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## ***Responding to a Disaster***

Lately our news reports, web updates and our conversations are full of Hurricane Katrina. What if eastern Nebraska were the target of a natural or man-made disaster? Would you know what to do? Would you be prepared? In our changing world, it's important that we understand and prepare for those things that can harm our health and quality of life. The Nebraska Department of Health and its funded local Health Departments are continually preparing to protect the health of Nebraskans. But Nebraska's public health agencies need your help. This planning guide can help you do your part to be prepared for both natural and man-made disasters. We can be better prepared by taking a few simple steps.

### **What You Can Do**

#### **Make an Emergency Plan**

Make an emergency plan for you and your family members. This plan should be done before an actual emergency happens. In your plan, include the following:

- Identify ways to stay in touch with family members. Keep important contact information with you.
- Choose an out-of-state contact who you can call to "check in." This contact can then let other family members know that you are safe.
- Pick two meeting places; one near your home and one in another place in case it is unsafe to go near your house.
- Plan for the special needs of all family members.
- Plan for the needs of pets in your emergency plans.
- Know the emergency plan for where you work, including evacuation plans. Make plans for staying at work for an extended period of time if needed.
- Know the emergency plan in your children's schools.
- Write down important medical information for all family members. Include blood type, allergies to medication, current medications and weight, age and height.
- Before an emergency, sign up to be a volunteer. For more information on volunteering, visit: [www.uwmidlands.org/volunteer](http://www.uwmidlands.org/volunteer) United Way recruits both medical and non-medical volunteers for disaster response.

#### **Have a Mobile Emergency Kit**

Prepare an emergency kit containing everything you and your family members would need for at least three days. Keep the kit in a place where you could grab it and go. Consider making similar kits for your car, workplace or children's lockers or desks. Include at least the following:

- One gallon of water for each person per day, for a minimum of three days
- Non-perishable food items (including pet food if you have animals)
- First aid kit, including medication you take on a regular basis
- Clean clothes and sturdy shoes, plus rain gear and coats, hats and gloves
- Blankets and/or sleeping bags
- AM/FM radio, flashlights and extra batteries

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- Candles and matches
  - Pencil and paper
  - Diapers, formula, etc. for infants
  - Small photo of each family member for identification purposes. Write name and address on back and contact information
  - Games and activities for children and adults

### **In an Emergency, Remember these simple tips:**

- Stay calm.
- Stay informed. Write down key information from radio and television.
- Follow instructions from emergency officials.
- Be considerate of others. Everyone will have questions and concerns.
- Check on your neighbors, especially the elderly or people with disabilities.
- Avoid contact with others if you are ill.

### **Should You Stay Home or Evacuate?**

Depending on the emergency, you may be asked to stay at home, evacuate or comply with a quarantine. The following tips can help you prepare for each.

**Shelter in place**—Sheltering in place involves creating a safe place in your house where you can stay until the danger has passed. In addition to diseases, such danger could be a release of a cloud of chemicals that can poison people and harm the environment. If you are asked to shelter in place do the following:

- Select a room beforehand that is big enough to accommodate your entire family.
- The room should have a TV or a battery-powered radio so you can stay informed and few windows if possible.
- Bring your family and small pets inside.
- Lock all of your home's outside doors.
- Close windows, air vents and fireplace dampers.
- Turn off air conditioning or forced-air heating systems, exhaust fans and clothes dryers.
- If instructed by public health officials, seal your doors and air vents with heavy-duty plastic sheeting and heavy-duty tape.

**Evacuate**—If an area is deemed unsafe, officials may ask people to evacuate. If asked to leave your home, do the following:

- Listen for, and follow, directions about where to evacuate and what routes to take.
- Keep your vehicle ready by always having your gas tank at least half full.
- Keep your car windows closed and turn off the air conditioner or heater.
- Take your emergency kit with you.

**Comply with Quarantine**—If you had contact with sick people, public health officials may ask you to comply with quarantine or stay home for several days or even weeks.

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Quarantine can be an effective way to keep illness from spreading since it keeps those who might be contagious from spreading the disease to others. To prepare for quarantine, do the following:

- Follow instructions from public health officials.
- Stay away from others.
- Keep enough food and water on hand to last for the entire quarantine. You may have food and water delivered to you, but left outside your home.
- If public health officials give you medicine, take it as directed.

## Planning Guide

### **Your Personal Contact List**

For quick and easy reference, list important contact information in case of an emergency. Complete the following:

**Children's School (Address & Phone Numbers):**

**Work Phone Numbers:**

**Cell Phone Numbers:**

**Out-of-State Contacts:**

**Other:**

**Your Family members' personal health information**

Keeping track of important personal and medical information is a key part of emergency planning. Complete the following for each member of your family:

(Information last updated \_\_ / \_\_ / \_\_\_\_)

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Age:**

**Gender:**

**Date of Birth:**

**Height:**

**Weight:**

**I.D. Number (Social Security or driver's license):**

**Allergies to Medication:**

**Medications Currently Taking:**

**Important Medical History:**

**Other Considerations:**

**For more extensive guidance, go to [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)**

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