



United We Prepare™

Resilience in Readiness

Five Simple Steps to Start Now

With Verizon's support, United Way is working to help you be better prepared for any disaster. This guide is a collection of experts' advice, curated from the nation's best emergency guides.

And we've made it simple. Here are 5 low- or no-cost steps to prepare yourself, your family, your business, and your community for disaster. The rest of this guide offers more details on these actions.

Taking action now will give you peace of mind – and may save you recovery time, energy, and money when disaster strikes.

No one can predict the future, but each of us can take steps to prepare for the unknown. Follow your [local United Way's](#) social media and stay connected for more information, workshops, and tools for disaster preparedness.

1 Identify your support network and key emergency contacts.

Add their numbers to your mobile device (smartphone or tablet) – categorized as an emergency contact – and make sure they have yours.

2 Get connected.

Make sure your phone is enabled to get local alerts and warnings. When emergencies strike, public safety officials use these systems to alert you.

3 Assess your needs.

This includes the needs of your family and friends. Take action to meet those needs now. Add your medical information to your phone ([this article](#) tells you how). Build an emergency essentials kit for your home and a “go bag” for your car. Keep a (charged) power bank in each.

4 Safeguard key documents and document valuables.

Use your phone to take photos of key documents and document valuables. Save the video and images in the cloud or external storage.

5 Engage your support network.

Now that you've taken these steps, make sure your family has done the same. Check in with your closest friends and extended family to share these tips. Discuss who will get Grandma and her oxygen tank, or make sure Dad is squared away.

What Can You Do to Prepare?

1 After you have your support network and key emergency contacts in your phone, call them.

Make sure they have your information. Talk about what to expect in an emergency. This can be an uncomfortable conversation with friends, neighbors, and family. Here are a few ideas to start these conversations:

- How do you like to get information? Via text? Email? Phone call? How do you typically respond back?
- Under times of great stress, how will you let me and others in our family/friend group know what you need?
- What help do you require for personal care that I might not know about? Do you have that written out and placed in your “go bag?”
- If you use assistive technology to meet your daily activity needs, are you prepared to take it with you?
- What transportation would you use if you had to leave quickly? Is it reliable? What methods of transportation do you rely on?

2 Check to make sure your cell phone is prepared.

Set up emergency alerts.

Back when you set up your phone, you may not have been thinking about emergency alerts. But think about it now! It's easy to make sure your phone is enabled to receive local alerts and get warnings. And it matters: when emergencies strike, public safety officials use wireless emergency alerts to “ping” all enabled mobile devices in that community.

- Go to “Settings” to start. Depending on your phone, you may need to navigate to “Government Alerts,” or “Emergency Alert Messages.”
- Older phones may not have the ability to receive wireless emergency alerts, so be sure to have a small transistor radio (with extra batteries) in your go bag and emergency essential kits, and know where to find your local news-oriented radio station.

Download a disaster preparedness app.

Check to see if your local TV station (that has a meteorologist) has an app or save their URL in your Favorites on your mobile device and laptop/desktop computer. Also:

- Follow social media pages for your city or county, local first responders, and your local emergency management agency.
- Social media is often the first thing people check during an emerging crisis!
- Our partner, The Red Cross, has a free [Emergency App](#).
- You can also check out [FEMA's \(Federal Emergency Management Agency\) app](#).

3 Assess your needs, and those of your family and friends.

Build an emergency essentials kit for your home and a “go bag” or two (see below). Keep a (charged) phone power bank and back-up battery (if you have one) in each.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have any medical conditions, mobility challenges, or dietary requirements that require specific care or medication? Do I have instructions logged in the emergency settings in my mobile device?
- How will I ensure the safety and well-being of my pet or service animal?
- Have I established communication strategies with neighbors and local emergency services?
- What specific accommodations or assistive devices do I need during an emergency? Download assistive technology services on your mobile device in advance.
- Have I identified an accessible evacuation route and shelter? You can call 211, the 24/7 resource hotline in 99% of the U.S., to find out what disaster officials are recommending, if it's not on the local government website or app.
- Is my support network aware of my emergency plans and needs? Have I identified a buddy to assist me in an emergency – and way to contact them?
- Do I have all my (and my family's) important medical information in my phone? (Check out [this article](#).)

It can be hard to think about these things during a crisis. Think about it now – and take notes in your phone to help you remember the plan in an emergency.

Your emergency kit is vital to preparedness. But it's not like packing for a vacation! It's the things you and your family must have to survive outside your home. Start with [Ready.gov's list: Build A Kit](#).

