

September to Remember...Emergency Preparedness!

By: Teresa Dodd-Butera, CSU San Bernardino Department of Nursing

September is officially recognized as “*National Preparedness Month.*” Have you considered what types of disasters you may need to deal with, specific to your community and your family’s medical needs? Ask yourself, today: “Am I ready?”

First, think about what you and your family need and make a plan together. Consider the following three questions:

1. What do you and your family need, to get through one day?
2. What resources are available in your community for families who have special needs, in cases of emergencies?
3. How could you prepare to survive without outside resources for at least three days?

Next, identify necessary items for each person in your family, considering the special needs you have identified. Begin by breaking it down into 4 categories for the basics: Food, Water, Supplies, and Communication.

Food: Choose non-perishable food items – enough for at least 3 days. It is best to choose foods that do not require much preparation. Canned and dried foods that do not require refrigeration and cooking are helpful if there are power outages, following a disaster.

Also, a manual can opener is needed for access to your canned goods, along with eating utensils. Consider you and your family members’ dietary needs, in addition to choosing foods that they enjoy eating. Remember to avoid salty foods and other items that make your family thirsty. Renew your food supplies, when necessary, by observing expiration dates.

Water: Clean water is an essential element for you and your family's survival. Remember that your usual water supply may be unavailable or contaminated, after a disaster. Stock up on enough water for each family member: One gallon of water per person/per day is an estimate; and have enough for three days for each person. If the weather is warm, you may need to have more water ready. Also, nursing mothers and infants, and persons with certain medical conditions may require more water, so plan according to your family's unique needs. When storing bottled water, keep containers closed until ready for use. Store water in a cool, dark place, and observe expiration dates for usage. For information on water treatment, go to RedCross.org.

Supplies: Other helpful items to include for your family's preparation are a radio, cell phone, and flashlight. Remember to include extra batteries and a solar cell phone charger (or inverter). A first aid kit, hand and diaper wipes, and garbage bags with ties will come in handy for minor medical needs and sanitation. Local maps and tools, such as a wrench or pliers, will allow you to turn off your utilities and guide your way, if you are evacuated. Dust masks with filters may be needed for protection, if the air is contaminated. Have plastic sheeting and duct tape on hand, in case you need to shelter-in-place.

Communication:

- A. For connection with your family, plan ahead for communication with your loved ones. Having a designated place to meet or an out-of-town relative to call, can alleviate anxiety if your family is apart from one another during an emergency.

- B. For connection with your community, identifying area resources for families with special needs before an emergency occurs, can alert first-responders of necessary precautions and preparation.
- C. For connection during an emergency: If you are trapped during an emergency, having a whistle with your supplies can signal rescuers where you are. Cell phones and texting can also be used, when available.

Considering Your Family’s Special Needs:

Each family is unique and special. You want to be prepared and ready to protect and care for one another, if a disaster occurs. Think about your family’s medical needs. Consider if you need oxygen, medications, hearing aids, eyeglasses, a wheel chair, or service animals. Does someone in your family have cognitive challenges? Also consider, if you have assistants to help your family with their medical needs – how would you survive if they were unable to get to you during a disaster? What about the important files with your family’s information, such as medical insurance cards, personal identification, prescriptions, and financial paperwork? Do you have the originals and copies of these in place, so you can locate them in the aftermath of a disaster? Family needs are also special across the lifespan. Pregnant and nursing mothers, infants and children, and elderly persons all have unique concerns. Think about these family members and your community resources, as you prepare and “*Get Ready*” for what life may bring (Table 1).

Table 1. Addressing Needs in a Disaster, Across the LifeSpan

Stage of Life	Special Needs During a Disaster
Pregnancy	Precautions for Exposures to Toxicants Contacts for Health Care Providers Services available for delivery, if needed, in Emergency Shelter
Breastfeeding	Precautions for Exposures to Toxicants Facilities for privacy while breastfeeding or pumping breastmilk Facilities and bottles for storing/freezing breastmilk
Infancy and Toddler age	Diapers, Ointment, Wipes, Formula or Breastmilk, Baby Food Areas for quiet in Emergency Shelter
Seniors	Contacts for Health Care Providers for medical needs Prescriptions and Medications Eyeglasses and Hearing Aids, if worn Dentures and supplies, if worn
Medical Vulnerabilities	May affect all ages and disabilities Plan what you need to survive for each day, and be prepared with at least 72 hours of supplies and medications

Still need more information? Try these resources:

American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/disabilities>

American Public Health Association: http://www.getreadyforflu.org/new_pg_facts.htm

Centers for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/BeReady/>

Disability.gov: https://www.disability.gov/emergency_preparedness

FEMA: <http://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs>