

January 25, 2018

# Senior Emergency Preparedness

by [Nursing Home Law Center Staff](#)



In an emergency, staying safe often depends on having some type of preparedness plan in place. This is particularly true for senior citizens. Whether a person is in a senior care facility or living independently at home, clear steps should be taken to prepare for potential emergencies and their aftermath. When elderly individuals live in a nursing home, the responsibility for creating and implementing these plans is in the hands of the facility's administration and staff. Seniors who live on their own, however, often must create a preparedness plan for themselves.

During an emergency, people may find themselves in a situation where their access to necessary resources is delayed or limited. This may hinder their ability to refill medications or buy staples such as water or food. For this reason, one of the first steps in preparing for a potential emergency is to put together and maintain an emergency supply kit.

This kit should include enough food to last each person in the home three full days. The food that's kept in the kit should consist of non-perishable items in cans or sealed in waterproof packaging. A can opener and eating utensils should also be stored with the food. In addition, a three-day supply of water, one gallon per day per person, is recommended. Because seniors often have pets or service animals, extra pet food and water may be necessary, too.

In addition to food, create and keep a first aid kit that's filled with supplies needed to treat potential injuries. These supplies should include items such as bandages, antibiotic ointments, and aspirin. Seniors who rely on medications must ensure that they are able to continue taking them during an emergency: Store enough medicine to continue taking it as prescribed for one week or longer. Place copies of any prescriptions in a plastic baggie to keep them from getting wet, and keep an extra copy in another location as a backup.

Some seniors may need to have backup items such as an additional pair of eyeglasses, extra oxygen, or a spare hearing aid and extra batteries for it. Copies of one's Medicare and Medicaid cards should also be kept in the emergency preparedness kit so that they're available if needed. Non-medical emergency supplies that can be useful include a hand-crank radio, flashlight, spare batteries, pliers, and a map.

After creating an emergency kit, it's important to check the home for any items that may fall during emergency situations such as earthquakes. Falling objects can cause serious injury or death, or they may block exits from the home. Any heavy item that's at risk of falling should be properly secured.

In addition, make sure that your finances will be covered. For instance, seniors often have their benefit checks sent to their homes, but they can ensure that they are financially prepared for an emergency by having their benefits automatically deposited into their bank account. Additionally, authorizing automatic payment of bills from this account will ensure that payments are not missed while you're distracted by a crisis.

When planning out what steps to take in the event of an emergency, one should plan out a network of trusted friends and relatives who would be willing and able to help with situations such as providing transportation, for example. They should all be aware of the details of the plan and be people who care about the well-being of the elderly individual. Elderly individuals should plan to stay in contact with these people during a crisis and to call them if needed. One or two trusted individuals should be asked to check on the person in question immediately following any major event that might occur.

In the event that a person must evacuate their home, they should have an established place to go. One may ask people within their network of friends if they are willing to host them temporarily if this should occur. People who do not have anyone to stay with should know where the area's emergency shelters are located and how to get there.

Because pets are not allowed in most shelters, pet owners should inquire about a shelter's animal policy in advance. If the number of shelters allowing pets is limited, it is important to plan for where the animal can temporarily stay.

For more information and to pre-register with Pinellas County as special needs assistance please go to <http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/specialneeds.htm>