



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Texas Department of State
Health Services



Emergency and Disaster Planning for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs

EMERGENCY & DISASTER PLANNING

FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS

In Texas, disasters or emergencies can happen quickly and without warning.

As a family with a child with special health care needs, planning for an emergency is **critical**.

You and your loved ones could be anywhere when it happens — at work, at school, or in the car.

It's important to plan before an emergency happens and know what types of disasters are likely to affect where you live.



Planning in advance is important to staying safe.

The Department of State Health Services, Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) Systems Development Group (SDG) wants to help families of children and youth with special health care needs and disabilities prepare for any type of emergency or disaster.

This guide can help you better prepare, no matter the emergency or disaster.



TYPES OF DISASTERS

Natural disasters are common in Texas.

Many types of natural disasters are common in Texas. These include fires, floods, tornados, high winds, and hurricanes. Natural disasters can cause loss of life, serious injuries, property damage, and displace families.



Texans should be aware of the types of natural disasters that affect the area in which they live and prepare for them.

- **Flooding** can happen in areas near rivers or where heavy rains create flash floods.
- **Tornadoes** can hit all over Texas, but the highest frequency is in North Texas, especially the Red River Valley, and the Panhandle, as part of the traditional Tornado Alley, with major activity in spring (April-June).
- **Hurricanes** can affect coastal areas, bringing strong winds and heavy rain.
- **Wildfires** are a concern in the rural dry parts of the state, especially during summer months.
- **Severe thunderstorms/freezes** can happen anywhere and can bring hail, ice, and high winds.

Man-made disasters are emergencies caused by people. These can include:

- **Transportation accidents** like crashes or hazardous material spills.
- **Water or power grid failures** can leave areas without water or power for days.

When planning for an emergency or disaster, you need to think about all the different possibilities, then make a plan that meets your needs.

BASIC TIPS FOR DISASTER RESPONSE

Basic Tips

- Follow any disaster relief and/or government official's direction.
- Stay in your home or other shelter during a disaster or emergency. Only leave if authorities tell you to do so.
- Stay off the streets and do not drive around.
- Do not use fuel-powered devices (such as a charcoal grill or gas stove) for cooking inside your home, car, or garage.
- Use gas-powered generators or equipment outside only.
- Stay out of unfamiliar places.
- Put a large note on your door that shows you have chosen to stay there so officials can locate you after the emergency passes.
- Bring your cellphone and/or radio to follow news updates. Have extra chargers and battery back up. Use trusted sources for information.
- If you must leave, take your disaster supply kit.



Call 2-1-1 Before a Storm

The State of Texas offers a free service for people with disabilities or special health care needs, referred to as **STEAR (State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry)**, that provides local emergency management planners and responders with information related to your needs during an emergency. **Available services will vary by community.**

Contact **2-1-1**, visit tdem.texas.gov/response/state-of-texas-emergency-assistance-registry, or call your local emergency management office to register. STEAR can assist people who require transportation during an emergency.

Calling **2-1-1** can also help you find medical or social services in your area.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING TIPS

Use these tips to help you prepare and plan for a disaster.

- ☐ **Talk with your family** about why it's important to prepare for disasters like fire, severe weather, and hurricanes. Explain the dangers to kids and assign jobs to work together as a team.
- ☐ **Identify common disasters** in your area (fire, flood, weather, etc.) and discuss how they might affect each family member, including any special needs.
- ☐ **Create a disaster plan** for each type of disaster, including how to stay safe.
- ☐ **Choose two meeting places** in case you get separated: one near your home and one outside your neighborhood. Make sure everyone knows the addresses and how to contact each other.
- ☐ **Pick an out-of-state contact** for your family to call after a disaster. Memorize their phone number.
- ☐ **Teach kids how to call 9-1-1** and when to ask for help.
- ☐ **Save emergency numbers** in your phones and in a notebook and post them at home.
- ☐ **Show adults how to turn off** the water, gas, and electricity in case of emergency.
- ☐ **Plan evacuation routes** from your home and practice what to do in an evacuation.
- ☐ **Plan for your pets**, making sure they have food, water, and a safe place to go.
- ☐ **Plan for infants**, remembering infant formula, bottles, diapers, and wipes etc.
- ☐ **Monitor** the news and weather for important updates.



EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST

Use these checklists to help guide you in preparing for a disaster or emergency.

Planning in advance helps you respond safely to an emergency.



Preparedness for Your Child with Special Needs

- ☐ Keep an updated care plan and medication list.
- ☐ Store two weeks worth of medications and supplies.
- ☐ Have a backup plan for medical equipment that needs power.
- ☐ Know where to go in a disaster and ask your child's doctor for guidance.
- ☐ Inform neighbors and first responders about your child's special needs.
- ☐ Ensure that there's a plan for your child at school, day care, or place of worship.

Supplies for Children with Special Needs

- ☐ Two-week supply of all disposable items, such as dressing materials, nasal cannulas, or suction catheters etc.
- ☐ Two-week supply of all prescription and non-prescription medications
- ☐ Copies of prescriptions for medical equipment, supplies, and medications
- ☐ Generator or battery backup for all electrical medical equipment
Remember to use your generator outdoors ONLY.
- ☐ Extra glasses or contact lenses and hearing devices
- ☐ Extra batteries for equipment and devices
- ☐ Special dietary foods and supplies
- ☐ Manual wheelchair and other necessary equipment

DISASTER SUPPLY KIT

Families of children with special needs must be prepared to manage in difficult conditions. One way to prepare is by making a disaster supply kit. When an emergency strikes, you won't have time to shop or search for supplies. By gathering your supplies ahead of time and storing them in a secured container, your family can handle evacuating or staying at home with greater ease.

Keep items in airtight plastic bags or containers. Review your family needs **at least once a year**. Use the following guide to build your disaster kit.

Supply Kit Items

- ☐ **Water:** One gallon per person, per day, for at least three days
- ☐ **Food:** A three-day supply of non-perishable, ready-to-eat food
- ☐ **Flashlight:** With extra batteries or a hand-crank flashlight
- ☐ **Battery-powered or hand-crank radio:** Including a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert
- ☐ **Whistle:** To signal for help
- ☐ **Manual can opener:** If including canned food
- ☐ **Personal hygiene and sanitation:** Toothpaste, hand sanitizer, personal and cleaning wipes, toilet paper, etc.
- ☐ **Cash:** ATMs or credit card machines may not be operational.
- ☐ **Cellphone with chargers**
- ☐ **Change of clothes and shoes**
- ☐ **Extra batteries/portable charger**
- ☐ **Important documents or records**
- ☐ **Blankets and personal protective gear**
- ☐ **First-aid kit**



Replace your stored food and water supplies every six months so they stay fresh.

GENERAL PREPAREDNESS

- ☐ Have a family disaster plan and practice it regularly.
- ☐ Prepare a disaster supply kit for your home.
- ☐ Talk to your kids about disasters and safety.
- ☐ Show children what emergency responders look like in equipment.

Home Preparedness

- ☐ Check your home for hazards inside and outside (ex. Broken glass, fallen trees, etc.)
- ☐ Ensure smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are working and checked monthly.
- ☐ Know the location of fire escapes or ladders if you live above ground level.
- ☐ Plan how to escape through windows if needed.
- ☐ Keep fire extinguishers and water hose accessible.
- ☐ Coordinate with neighbors to help each other during a disaster.

Important Documents

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Will | <input type="checkbox"/> Family records (birth, marriage, death certificates) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insurance policies | <input type="checkbox"/> Family medical records |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Security cards and passports | <input type="checkbox"/> Notebook with important telephone numbers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bank accounts and financial information | |

If You Must Leave Home . . .

- ☐ You should always be prepared to evacuate.
- ☐ Keep all things that you will need during an evacuation in an easy-to-carry bag like a backpack or duffle bag.
- ☐ Keep the bag in an easy-to-reach place near the exit you usually use at your home.
- ☐ Ask your doctor or pharmacist about storing medications that must be kept in the refrigerator. Keep a cooler and ice on hand for this purpose.

FIRST-AID KIT

First Aid and General Medical Supplies

Put together a first-aid kit for your home and one for each car.

