



## **Emergency Preparedness for Persons with Disabilities and Their Families**

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Disasters can happen anywhere at any time. You may have advance warning, or not. Some geographic locations more at risk for certain types of natural disasters (Baker & Cormier, 2013). For example, in BC we may experience earthquakes. Other natural disasters can strike anywhere. For example, storms, flooding, and power outages can happen regardless of location.

### Persons with Disability

Persons with disabilities tend to be more vulnerable to adverse consequences in emergencies (Fox et al., 2007). This is because they may be unable to take protective

action (Murray, 2011); it is too dangerous to evacuate, they are more affected by unfamiliar surroundings and change of routine, and/or their support systems fall apart (Rothman & Brown, 2007). Other factors include that their necessary assistive devices may be left behind during evacuation (Rooney & White, 2007) and a lack of access to medical records (Jan & Lurie, 2012).

Persons with disability may also be less prepared (Levac et al., 2012; Tomio et al., 2012) due to a combination of factors, including lack of time or money to purchase supplies, lack of information (Levac et al., 2012), or trust in authorities and expectation of rescue (Hogaboom et al., 2013). Some may be unable, due to disability, to engage in preparedness activities (Tomio, et al., 2012).

This information is intended to assist you in preparing to protect yourself in case of a disaster.

## **Recommendations for Persons with Disabilities and Their Families**

### *Preparation:*

- Know your community's unique risks (e.g., earthquake, tsunami, etc.) and its emergency plans,

including the location of shelters and their accessibility, as well as the evacuation routes from your community (Levac et al., 2012; Rooney & White, 2007).

- Have an emergency kit, have an emergency plan for your family and home, and practice for emergencies (Baker & Cormier, 2013; Levac et al., 2012; Rooney & White, 2007).
- Consider voluntary self-registration with Emergency Planners (Fox et al., 2007), including where you live and what sorts of assistance you might need in an emergency.
- If you live alone, know how to turn off power, gas (if relevant), and water (Al-rousan et al., 2015; Baker & Cormier, 2013; Rooney & White, 2007).
- Medical Preparation:
  - Prepare and regularly update a brief medical history and carry it with you at all times, *especially* if you or your family member may not be able to communicate it (e.g., child, cognitive disability, etc.) (Baker & Cormier, 2013; Bloodworth et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2009; Murray, 2011). Store a copy with someone who

lives elsewhere (Rothman & Brown, 2007). Include names and contact information for specialists as well as immunization records (Murray, 2011). You may wish to laminate it (Jones et al., 2009). Include your health care number (Public Safety Canada, 2010) and any supplementary insurance information.

- Send an updated list of all medications and their dosages to someone who lives elsewhere (Rothman & Brown 2007) and is likely to be unaffected by a local emergency.
- Get an extra prescription for one week's emergency supply of medications (Diamond & Precin, 2003; Murray, 2011; Rooney & White, 2007), and rotate these with your usual supply so that they do not expire.
- Ask your physician whether you are taking any medications should not be stopped abruptly in case of short supply, and discuss how to taper down and how to communicate potential side effects with disaster personnel (Bloodworth et al., 2007).
- Prepare a support Network:

- Establish a support network of neighbours who know that you may need help (Public Safety Canada, 2010).
  - Have a contingency plan in case informal caregivers are incapacitated by the emergency (Al-rousan et al., 2015; Campbell et al., 2009; Levac et al., 2012; Murray, 2011). This should include at least 3 members (Hageboom et al., 2013).
  - Establish an emergency communication plan with your support network (Levac et al., 2012; Tomio et al., 2012). It may be helpful to include a person who lives somewhere else (Public Safety Canada, 2010).
  - You may also wish to establish a meeting place with local members of your support network.
- Prepare your medical and assistive devices:
    - Tag personal medical and assistive devices with your name and instruction regarding use (Public Safety Canada, 2010).
    - If you rely on medical equipment that requires power, consider having an alternate power

source (e.g., generator) or battery back (Jan & Lurie, 2012; Murray, 2011; Public Safety Canada, 2010; Rooney & White, 2007). You may also want to voluntarily register with the local Emergency Planning organization for priority power restoration.

