

72 hours: Is your family prepared for an emergency?

<http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/En/News/NewsAndFeatures/Pages/72-hours-Is-your-family-prepared-for-an-emergency.aspx>

Every spring, Emergency Preparedness Week encourages Canadians to plan for an emergency, such as a flood, fire, tornado, or pandemic. Your family should aim to be self-sustaining for at least 72 hours.

In the first few days of an emergency, essential service workers are swamped with responsibilities. They fix or maintain power and water, help those who cannot help themselves, take care of the sick and injured, and ensure public order. If many citizens are self-sufficient during the beginning of an emergency, essential workers will be better able to focus on their jobs and serve those truly in need.



In an emergency, your family may need to stay at home without access to food, water, or medicine. This is known as shelter in place. Alternatively, you may need to leave your home at very short notice and stay with friends or at an evacuation centre. Having an emergency plan and kit in place helps ensure that you are ready if an emergency strikes.

Know the risks

Disasters are different in every region. To find out what risks your family needs to be prepared for, go to the Public Safety Canada website or your local municipality's office of emergency management.

Your family's emergency plan

Make sure everyone in your family, including kids, knows what to do during and after an emergency. This includes:

- how to leave your home safely, including doors, windows, and stairways
- where to meet: this should be outside your home, usually a few doors down from your home or across the street
- who to call: have an emergency contact person who does not live in the same area as your family, so that if you get separated, everyone in your family knows to call this person

Review and update your plan at least once a year.

Special considerations for kids

Make sure that kids know the basics of the family emergency plan, including:

- escape routes from your home
- where to meet in an emergency
- the name, address, and phone number of your family's emergency contact person

Kids should also know:

- when and how to call 911 or emergency services
- their home address and telephone number
- how to identify the smell of gas; if they smell it, they should tell an adult and leave the building right away
- the basics of electrical safety: never touch wires that are lying on the ground or hanging from poles

Emergency preparedness is important, but presenting it too seriously may cause anxiety, especially if your child is a worrier. Help your kids become emergency-ready in a positive and age-appropriate way. Make fire drills into a "beat the clock" game, or get the whole family to help prepare an emergency kit. Involving your children in emergency preparedness may also help them feel less anxious when news of disasters and pandemics flood the TV.

Your family's emergency kit

Keep an emergency kit in a sturdy container, or in knapsacks so that it's easy to carry. Check your kit twice a year to make sure it is up to date. Your kit should include enough food, water, and supplies to meet your family's needs for at least 3 days, including:

- at least 3 litres (0.8 US gallons) of bottled water per person per day, enough for drinking, cooking, and basic hygiene
- canned foods, dried foods, and a can opener
- at least 1 week worth of medications
- copies of important documents such as prescriptions and health, financial, and family records
- important telephone numbers, including your emergency contact person, your local emergency services and poison information centre, your family doctor, your vet, your insurance company, and other family members
- money, including a few quarters for payphones; note that ATMs and cellphones may not always work in an emergency
- photos of family members in case you get separated
- sanitation supplies, including hand sanitizer, disinfectant, a bucket you can use as an emergency toilet, and bleach or water purification tablets
- a hand-cranked or battery-operated radio
- a complete change of clothes, including shoes, hats, and gloves, for each family member
- basic toiletries
- a first-aid kit
- supplies for your pet, including food, water, toys, a leash, and records

For detailed information on building an emergency kit, go to the Public Safety Canada website or your local municipality's office of emergency management.

Special considerations for kids

Think about what your kids might need if you had to stay in your home or a shelter for 3 days. Your kit might include:

- a 3-day supply of diapers, wipes, and barrier cream
- a 3-day supply of formula or baby food
- baby bottles
- a selection of age-appropriate games, toys, and books to keep kids occupied
- snacks and favourite comfort foods
- food for special diets, if needed
- medication, if needed

Remember, kids grow, so check your kit at least twice a year to make sure spare clothes are the right size.

If your child has special medical needs, it's especially important to be prepared for an emergency. Think about what your child might need if the power, water, heat, or air conditioning went out; if you had to stay home for a period of time without access to the outside world; or if you had to evacuate.

By their nature, emergencies often happen without warning. Taking some time now to prepare for an emergency could one day make all the difference to your family's comfort and safety.

For more information

Public Safety Canada has plenty of useful information on how to get prepared: getprepared.gc.ca

The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has emergency preparedness games and information for kids: www.fema.gov/kids/

Sesame Street's Let's Get Ready! program has tips and activities to help families prepare for an emergency together: www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/ready

Emergency preparedness for children with special needs, from Seattle Children's Hospital: cshcn.org/planning-record-keeping/emergency-preparedness-children-special-needs

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Sources

City of Toronto, Office of Emergency Management. Get Emergency Ready: Your Personal Preparedness Guide. Available from: http://www.toronto.ca/wes/techservices/oem/pdf/oem_booklet.pdf [accessed 2009-05-01]