Each kit should include:

- ☐ Sterile Band-Aids in assorted sizes
- ☐ Assorted sizes of safety pins
- ☐ Soap and/or hand sanitizer
- ☐ Disposable gloves (two pairs)
- ☐ Non-prescription medications in doses that are right for all family members
- ☐ Aspirin or non-aspirin pain reliever
- ☐ Anti-diarrhea medication
- ☐ Antacid (for upset stomach)
- ☐ Laxative or stool softener
- ☐ Anti-itch cream
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Triangular bandages (three)
- ☐ Two-inch sterile gauze pads (four to six)
- ☐ Four-inch sterile gauze pads (four to six)
- ☐ Two-inch sterile roller bandages (three rolls)
- ☐ Three-inch sterile roller bandages (three rolls)
- ☐ Eye dressing pads
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Tweezers
- ☐ Needles and thread
- ☐ Moistened towelettes
- ☐ Antiseptic like hydrogen peroxide or rubbing alcohol
- ☐ Cotton balls, sterile tissue, and cotton swabs
- ☐ Thermometer
- ☐ Tongue depressors (two)
- ☐ Tube of petroleum jelly or other lubricant
- ☐ Medicine dropper



OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

Clothing and Bedding

- ☐ One complete change of clothing and extra shoes per person that are right for the season and weather
- ☐ Sturdy shoes or work boots
- ☐ Rain gear
- ☐ Hats and gloves
- ☐ Blankets and sleeping bags

Entertainment

- ☐ Books for all ages
- ☐ Games (card or board games)
- ☐ Mobile device charger
- ☐ Extra batteries
- ☐ Toys
- ☐ Art supplies

Supplies For Families With Pets and Service Animals

**Make a seven-day supply kit for your pet or service animal.
Put it in a pack that your animal can carry.**

- ☐ Food and water bowls
- ☐ Food and water for seven days
- ☐ Pet bed and toys
- ☐ First-aid kit for minor wounds
- ☐ Pet medications
- ☐ Pet carrier marked with your name, your pet's name, and an emergency contact number
- ☐ Plastic garbage bags (to dispose of waste)
- ☐ Medical and current pet vaccination records
- ☐ Identification tags and license
- ☐ Extra harness
- ☐ List of hotels that accept animals
- ☐ Pet treats



IF DISASTER STRIKES...

Before/During

- Stay calm. Put your plan into action. Evacuate, if told to do so by authorities or officials.
- Put all your pets in a safe and secure place. Do not just “let them go.”
- Call your family contact, review the emergency plan with everyone. Do not use the telephone to save battery life unless it is a life-threatening emergency.
- Check on your neighbors, help those who are elderly or disabled prepare or evacuate as well.
- Listen to your battery-powered radio for news and instructions.
- Identify all possible hazards and prepare accordingly (e.g., board windows, stay away from downed power lines, etc.)
- Use flashlights. Do not light matches or turn on electrical switches if you think your home is damaged.

After/When Safe

- Check for injuries and give first aid or get help for seriously injured people.
- Check (smell) for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open windows, and get everyone outside quickly.
- Shut off any damaged utilities.
- Check for fires, fire dangers, and other dangers around your house.
- Check on your neighbors, especially the ones who are elderly or disabled.
- Check for damage in your home after the disaster, prioritize safety first.



TIPS TO HELP FAMILIES SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN

1. **Make a family plan**

Children feel safer when they know what to expect. Explain your emergency plan and each person's role. Let older kids help create the plan and give younger ones tasks like packing water or flashlights.

2. **Stay calm and keep routines**

Limit exposure to dramatic news. Stick to regular routines or start new ones tied to preparedness. Routines help children feel secure and remind them that life continues.

3. **Talk openly and honestly**

Give simple, clear information about what's happening and what you'll do. Compare events to past experiences they've handled well. Encourage them to ask questions and share feelings.

4. **Teach children how to get help**

Make sure kids know how to recognize emergency workers: police, firefighters, Red Cross members/volunteers, etc. Teach them to approach these helpers if separated and not to hide.

5. **Prepare for separation**

Teach children your full name, phone number, and address. Ensure they carry an ID with emergency contact info, either in their pocket or on a shoelace tag.

6. **Support children with special needs**

Children with medical needs should wear a medical alert bracelet. Teach them how to explain their condition and treatment, if the child can do so. Complete an emergency information form and keep copies handy.

7. **Comfort and reassure**

Hold and soothe young children. Use familiar songs and games to calm them. Let them know you will always do your best to keep them safe.



RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Use the following websites to learn how to prepare for emergencies and keep your family safe.

texasready.gov

- Build a kit containing essential things you, your family, and your pets will need. Natural and man-made disasters can happen anytime and anywhere.

ready.gov

- The Department of Homeland Security has a website to help people prepare for and respond to any kind of disaster. The site has brochures and lists for emergency kits that you can print out and use. It also has links to other resources.

tdem.texas.gov

- The Texas Division of Emergency Management website has information on how to prepare disaster kits for all kinds of disasters, maps of escape routes, maps of potential coastal flooding due to storms, plus much more.

cdc.gov/children-and-school-preparedness/special-healthcare-needs

- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website has information on CYSHCN in emergencies. Information includes before/after disaster information and special considerations for planning.

redcross.org

- The Red Cross website has a lot of information about planning and responding to disasters. The site also has specific information for communities after a disaster strikes.

salvationarmyusa.org

- The Salvation Army offers services that include disaster relief, day care centers, summer camps, services for the aging, residential services, medical facilities and shelters for battered women and children, plus much more.

txpeds.org/tps/Web/Practice-Patient-Care/disaster-prep-resources.aspx

- The Texas Pediatric Society has compiled a list of downloadable resources to help prepare for emergencies and natural disasters.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION FORM INSTRUCTIONS

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American College of Emergency Physicians created a form called the **Emergency Information Form**.

You can use this simple form to put together health information for your child with special health care needs.

When you and your child's doctor complete the form, you should keep a copy in the different places where your child might be, such as home, a child care center, with a babysitter, with grandparents or other relatives, or at school.

In an emergency, doctors and emergency medical workers can read the **Emergency Information Form**.

The form can be found at:

acep.org/by-medical-focus/pediatrics/medical-forms/emergency-information-form-for-children-with-special-health-care-needs

It is important that you update the form **every two to three years**, and after any of the following events:

- Important changes in your child's condition
- Any major surgery or procedure
- Important changes in the treatment plan
- Changes in doctors

FIGURE 1
Computerized Emergency Information Form

Emergency Information Form For Children With Special Health Care Needs

Is this a new form or just an update? ☐ New ☐ Update

Patient ID

Child's name: _____ Address: _____
 Date of birth: _____ Telephone: _____
 Social Security Number: _____ Emergency contact: _____

Parent(s) & Provider(s)

Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Address: _____
 Phone: _____
 Email: _____
 Other: _____

Medical History

Current conditions (list all, starting with most important): _____
 Previous conditions (list all, starting with most important): _____
 Allergies (list all, starting with most important): _____
 Medications (list all, starting with most important): _____
 Surgeries (list all, starting with most important): _____
 Hospitalizations (list all, starting with most important): _____
 Other: _____

Current Medications

Medication name: _____ Dose: _____ Frequency: _____
 Other: _____

Emergency Management

Describe current presenting problem(s): _____ Suggested studies: _____ Treatment recommendations: _____
 Other: _____

Immunizations

DTaP status: _____ Tdap status: _____
 Polio status: _____ Hib status: _____
 Other: _____

Disaster Planning & Crisis

Check or enter at least two of the most likely disasters that could affect this patient:

☐ Flood ☐ Fire ☐ Earthquake ☐ Hurricane ☐ Tornado ☐ Bomb ☐ Chemical ☐ Nuclear ☐ Biological ☐ Other (specify): _____

Other: _____

Disaster planning & crisis: _____



TEXAS

Health and Human Services

**Texas Department of State
Health Services**

Contact Information

Maternal and Child Health

Texas Department of State Health Services

1100 West 49th Street

Mail Code 1922

Austin, Texas 78756

Phone: 512-776-7373

Fax: 512-458-7658

titlev@dshs.texas.gov

dshs.texas.gov/mch