emergency response plan. Identify how you will contact each other and what action will be taken.
- **Help evacuate.** Be able to assist if an evacuation order is issued. Provide physical assistance in leaving and transferring to a vehicle. Provide transportation to a shelter. This may require a specialized vehicle designed to carry a wheelchair or other mobility equipment.
- **Join a self-help network.** Self-help networks are arrangements of people who agree to assist an individual with a disability in an emergency. Discuss with the relative, friend, or co-worker who has a disability what assistance he or she may need. Urge the person to keep a disaster supplies kit and suggest that you keep an extra copy of the list of special items such as medicines or special equipment that the person has prepared. Talk with the person about how to inform him or her of an oncoming disaster and see about getting a key to the person's house so you can provide assistance without delay.

Adapted from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

## Reliable sources of information

### Colorado HELP hotline

1-877-462-2911 (toll-free)  
M-F 7 a.m. – 11 p.m.;  
S-S 9:30 a.m. – 8 p.m.

### Federal Emergency Management Agency, Region VIII

www.fema.gov  
303- 235-4800

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov  
1-800-311-3435 (toll-free)

### National Organization on Disability

www.nod.org  
202-293-5960  
202-293-5968 (TTY)

### Ready Colorado

www.readycolorado.com



Colorado Department  
of Public Health  
and Environment