



EMERGENCIES AND DISASTERS KEEPING CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS SAFE

We hope emergencies and disasters never happen, especially to our children. But we know they do. As parents, teachers, relatives, neighbors, and friends who care for and about children and youth with special health care needs, we want to keep our children safe.

ALL families should have emergency plans for their children. If your son or daughter has special health care needs, your emergency plan will probably be more complicated, involve more people, and may require equipment. This will be the case if your child or youth:

- Depends on electricity --- to breathe, be fed, stay comfortable;
- Cannot be moved easily because of his medical condition or attachment to equipment;
- Uses a wheelchair, walker, or other device to move;
- Cannot survive extreme temperatures, whether hot or cold;
- Becomes afraid or agitated when sudden changes happen;
- Cannot get out of an emergency by herself for physical or emotional reasons.

IDEAS FOR MAKING AN EMERGENCY PLAN

Below are some simple tips to help you begin to make an emergency plan, followed by a short list of resources that can provide more information. We strongly suggest that you ask your child's physician or your local parent organization to help you make your plan.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION FORM – The *Emergency Information Form*, developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American College of Emergency Physicians, can be downloaded from the AAP website in an interactive format so it can be saved on a family's home computer and easily updated, or it can be printed out. This is a good format to use when developing an emergency plan with your child's physician for your child with complex conditions.

Start by filling out this simple 2-page emergency form. Distribute the completed form where your child goes regularly. The form is available on the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) website: <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/eif.doc>.

HOME - Everyone in your home should know what to do in an emergency, whether it's a power outage, fire, or natural disaster, such as a flood or tornado.

- **Instructions:** Prepare simple, one-page emergency instructions, and update as things change. Include information about exits, fire extinguishers, and power shut-offs. Place them where they can be seen. And have everyone practice.
- **Medical Things:** Make sure your child's medicine, medical records, and important equipment are easy to grab if you have to leave suddenly.
- **Electricity and Telephone:** Tell your local utilities that your child depends on electricity. Ask them to "flag" your household and to bring power back quickly to your home. Get a generator if you can.
- **Emergency Services:** Visit your nearest emergency center (fire department, rescue squad, 911 facility). Tell them about your child. Invite them to your home to become familiar with the situation and to give you emergency tips.



- **Local Hospital:** For some children or youth, the nearest hospital might be the safest place to be in a disaster, so you and your doctor should work out admitting procedures to avoid an ER wait.
- **Emergency Box:** Keep a box containing flashlight, water, blankets, with necessities and comforts for your child, close to an exit.

SCHOOL - Every student with special health care needs, whether physical or emotional, must have a school emergency plan. A student's IEP plan should include emergency plans available to all school personnel. But one team member must be responsible for getting your child to safety, no matter where he is in the school, and must practice with your child frequently. Make sure your child's school bus staff also knows what to do in an emergency—and has practiced it.

OTHER PLACES - Every place your child goes should have an emergency plan for your child. This includes child care center, summer camp, hospital, grandparent's house, recreation program, as well as the glove compartment in each of your cars, and your child's backpack. The 2-page emergency form (see above) might be the easiest way to do this.

RESOURCES WITH EMERGENCY AND DISASTER INFORMATION

Before you make your child's plan, look for tips and guides about emergencies and disasters. The Internet has many sites about preparing for emergencies for children and is your best resource. If you don't have a computer, call or visit your local library, school, community center, or parent group and ask for assistance finding emergency information to help you make a plan.

- Emergency Medical System for Children/EMSC. Visit www.ems.c.org, and click on Rehabilitation and Children with Special Needs to find materials like an Emergency Care Plan, as well as booklets and CDs for specific diagnoses or purposes. Phone is 202/884-4927.
- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Going to www.aap.org, you will find a special section called Children Terrorism, and Disasters, where disaster plan kits and other information can help you.
- American Red Cross. Call your local chapter. Or visit www.AmericanRedCross.org where there is information about on emergency planning and tips for people with disabilities.
- Independent Living Center of San Francisco. Go to www.ilrcsf.org to find excellent materials in several languages --- from tip sheets to basic preparedness. Or call 415/543-6222.
- The National Safety Council. Visit www.nsc.org for sections on Emergencies and Disasters, Checklist for Home, and links to the Red Cross and other resources. Tollfree 1/800-621-7619.
- Family Voices. www.familyvoices.org, is a wonderful source of information about kids with special needs, listing family leader contacts in each state, state and national activities, publications, and issues facing our families and children. Tollfree 1/888-835-5669.