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Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities/Special Needs

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Introduction

Being prepared for emergencies is a shared duty. Every person is urged to be equipped to handle a crisis for at least the first 72 hours while emergency personnel attend to those who need help right away.

This manual offers instructions on creating an emergency plan and kit for those with special needs or disabilities as well as for the caretakers. Even though everyone is affected by disasters and emergencies, the effects on those with disabilities or special needs are frequently made worse because of things like reliance on electrical power, elevators, accessible transportation, and accessible communication, all of which can be compromised in emergency situations.

You may improve your readiness to handle a variety of emergencies by taking a few easy steps right now. You should be able to take care of yourself and your loved ones during an emergency by following these simple procedures.

Three fundamental steps are involved in emergency preparation:

- **Realizing the dangers / risks**
- **Planned action (making a plan)**
- **acquiring a survival kit**

About this manual

Special needs and disabilities are distinguished as separate categories on each component.

According to particular disabilities/special needs, each section offers a list of suggested emergency kit components and preparation advice for persons and caregivers.

Please note that neither first aid instruction nor medical advice is provided in this guide.

How do you establish a network of support?

Whether you need assistance in an emergency, ask the individuals you trust if they are willing to do so.

- Choose contacts for key locations like home, work, or school. In an emergency, neighbours are frequently the nearest and most accessible contacts.
- Inform these helpers of the location of your emergency kit.
- Give the key to your house to one of the group. Include a support network contact who is sufficiently removed from the emergency to be unlikely to be impacted by it.
- To create a strategy that suits your needs, collaborate with your support system.
- With your network, test out your emergency plan. Show them how your special needs equipment operates, if applicable.

Emergency Kit Checklist

In an emergency you will need some basic supplies. Be prepared to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours. These items may not apply to every situation or every person; refer to the appropriate section in this guide for additional recommended items and select them according to your own needs. Check your kit twice a year to ensure contents are up to date. Re-stock as needed.

Basic emergency kit checklist

- **Water – at least two litres of water per person per day. Include small bottles that can be carried easily in case of an evacuation order**
- **Food that won't spoil, such as canned food, energy bars and dried foods (replace food and water once a year)**
- **Wind-up or battery-powered flashlight (and extra batteries)**
- **Wind-up or battery-powered radio (and extra batteries)**
- **First aid kit**
- **Special items such as prescription medications, MedicAlert® bracelet or identification**
- **Extra keys to your car and house**
- **Cash in smaller bills, such as \$10 bills and change for payphones**
- **Special items according to your needs (i.e., prescription medication, infant formula, special equipment, pet food and water, etc)**
- **A copy of your emergency plan and contact information**
- **Manual can-opener**

Recommended additional items checklist

Two additional litres of water per person per day for cooking and cleaning

Candles and matches or lighter (place candles in sturdy containers and do not burn unattended)

Change of clothing and footwear for each household member

Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each household member

Toiletries, hand sanitizer, utensils, Garbage bags for personal sanitation

Minimum of a week's supply of prescription medications

Household chlorine bleach or water purifying tablets

Basic tools (hammer, pliers, wrench, screwdrivers, work gloves, dust mask, pocket knife)

Small fuel-operated stove and fuel (follow manufacturer's directions and store fuel properly)

A whistle (in case you need to call for help)

People With a Disability / Special Needs – Tips

Make sure all your emergency kit items are organized in one place, easy to find and to carry.

Tag all of your special needs equipment including instructions on how to use and/or move each assistive device during an emergency.

Complete a checklist and personal assessment sheet and provide a copy to your designated network(s).

Keep a copy in your emergency kit(s).

If you have food / drug allergies, wear a MedicAlert® bracelet.

List all food/drug allergies and current medications (for each medication, specify the medical condition being treated, the generic name, dosage, frequency, and the name and contact information of the prescribing physician). Provide this list to your designated network and keep a copy in your emergency kit(s).

People With a Disability / Special Needs – Tips

If you rely on any life sustaining equipment or if you require regular attendant care, ask your network to check on you immediately if an emergency occurs and have an emergency backup plan in the event of a power outage.

During an emergency, if your support network is unable to help, ask others for help and inform them of your special needs and how they can assist you.

Carry a personal alarm that emits a loud noise to draw attention.

Be aware that experiencing an emergency can be overwhelming and stress can worsen some medical conditions.

