



## Special Needs

The elderly and chronically ill are particularly vulnerable during an emergency such as a hurricane. Power outages can pose serious threats to someone dependent on respiratory devices or other medical devices.

Follow these steps to ease the difficulty of accommodating a special needs family member in an emergency:

- If a family member needs assistance with evacuation, register with local emergency authorities before hurricane season begins. Emergency response crews will not be able to help you when the storm arrives
- Register with your local power company. Most companies do give special priority to homebound patients but it may take time before crews can begin work
- Make prior arrangements with your physician and medical supplier if you require medical devices that operate on electricity
- If you require oxygen, check with your supplier about emergency plans
- If you have to evacuate, make sure to bring any medications, special equipment, walkers, wheelchairs and other aids, along with written care instructions
- Help those with special needs by preparing their homes and property for emergencies, shopping for supplies and writing a disaster plan

If you do not evacuate, have a list of friends and family members with their phone numbers so you can make quick arrangements to stay with them in the event of a power outage. And identify the nearest hospital that could help provide emergency electricity for life-support equipment.

Your family members living in a nursing home also need assistance to prepare for a storm. Ask health care providers if they are ready for disasters or emergencies. Preparations should include:

- Transportation agreements that are renewed every year
- Maps with highlighted evacuation routes
- A disaster plan annually reviewed by staff and administration
- Emergency training for employees on a regular basis
- An identification method for residents that includes names, ages, medical conditions and medications
- A list of items and care procedures for each resident in the event of evacuation
- A list of volunteers who will help in an emergency
- Transfer forms to authorize admissions to hospitals if necessary

The best arrangement may be to include special needs family members in the evacuation.



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Prepare in advance. Shop for supplies and store for emergency use. Secure the home when an emergency occurs. Teach those who may need to assist in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment a special needs family member may need. If a personal care attendant is a part of your family's support system, discuss emergency planning with his/her employer as well as the attendant. Will services be provided in other areas should an evacuation be necessary? If a special needs shelter is an option, will the caregiver go with your family member? If hearing aids, electric wheelchairs or other battery-operated equipment are used, store aids and batteries in easily accessible places. For the hearing impaired: Consider carrying a preprinted card that reads, "I speak American Sign Language." At home (or in a nursing home), create and post a list of friends and family and phone numbers to call for help should the need arise. Include at least one (1) out-of-state and one (1) local friend or family member.

Patients who are on homebound life support or are home health care patients, know this: During many emergencies, emergency vehicles will not be able to pick you up. If you are going to evacuate, make arrangements early. Notify your home health agency where you will be during an emergency, or contact your physician if you are not under the care of a home health agency. Check with your oxygen supplier about emergency planning. Locate the nearest hospital that can provide emergency power if you have electricity-dependent equipment and electrical service may be interrupted.

Medical Special Needs Shelters. Who is eligible? Medical Special Needs Shelters are intended for those who need assistance that cannot be guaranteed in a regular shelter (for example, medication that requires refrigeration, power for special equipment, etc.), and have no other resources.

Those who qualify for a Medical Special Needs Shelter cannot be ill and must:

- Be able to provide for their own basic care
- Have a chronic, debilitating medical condition that requires intermittent or occasional assistance
- Be dependent on electricity on an intermittent basis for medical treatments or refrigeration of medicines
- Meet the criteria and be a candidate for services supported in the shelter
- Those found to be acutely ill will be referred to local hospitals.

Those in a nursing home: Are your family member's health care providers prepared for a disaster or emergency? Look for: annually reviewed and in-place disaster emergency plans and ongoing, in-house staff emergency preparedness training; patient identification plans (name tags, wristbands, medical conditions, etc.); transfer forms and transport plans for evacuations; maps with evacuation routes noted; and list of supplies and medicines that are to accompany



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your family member in the event of an evacuation.

If you move to a Medical Special Needs Shelter, remember to take:

- Medications and equipment needed to administer
- Written instructions regarding your care
- Walker, wheelchair, cane or other special equipment
- Bedding
- Identification, insurance, health and Social Security cards
- Batteries
- Nonperishable food including that needed for special diets (five [5]-day supply)
- Personal hygiene items
- Clothes
- Air mattress
- Drinking water (one [1] gallon per day)
- Extra glasses
- Flashlight
- Garbage bags
- Food for guide or service dogs (if applicable)
- Style and serial numbers for medical devices (such as pacemakers)
- Draw sheets (if appropriate)
- Plastic hospital-type urinal (if needed)

A caregiver must stay with a special needs family member while in the shelter.



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