- In case of rescue, take the initiative. Inform first responders of your disability, including what you need and how to best assist you (Public Safety Canada 2010). Tell them you need your assistive devices/medical equipment to be taken with you, if at all possible (Bloodworth et al., 2007).
- If you work or volunteer outside the home, consider emergency preparations for that location too. Encourage your employer to make emergency evacuation plans for you and include you in all drills too (Loy et al., 2006; Rooney & White, 2007). If you are in paid employment, you can insist on an evacuation plan as part of your job accommodations.

### *Emergency Kit:*

Your emergency kit should include:

- non-perishable food and water for each person for 7 days and a first aid kit (Baker & Cormier, 2013)
- a supply of necessary medical supplies (e.g., dressings, catheters, ostomy supplies, etc.) (Bloodworth et al., 2007)
- a supply of cash (Rooney & White, 2007)
- If you use assistive devices with inflatable tires (e.g., wheelchair), consider including tire patch kit and seal -in-air product (Public Safety Canada, 2010).
- If you use a power wheelchair, consider having a light weight manual chair for back-up and/or emergency evacuation (Public Safety Canada, 2010).
- If you self-propel a wheelchair manually, have heavy gloves in case of glass (Public Safety Canada, 2010).
- If your medication requires refrigeration, have a small cooler and ice packs (Public Safety Canada, 2010).
- a way to get information, such as a radio with crank powered batteries, so it will not go dead

(Jan & Lurie, 2012; Levac et al., 2012; Rooney & White, 2007).

- A light source that does not depend on power (e.g., candle lantern, flashlight powered by batteries that can be recharged by hand crank or shaking) (Jan & Lurie, 2012; Levac et al., 2012; Rooney & White, 2007).

### *Carry with You:*

You do not know when an emergency may strike, so you also need to have some essentials with you at all times. These include:

- a brief medical history, especially if person may not be able to communicate it (e.g., child, cognitive disability, etc.) (Baker & Cormier, 2013; Bloodworth et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2009; Murray, 2011)
- a list of all medications and dosages (Bloodworth et al., 2007), and a week's supply (Tomio et al., 2012)
- a week's supply of hearing aid batteries, if applicable (FEMA, n.d.)



- You may wish to carry a signaling device with GPS to assist first responders to locate you (Jan & Lurie, 2012).
- You may also wish to consider a loud personal alarm to attract attention/assistance (Public Safety Canada, 2010).

*If You Have Service Animal:*

- Have an emergency kit for the animal. It should include:
  - 7 days of food and water
  - can opener
  - feeding bowls
  - leash, collar/harness, muzzle, vest,
  - blanket with your scent
  - poop bags
  - toy
  - grooming supplies
  - pet first aid supplies, and potentially booties if you have them
  - blanket and/or coat
  - medications (including list and information about the animal's veterinarian)

- medical records (including vaccination records)
- identification information (photo, ID chip, license, tattoo, training records/certifications) (BCSPCA, n.d.; Manitoba Flood Fact Sheet, 2010; Public Safety Canada, 2010)
- In an emergency situation, you will have to determine whether to allow your service animal to assist you or to take animal off duty while first responders work (Public Safety Canada, 2010).
- In case of evacuation, identify your service animal as such, and insist it be evacuated with you, if at all possible.

## **Additional Resources for Persons with Disabilities and Their Families:**

Emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities/special needs

[www.GetPrepared.ca](http://www.GetPrepared.ca)

1-800-O-Canada, TTY 1-800-926-9105 (available in alternate formats)

Prepared BC – Resources for People with Disabilities  
(Includes information re service animals)

[http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/embc/preparedbc/2016\\_preparedness\\_for\\_people\\_with\\_a\\_disability\\_guide\\_web.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/embc/preparedbc/2016_preparedness_for_people_with_a_disability_guide_web.pdf)

Emergency Preparedness for People with  
Disabilities/Special Needs (Ont)

[http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/documents/en/mcsc/publications/accessibility/6453EMO\\_ENG\\_LP.pdf](http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/documents/en/mcsc/publications/accessibility/6453EMO_ENG_LP.pdf)

Disability specific guides for persons with Mobility,  
Cognitive, or Sensory disabilities (US)

<https://www.disability.gov/resources-help-family-prepare-emergencies-disasters/>

National Library Service Emergency Preparedness  
Resource Guide for Persons with Disabilities (US)  
(includes guides specific to different emergencies  
and different disabilities)

<http://www.loc.gov/nls/reference/guides/emergency.html>

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