Assisting People With a Disability / Special Needs – Tips

Ask if the person wants your help, and how you may best assist them.

If someone refuses your help, wait for first responders to arrive, unless it is a matter of life or death.

Do not touch the person, their service animal or equipment without their permission, unless it is a matter of life or death.

Follow instructions posted on special needs equipment.

You may be asked to use latex-free gloves to reduce the spread of viral infection or to prevent an allergic reaction to latex.

Ask the person if areas of their body have reduced sensation and if they want you to check those areas for injuries.

Assisting People With a Disability / Special Needs – Tips

Do not try to move someone unless you are trained in proper techniques.

If a person is unconscious or unresponsive do not administer any liquids or food.

If the person has a service animal, it is the animal owner's responsibility to assess whether or not it is safe for the animal to work through the emergency situation.

To make this decision, the service animal owner will need information as to the nature of the hazards they are expected to face and any changes to the physical environment.

If providing sighted assistance, the first responder or caregiver should confirm that the service animal is then not working, and is therefore off duty.

LACK OF MOVEMENT

A person with mobility issues could find it challenging to use stairs or travel rapidly across long distances. Reliance on mobility aids like a wheelchair, walker, crutches, or a walking cane may be a limitation.

People who have breathing problems or cardiac conditions may also be less mobile.'s emergency strategyRequest that an emergency evacuation chair be kept close to a stairwell on the same floor as your home or place of employment if you use a wheelchair or scooter so that your network may easily access it to assist you during an evacuation.

The disabled person needs to be involved in choosing the evacuation chair. Those who need to use an evacuation chair should choose a primary and backup contact who will help them if there is a need to evacuate. Together with the building management and contact people, draught an escape plan and practise using the chair.

If you can't check for injuries yourself after an emergency, identify any regions of your body that have decreased sensation on your personal evaluation checklist.Find out whether there are wheelchair-accessible emergency shelters in your region by contacting your local municipal office.

Assisting a person with a movement disability – what to do

If possible, use latex-free gloves when providing personal care.

Try to ensure that the person's wheelchair is transported with the person.

If this is not possible, employ other evacuation techniques as appropriate, such as use of the evacuation chair, shelter-in-place (if instructed to do so), or lifts and carries by trained personnel.

Do not push or pull a person's wheelchair without their permission, unless it is a matter of life or death.

Non Visible Disability

Even though their illness is not visible, people with non-visible disabilities may have trouble completing some jobs.

A person's ability to react to an emergency may be hampered by non-visible limitations such as communication, cognitive, sensory, mental health, learning, or intellectual impairments. Allergies, epilepsy, diabetes, lung or cardiac illness, and/or dependence on dialysis are examples of conditions.

- **Keep a list of contacts handy for emergencies.**
- **Important people who are aware of your unique requirements should be included on this list.**
- **Tell your chosen support group where you keep your medications.**
- **To assist in alerting emergency responders to your unique needs, think about wearing a MedicAlert® bracelet or identification.**
- **In order to alert others to your location and the fact that you require particular assistance in an emergency, request that panic push-button installations be made in your living and working spaces.**

Assisting a person without Visible Disability– what to do

Allow the person to describe the help they need.

Find effective ways to communicate, such as drawn or written instructions, using landmarks instead of general terms like "go left" or "turn right".

Maintain eye contact when speaking to the person.

Repeat instructions (if needed).

If a person needs to take medication, ask if he/she needs help taking it. (Never offer medicine not prescribed by a physician.)

Assisting a person with Hearing Loss– what to do

Hearing

The way that emergency warnings are issued in an emergency is critical to the understanding of instructions and the subsequent response and safety of those with hearing loss.

Your emergency plan

Communicate your hearing loss by moving your lips without making a sound, pointing to your ear, using a gesture, or if applicable, pointing to your hearing aid.

Keep a pencil and paper handy for written communication.

Obtain a pager that is connected to an emergency paging system at your workplace and/or your residence. Install a smoke detection system that includes flashing strobe lights or vibrators to get your attention if the alarms sound.

Test smoke alarms monthly by pushing the test button.

Replace batteries every six months or whenever there is a low battery signal.

Assisting a person with Hearing Loss – what to do

Recommended additional items checklist

Writing pads and pencils for communication

Flashlight, whistle or personal alarm

Pre-printed phrases you would use during an emergency, such as "I use Sign Language" or "If you make announcements, I will need to have them written simply or signed".

