



This article was produced in collaboration with Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

## PREPARING YOUR FAMILY FOR AN EMERGENCY

### The Issue

If a disaster happens in your community, it may take some time for emergency workers to get to you as they help others in desperate need. You should be prepared to take care of yourself and your family for a minimum of 72 hours.

### Background

Across the country, Canadians face a number of potential hazards, ranging from earthquakes, to blizzards, to hurricanes. In addition to natural disasters, there are other types of risks, such as outbreaks of disease, blackouts, large chemical spills, transportation accidents, nuclear incidents and the possibility of acts of terrorism.

If disaster strikes, you may have to evacuate your home on a moment's notice. Or, you may find yourself home-bound without electricity, water supply or access to stores and banks. All levels of government in Canada have emergency response plans in place, but it may take several days for first responders to reach you. It is impossible to predict everything that might happen during an emergency, but you can minimize the potential impact on your family by preparing ahead and being ready to take care of yourself and your family for at least 72 hours.

### Preparing for Emergencies

A few basic steps can prepare your family to face a range of emergencies – anytime, anywhere. For each of the steps outlined below, there are tools (e.g., self-help guides, checklists) and other resources to help you get started. The resources are listed in the Need More Info? section at the end of the article.

#### Step One – Know the risks. Know your region.

Although the consequences of disasters can be similar, knowing the risks specific to your region can help you prepare yourself better. Are floods likely in your area? Is there a history of tornados, earthquakes or hurricanes in the region? Two Web sites that can help you find this information are listed at the end of this article in the

Need More Info? section. Once you know about the risks in your region, you can use free, self-help publications (produced by the Government of Canada) on preparing for those specific situations.

#### Step Two – Make a Plan

Every Canadian household needs an emergency plan. Put the plan in writing. It will help your family know what to do in case of emergency. Practise your plan. As a minimum, the plan should include the following elements:

- emergency exits from each room of your home;
- an escape route from your neighbourhood in case you are ordered to evacuate;
- a previously identified area where family members should meet if they have to leave home during an emergency;
- plans for specific risks, such as what to do in case of an earthquake, flood or blackout;
- emergency contact information, such as telephone numbers for your dentist, doctor, pharmacist, veterinarian, out-of-town contacts, family, friends and neighbours; and
- safety information, such as the location of the fire extinguisher and how to turn off the water, electricity or gas, if necessary.

#### Step Three - Prepare a Kit

Put together an emergency kit with enough basic supplies for at least 72 hours. Make sure your kit is easy to carry. Keep it in a backpack, duffel bag or suitcase with wheels, in an easy-to-reach place, such as your front door closet. As a minimum, the kit should contain the following:

- two litres of water per person per day, plus water for pets;
- a three-day supply of food (including pet food) that will not spoil, such as canned food, energy bars, dried foods (remember to replace the food and water at least once a year);



- a manual can opener;
- flashlight, batteries, candles and matches or lighter;
- a battery-powered or wind-up radio, plus extra batteries;
- a first aid kit, including such essentials as ASA, ibuprofen, anti-nausea and anti-diarrhea products;
- special items, such as feminine hygiene products and prescription medications (In an emergency, pharmacies may be closed for some time. Talk to your doctor about preparing a "grab and go" bag with a two-week supply of your medications. Also, ask how often you should replace the medications with a fresh supply);
- some cash (or travellers cheques) in small bills, change for telephones;
- copies of your emergency plan, contact information and other important documents (license, birth certificate, passport, etc.) stored in a water-proof container; and
- a change of clothing and footwear for each family member

In addition to preparing a kit, it is also a good idea to stock up on non-perishable items (e.g., toilet paper, paper towels, more candles, dried or canned foods, etc.) in case stores remain closed or you are unable to leave your home during an emergency.

## Minimizing Your Risk

Prepare your family for emergencies, including risks specific to your region. Start today, using the self-help guides listed in the Need More Info? section. In case of a major emergency:

- follow your emergency plan;
- get your emergency kit;
- make sure you are safe before assisting others;
- listen to the radio or television for information from authorities;
- stay put unless ordered to evacuate;

- if ordered to evacuate, take your emergency kit, essential medications and a cellular phone with charger, if you have one;
- take your pets with you; and
- if possible, let your out-of-town contacts know where you are going and when you have arrived safely.

## The Governments' Roles

All levels of government in Canada are involved in preparing for and responding to emergencies or disasters. Municipal governments respond to local emergencies; provincial and territorial governments respond to emergencies within their borders, but may request federal government assistance, if required.

At the federal level, where assistance is requested – or should the emergency involve more than one province or territory – the Government of Canada will mobilize its resources. For most emergencies, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (PSEPC) will coordinate the federal response. PSEPC also works with the provinces, territories and other partners on public awareness campaigns about safety, such as Canada's annual Emergency Preparedness Week.

In the event of an emergency that poses a risk to public health, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada also play key roles in protecting the health and safety of Canadians.

## Need More Info?

Contact:  
Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (PSEPC)  
340 Laurier Avenue West  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0P8  
or visit the PSEPC Web site at <http://www.psepc.gc.ca/index-en.asp>

To learn more about emergency preparedness, visit the Emergency Preparedness Week Web site at [www.epweek.ca](http://www.epweek.ca). You can download self-help publications, such as Your emergency preparedness guide. There are also links to resources on planning

for specific risks, such as earthquakes, storms and power outages. You can also order these publications by calling 1-800- O-Canada (1-800-622-6232) TTY: 1-800-926-9105, from Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. local time.

To find out about risks specific to your region, visit the following Web sites:

Canadian Disaster Database at:  
<http://www.psepc.gc.ca/res/em/cdd/index-en.asp>

Natural Hazards of Canada at:  
<http://www.psepc.gc.ca/res/em/nh/index-en.asp>

Also, see the following:

The Safe Canada Web site at:  
[http://www.safecanada.ca/menu\\_e.asp](http://www.safecanada.ca/menu_e.asp)

The Public Health Agency of Canada's Emergency Preparedness Web site at:  
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ep-mu/index.html>

Health Canada's Emergencies & Disasters Web site at:  
[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ed-ud/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ed-ud/index_e.html)

For additional articles on health and safety issues go to the It's Your Health Web site at:  
[www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh)  
You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709  
or TTY at 1-800-267-1245\*