

YOUR HEALTH DURING AN EMERGENCY

Ontario's doctors want you to be healthy during an emergency. Over the years, the government and others have taken important steps to plan for your health and safety during an emergency. You also have an important role to play in ensuring your own safety. While it may be uncomfortable to consider yourself in an emergency, good outcomes can't be left to chance. The risk of widespread catastrophic events in Ontario is low, however, it's important to understand the local risks in your community. Experts say you should have a plan to cope for at least 72 hours when an emergency strikes and possibly even longer if you have special needs. Here are some things to consider in your emergency plan if you or someone you know has health issues.



ACCESSING HEALTH CARE

Follow your doctor's advice about accessing health-care during an emergency. However, if she/ he is unavailable and there is an emergency, call 911 or visit your local emergency department. Note that emergency services, including emergency departments, could be very busy during an emergency. If you receive home care, speak with your care co-ordinator or home-care provider to identify a backup plan.



CREATE A SUPPORT NETWORK

Identify people you trust near your home, school, workplace and any other location where you spend time. You should also identify someone in your network who lives outside of your community in case the emergency is widespread. You may wish to inform these people about your special needs and share emergency contact information. This group can assist you and may provide social support as an emergency can be emotionally taxing.



MAINTAIN A COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

It is important to maintain a communication channel with your support network and emergency officials. Be sure to consider any special communication needs (e.g. sensory issues — hearing difficulties, visual impairment, etc). Keep a corded telephone (one that does not need to be plugged into an electrical outlet) and a radio. Try not to rely on a cell phone because the network may be down and batteries run out quickly.

MAINTAIN AN EMERGENCY KIT

The golden rule of emergency planning is maintaining a kit that provides the necessities of life for 72 hours and accommodates health needs. Here are some items to include:

Medications and health-care supplies

If possible, maintain at least one week's worth of essential medication and appropriate medical supplies (e.g. insulin syringes, catheters, etc). Emergencies can happen without warning, so do not assume there will be access to a pharmacy or health-care provider.

Hydration

It is important to have 2L of potable water per person per day and make sure you drink enough. Early signs of dehydration can include thirst and dark-coloured urine.

Accessible mobility equipment

Take note if you require mobility devices to evacuate and get around. Consider keeping an extra mobility device near an exit if possible.

First aid kit

You never know when you may be injured and quick response is essential. It is also worth taking a first aid/CPR course from a reputable educator.

KEEP YOUR HEALTH INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE

Do not assume that there will be access to your health records during an emergency. Keep your health card in a safe place and have the following written down in an accessible location:

- Name and telephone number of your physician, pharmacist and other health-care providers
- List of health conditions
- Names and dosage of medications you're currently taking
- Allergies (consider getting a medical ID bracelet)
- Any other relevant information. Emergency preparedness is not a one-time activity. Circumstances and your health can change and it is important to revisit your plan. Emergency Preparedness Week happens each year in May and is a great time to have a discussion about your emergency plan.

ELECTRICITY-DEPENDENT EQUIPMENT

Speak with the supplier of any medical equipment that requires electricity. There may be opportunities to maintain backup batteries or consider an alternate power supply. Don't forget about medications stored in the fridge. Although you may want to run a generator or your car to produce power, never do so in an enclosed area because of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

More Resources:

- Canadian Red Cross
- Get Prepared

Oma.org

info@oma.org

1.800-268-7215



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