Assistive equipment according to your needs (i.e., hearing aid, personal amplifier, etc.)

Portable visual notification devices to know if someone is knocking on the door, ringing the doorbell, or calling on the telephone

Extra batteries for assistive devices

A card or any other document that explains your hearing loss and identifies how first responders can communicate with you during an emergency

What to do while assisting a person with Hearing Loss

You can use a visual cue or a light touch on their arm to draw their attention.

Never approach someone from behind.

As they might rely on lip reading and converse close up, speak to the person directly and make eye contact.

Speak naturally and plainly. Avoid shouting or speaking too slowly.

Rather than saying the same thing again, try to rephrase.

Make motions to further clarify your meaning.

It could be beneficial to write a message if there is time.

Avoid making loud noises since hearing aids can provide a physical shock to the wearer by amplifying sounds.

Be aware that some persons may be blind and deaf.

What to do while assisting a person with Visual Impairedness

Vision

A person who is blind or has reduced vision may have difficulty reading signs or moving through unfamiliar environments during an emergency. They may feel lost and/or dependent on others for guidance.

Your emergency plan

- Have a longer white cane available to readily manoeuvre around obstacles (there may be debris on the floor or furniture may have shifted).
- Identify all emergency supplies in advance with fluorescent tape, large print or Braille text, such as gas, water and electric shutoff valves.
- Familiarize yourself in advance with all escape routes and locations of emergency doors/exits on each floor of any building where you work, live and visit.
- Recommended additional items checklist
 - Extra white cane, preferably longer in length
 - Talking or Braille clock
 - Large print timepiece with extra batteries
 - Extra vision aids such as an electronic travel aid, monocular, binocular or magnifier
 - Extra pair of prescription glasses (if applicable)
 - Any reading devices / assistive technology to access information or portable CCTV devices

Assisting a person with a vision disability – what to do

- For people who are deaf-blind, draw an "X" on their back with your finger to let them know you can help them.
- To communicate with someone who is deaf-blind, trace letters in their hand with your finger.
- To guide a person, keep half a step ahead, offer them your arm and walk at their pace.
- Do not shout at a person who is blind or has reduced vision. Speak clearly and provide specific directions.
- Provide advance warning of upcoming stairs, major obstacles or changes in direction.
- Watch for obstacles that the person could walk into.
- Never grab a person with vision loss, unless it is a matter of life or death.
- Do not assume that the person cannot see you.
- Avoid the term "over there"; describe positions such as, "to your right / left / straight ahead / behind you", or by using the clock face positions (i.e., the exit is at 12 o'clock).
- If the person has a service animal on duty, ask them where you should walk to avoid distracting the animal. Do not separate the service animal from its owner.

Seniors With a Disability/ Special Needs

Seniors, especially those with special needs, should be informed of what to do in an emergency. Contact your municipality to find out about programs and services in your area that will help you during an emergency and assist you in returning to your daily routine.

Your emergency plan

- Create an emergency contact list identifying your personal support network, including physicians, case worker, a contact from a seniors group, neighbours and your building superintendent.
- Keep a copy of this list in your emergency kit and on your person.
- Familiarize yourself with all escape routes, emergency equipment and the location of emergency doors / exits in your home.
- Request that a panic push-button be installed in your work and/or living area so that in the event of an emergency you can notify others of your location and that you need special assistance.

Seniors With a Disability/ Special Needs

Recommended additional items checklist

Non-perishable food appropriate to your dietary restrictions

Assistive devices needed such as canes, walkers, lightweight manual wheelchair, hearing aids, breathing apparatus, blood glucose monitoring device

Extra prescription eyewear and footwear (if required)

Extra supply of medications and vitamin supplements

A list of all your needed medical supplies and special equipment

Copies of all medication prescriptions

Extra dentures (if required) and cleaner

Latex-free gloves (for anyone providing personal care to you)

Seniors With a Disability/ Special Needs

Assisting a senior with a disability / special needs – what to do

- **Check on neighbours to find out if there are seniors who would need your help during an emergency.**
- **Always speak calmly and provide assurance that you are there to help. Avoid shouting or speaking unnaturally slowly.**
- **Let the person tell you how you can help.**
- **Know the location of emergency buttons (many seniors' buildings have emergency buttons located in bedrooms and washrooms).**
- **Follow instructions posted on special needs equipment and/or assistive devices.**