Shop your home before you hit the stores. Collect items you already have in your home, such as (but not limited to):

- Non-perishable or “shelf stable” food that will last, and requires no cooking (e.g., canned food, peanut butter, and trail mix).
- A can opener
- Enough water for three days, which is one gallon per person per day
- First-aid kit, medications (take pictures of the prescription labels) and medical devices
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Phone/electronics charger and cords, and at least one charged power bank
- Emergency tools: battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra (new) batteries
- Personal items like toiletries and toilet paper
- One change of clothing for each person
- Sweatshirt or rain poncho for each person
- Pair of sneakers for each person
- Hand sanitizer and sunscreen
- For young children and infants: diapers, wipes, and baby formula, sippy cup & some non-perishable food in pouches
- Plastic resealable baggies and garbage bags
- Pet food and medication, leashes
- Copies of key documents

Keep a list of these items in your phone – this will help you remember what you have in your emergency essentials kit when it matters most. It will also help you track and replace used and expired items. Print a copy to hang on the side of your fridge.

4 Safeguard key documents and document valuables.

Use your phone to take pictures of key documents. Keep electronic copies of these important documents in a password-protected format on a removable flash or external hard drive in your fireproof and waterproof box or safe or consider using a secure cloud-based service. Once a year, walk around your house with your camera to record (and narrate) a visual list of your valuables and to give value estimates, for insurance purposes. Save this where you save your other important digital records.

Key documents can include:

- Vital records (birth, marriage, divorce certificate, adoption, child custody papers)
- Passport, driver's license, state government-issued ID, Social Security card, green card, military service identification, others
- Pet ownership papers, identification tags
- Housing: lease or rental agreement, mortgage, home equity line of credit, deed
- List of medications, immunizations, allergies, prescriptions, medical equipment and devices, pharmacy information
- Other financial obligations: utility bills, credit cards, student loans, alimony, child support, elder care, automatic payments such as gym memberships
- Financial accounts: checking, savings, debit cards, retirement, investment
- Insurance policies: home, health, flood, fire, and others
- [Check out Ready.gov's steps for more on key documents](#)

Since no one knows where we'll be when an emergency occurs, it's important to prepare supplies for home, work, and cars.

- Home: Keep a kit in a designated place and have it ready in case you have to leave your home quickly. Make sure all family members know where the kit is kept.
- Work: Be prepared to shelter at work for at least 24 hours. Your work kit should include food, water and other necessities like medicines, as well as comfortable walking shoes, stored in a "grab and go" case.
- Car: In case you are stranded, keep a kit of [emergency supplies in your car](#).

5 Engage your support network.

Now that you've taken these steps, make sure your family has done the same. Check in with your closest friends and extended family to share these tips. Discuss who may need extra help and designate someone to get them in an emergency. Check yourself and each other, asking yourself if:

- I have created a support network of family, friends, caregivers, fellow congregants at my place of worship, and others who can assist me during an emergency.
- I have shared my emergency plan with my support network.
- My support network is aware of any specific needs I have.
- Someone in my support network has an extra key to my home, knows where I keep my emergency supplies, and knows how to use lifesaving equipment and administer medicine.
- I know my clinic/hospital's emergency plans and have identified backup service providers.
- My support network and I are informed about local emergency alerts and updates.
- I have or will try to participate in a community preparedness event or initiative.

Contact your [local United Way](#) or check their website to find out if they have any preparedness workshops scheduled, or information about pending disasters.

Resource Information

FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Office):

FEMA Helpline 1-800-621-3362, 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. ET, 7 days a week. For inquiries about Individual Assistance benefits, email AskIA@fema.dhs.gov. To locate a local disaster recovery center, [click here](#).

Local emergency management office: Use this link to find your local emergency management office: [Search Your Location | FEMA.gov](#).

Local non-emergency phone numbers: Use this link to find local non-emergency phone numbers: [Police Non-Emergency Numbers: Searchable Directory](#).

211: Call, text, or chat this 24/7 resource line for accurate, up-to-date information about evacuation routes, water, food shelter or other locally available resources: <https://www.211.org>.

United Way: Find your local United Way here: <https://www.unitedway.org/find-your-united-way>.

County/Region/State/Tribal Organizations: Other non-profit organizations, including faith groups, food banks, shelters.

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

(VOAD) is a state-by-state coalition of non-profit organizations that work together to respond to and recover from disasters. VOADs (which United Way is active in) focus on coordination, communication, cooperation, and collaboration to ensure effective service delivery during disaster relief efforts. Contact your state VOAD: [State/Territory VOADs | VOAD](#).

[**Ready.Gov**](#)

[**Disaster Preparedness Guide for Caregivers**](#)

[**Disaster Preparedness Guide for Older Adults**](#)

[**Wireless Emergency Alerts**](#)

Additional Emergency Contact Information:

Common hazards and vulnerabilities affecting your region. Check out this National Risk Index for identifying the most likely and destructive natural hazards in your area: [National Risk Index for Natural Hazards | FEMA.gov](#).

Local Partnerships: ex: Local Red Cross contact information, county VOAD.

Locate shelters, food pantries, clothing, or health clinics: [Find Shelter | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#).

Local heating and cooling centers, shelters, food pantries, and other resources

FEMA App: [Download here](#).

Red Cross Emergency App: Great option for staying up to date with local resources and helping to develop an emergency plan. [Download here](#).