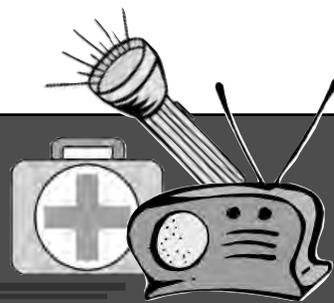


Ready or Not

Compiled by Susan L. Fitzgerald



Disasters strike when you least expect it, here's how your family can prepare.

In the last few years our country — and our world — have suffered unimaginable disasters. From the tsunami to Hurricane Katrina, adults and children have dealt with situations that push people and organizations to their limits. For families who may have a child with special needs, emergency situations bring unique challenges. But these can be reduced with some prior planning.

While emergencies vary greatly, there are some common factors for which you can prepare. Taking some time before an emergency happens to think about an action plan could make a big difference later on. The Ohio Legal Rights Service summarizes these important steps:

- **Train an emergency back-up person:** Even if you have nursing or home health aide services, train a relative or friend on the particulars of your child's care. You never know when an emergency situation will arise that will require you to leave immediately.

- **Discuss hard decisions in advance:** Talk to your spouse and, if appropriate, your other children about what all of you would want to do if a life-threatening situation occurs with your child. Hard decisions, such as whether to use life-sustaining equipment, should be made before the situation happens. This is not a pleasant subject to talk about, but it is an important one.

- **Keep an emergency bag of supplies on hand at all times:** This is helpful for those unexpected trips to the emergency room, or when the electricity goes out and you need to find everything in one place.

- **Create a medical history sheet:** A medical history sheet should be kept that details your child's medical history, medications, feeding instructions, medical alerts (seizures, behavioral issues, etc.), listing of physicians, emergency contacts, insurance/Medicaid information, and so on. The following are resources to help you create a medical history sheet:

- **Keep a daily journal of your child's health progress or concerns.** This is helpful if you are in an emergency situation and the hospital personnel want

to know what your child's behavior and health has been like lately. It doesn't have to be detailed — just enough to jog your memory of what has been going on with your child.

- **Post emergency numbers:** Post up-to-date lists of all emergency numbers in your child's bedroom and close to your phone. Include numbers for the local fire department, poison control, local hospitals, doctors, dentists, family members, and neighbors.

- **Register your life support equipment:** If someone in your household uses any type of life-sustaining equipment that has been prescribed by a physician, such as a ventilator or kidney dialysis machine, you should contact your utility company to register the equipment with them. Many utility companies maintain a database of individuals relying upon these machines so that, in the event of an outage, attempts will be made to restore service to that customer as quickly as possible. Please be aware, though, that registering your equipment does not guarantee uninterrupted or expedited service. Some families choose to purchase a standby generator. American Electric Power recommends that you make sure the generator has a manual or automatic switch that disconnects it from main power lines to prevent utility workers from being shocked. If switches are not available, use the main switch on your service panel to cut power. It is best to have a licensed electrician connect the generator to your home. For small equipment, you can purchase an adapter that can be used in a car lighter port.

- **Get to know your local emergency medical station:** Contact the fire stations and paramedic units that would respond to an emergency at your house. Set up a meeting with them (preferably at your house so they can see the set up of your child's room and the equipment that you use) and give them copies of your child's medical emergency sheet. Keep them up-to-date on any significant changes in your child's condition.

- **Ensure that your house number is prominently displayed:** Having your house number prominently displayed is important so that, in the event that an ambulance is called to your house, it can be easily found. This is especially important for those who live in rural areas. Fire stations recommend the use of

reflective street signs that can be easily attached to mailbox posts, and will often provide these signs for a small fee.

- Perform regular checks to oxygen tanks: If your child requires oxygen only as needed, be sure to check the gauges on the tanks regularly to make sure the tanks are full. Also, have a representative from the company who supplies the tanks or a person from your local fire department show you the safest way to store tanks.

- Make a disaster supply kit: A disaster supply kit should contain food, water, tools, first aid supplies, flashlights, and other items needed in the event that you will be without power or water for several days and can be used by all family members. A basic supply kit, a portable kit, and a supply kit for the car should be made. For more information, visit the American Red Cross Web site to view their information about disaster preparedness for people with disabilities.
- Keep an emergency bag of supplies on hand at all times: For the family member with a disability, a bag with backup supplies of all essential disability-related and medical equipment items should be kept. For those who use a wheelchair, families usually keep the supplies in a back pack that is attached to the chair so that the items are always with the person. Additional supplies should be kept in the car that normally transports the family member with a disability. For more information, visit the American Red Cross Web site at www.redcross.org to view their information about disaster preparedness for people with disabilities.

- Establish an evacuation plan: Have an emergency evacuation plan in place for your family and any caregivers (nurses, respite workers, etc.) who are regularly in your house. Especially in the case of a person who uses a wheelchair, be specific about how the person should be removed from the house in case

of a fire. Ensure that all smoke detectors are in working order. Draw and display the evacuation plan in a prominent place and remember to regularly practice the plan.

- Carry a cell phone: Although an added expense, a cell phone can be a life saver if an emergency happens while in a car or when you are in a remote place without access to a phone. A cell phone is also helpful when your regular phone is out of service.

Getting organized in advance will go a long way in helping your family deal with unexpected events. ■

Care Organizing Tools

- *Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle, Washington;*
www.cshcn.org/resources/CareNtbk.cfm

- *Emergency Preparedness for Children with Special Health Care Needs,*
American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org/advocacy/emergprep.htm

- *Health History Summary for Teens Adolescent Health Transition Project*
<http://depts.washington.edu/healthtr/healthhistory/default.html>

- *Patient Health and History Form (PDF file)*
http://olrs.ohio.gov/other/history_form.pdf

- *Get Ready*

learn what steps you and your family need to take in order to prepare for emergencies
makeaplan.org



After September 11, 2001, the National Organization of Disabilities (N.O.D.) launched the Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI) to ensure that emergency managers address disability concerns and that people with disabilities are included in all levels of emergency preparedness- planning,

response, and recovery.

Throughout the first three years of the program, EPI has become firmly established within the emergency management industry and disability advocacy organizations. EPI remains the nationally recognized leader in emergency preparedness for people with disabilities and special needs.

For additional EPI program information, visit the Web site, www.nod.org/emergency. If you need further assistance please

and

address inquiries to EPI Director Hilary Styron at epi@nod.org.

Brochures with specific information for people with different types of disabilities are available to be downloaded from the Web site.

- *Disaster Readiness Tips for People with Mobility Disabilities*
- *Disaster Readiness Tips for People with Sensory Disabilities*
- *Disaster Readiness Tips for People with Developmental or Cognitive Disabilities*