



General Weather Hazard Guidance

For Caregivers

Whether you are caring for children, a family member with complicated medical issues or advanced age, someone with limited mobility, someone living with mental health challenges, or someone with other specific or special needs, it is important to think about how you can help them prepare for and stay safe during the types of emergencies that are becoming more common as a result of climate change.

This guide is intended to give you a simple list of things to consider. It will be most effective if you talk about it with the person you are caring for and their healthcare team. If possible, you should talk about this with them now, so that if something dangerous happens you will be ready.

Learn about local hazards and health risks

Climate change is leading to more dangerous heat waves, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, and wildfire smoke events. These can cause health problems, particularly for people who are very young, very old, pregnant, living with disabilities, or living with certain medical or mental health conditions.

Wherever you live, there are one or more climate-related health hazards that you need to know about. Most people in the United States are at risk from heat and wildfire smoke. Many people are at risk from flooding; your risk will depend on local geography. If you live in the southern or eastern part of the country, you may face risks from hurricanes.

What you can do:

- Learn which hazards are most dangerous in your location. You can learn where to find information about each hazard in the patient information sheets in this toolkit. If you want more detailed information, the provider materials have additional information you may find helpful.
- Review the patient information sheets for each hazard.
- Write down a list of hazards (such as heat, flooding, fires, smoke, and hurricanes) that you need to pay attention to.
- Write down a list of medical issues related to each hazard that you need to think about for the person you are caring for.
- Ask your healthcare team for more information. They can help you understand how each of these hazards might affect the person you are caring for.

Plan ahead to prevent medical problems

You can prevent many of the health problems caused by wildfires, smoke, heat, floods, and hurricanes by planning ahead and taking specific actions. This can help the person you are caring for stay safe and avoid injuries or health problems.

- Talk to your healthcare team about making a plan for the person you care for. They can help you decide what is most important for them.
- Make sure that the person you are caring for has enough medication available to get through a climate related disaster and its immediate aftermath, during which pharmacies may not be open.

- Make sure that the person you are caring for is living in a home that supports their health. If possible, their home should provide them with shelter from severe weather, a cool space to stand when the weather is very hot, clean air when there are dangerous levels of air pollution or wildfire smoke, and a safe place to store medications and other supplies that they may need.
- You can refer to the patient materials in the sections of this toolkit focused on heat, fire, flood, and hurricanes, as well as general information, for additional ideas about how to keep the person you are caring for safe. These documents include checklists and action plans that you can fill out with them.

Check on and support people who live alone

If you are caring for someone who still lives alone, check on them regularly before, during, and after a weather disaster. You may be able to help them avoid medical problems and access important resources.

Before a disaster

- Check to make sure that they know something dangerous is about to happen.
- Make sure they have enough groceries, stored water (in case the water supply stops working), and other essentials.
- You can refer to the sheets on **Building an Emergency Kit** and **Plan for Power Outages** for more information.

During a disaster

- If possible, be present with them during the disaster. Transportation may become impossible, and you may not be able to get to them if you need to during a hurricane, flood, or wildfire.
- If you cannot be with them, check in regularly by telephone to make sure that they are safe.
- Checking in regularly is particularly important during heat waves because people can become confused and not realize how hot they are getting.
- Regular check-ins can save lives.

After a disaster

- Make sure they have a safe place to stay.
 - If they are staying in or returning to their home, check for structural damage, water damage, and/or smoke damage. If in doubt, ask for a professional evaluation.
 - If they are staying in a shelter, hotel, or another person's home, check to make sure that they have their medications, medical devices, and other essentials.
- Make sure their medical needs are met.
 - Make sure they continue to take their medicines and are able to get refills when needed.
 - Make sure they can get their regularly scheduled essential medical services such as dialysis.
 - Check-in with their primary care doctor about any refills or medical evaluations that need to happen.
 - Watch for signs of illness or mental health impacts and help them get appropriate medical attention.

- Help them access services and resources.
- See if they qualify for federal, state, or local financial assistance.
- See if there are programs to help support survivors.
- Reach out to patient advocacy organizations or disability groups to address civic needs or conditions of the person you care for. These groups may be able to direct you toward additional resources.

Have an evacuation plan

Pay attention to local media outlets for evacuation orders. Know how to get the person you are caring for out of their home - where the exits are and what windows can be opened. If they have special mobility needs, make sure you have the necessary equipment available.

Identify an emergency contact for them to call and update on plans, if relevant. This may be you or another person involved in their care.

Their emergency contact person is: _____

Their phone number is: _____

Identify both a preferred and backup evacuation location that has power if needed. If possible, these two locations should be in different directions from their home.

The evacuation locations we will take them to are:

1. _____

2. _____

If we need to evacuate them, the vehicle/transport we will use is: _____

Never drive or walk or take transport into standing water.

If we need help evacuating them, I can call:

Name

Phone

1. _____

2. _____

Information about specific hazards

Older adults who live alone are at exceptionally high-risk during heatwaves. They may not realize how hot or dehydrated they are getting. Checking on older adults during heatwaves can save lives.

People with limited mobility may have a hard time evacuating. This can put them in danger during floods, hurricanes, and wildfires. Evacuating well ahead of time will give everyone more time to deal with these challenges.

Hurricanes, floods, and wildfires can damage or destroy homes. If you must evacuate someone that you are caring for because of one of these hazards, bring everything you need to care for them away from their home for a long time. The emergency kit document has more information.

Wildfire smoke can travel hundreds or thousands of miles. If the person you are caring for has lung disease or breathing problems, pay attention to wildfire smoke conditions and air quality. Refer to materials in the **Module for Wildfire Smoke** for more information.

Self-care

Caring for another person is one of the most meaningful things that you can do. It is also one of the most challenging.

Many caregivers struggle to balance the needs of the person they are caring for with their own, and may also experience psychological stressors, financial hardships, and other challenges. It is important to give yourself permission to meet your own needs, both physical and psychological, in order to be there for the person you are caring for. Additional resources for caregivers are available at <https://www.hhs.gov/programs/providers-and-facilities/resources-for-caregivers/index.html>.

In addition, hazards such as wildfires, hurricanes, floods, and heat waves can lead to anxiety, distress and PTSD, and other mental health impacts, even in people who do not have the responsibility of caring for another person. If you are experiencing fear, anxiety, feelings of helplessness or hopelessness or isolation, or other symptoms related to the stress, please reach out to your primary care doctor, a licensed mental health professional, your local ER, or other people who can help you address these feelings and get appropriate help. Symptoms to watch out for and resources you may find helpful are available at <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-behavioral-health-resources>

If you become overwhelmed and have thoughts of suicide or self-harm, please call 911, go to your nearest Emergency Department, or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at one of the numbers below.

- English: 1-800-273-8255
- Espanol: 1-866-628-9454
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing: 1-800-799-4889
- Veterans: 1-800-273-8255
- Disaster Distress: 1-800-985-5990

