

Emergency Preparedness for Special Needs Populations

Emergency situations create unique challenges for the elderly and for children.

Disaster Tips for the Elderly

BEFORE A DISASTER

- ✓ Eliminate hazards. Make it as easy as possible to quickly get under a sturdy table or desk for protection during an earthquake.
- ✓ Keep a list of medications, allergies, special equipment, names and numbers of doctors, pharmacists and family members. Make sure you keep this list with you.
- ✓ Keep an extra pair of glasses and medication with your emergency supplies.
- ✓ Keep walking aids near you. Have extra walking aids in different rooms of the house.
- ✓ Make sure you have a whistle to signal for help.
- ✓ Keep extra batteries for hearing aids with your emergency supplies and remember to replace them annually.
- ✓ Find two people you trust who will check on you after an emergency. Tell them your special needs. Show them how to operate any equipment that you use. Consider giving them a spare house key.
- ✓ If you live in an assisted living facility, make sure that you and your family are aware of their evacuation and emergency situation plans.



DURING/AFTER A DISASTER

- ✓ Prepare to be self-sufficient for at least three days.
- ✓ Turn on your portable radio for instructions and news reports.
- ✓ Cooperate fully with public safety officials and instructions.
- ✓ If you must evacuate, make sure to take vital medications and supplies with you.

According to the 2005 US Census, nearly 14% of Cowlitz County residents are over the age of 65.

OXYGEN AND BREATHING EQUIPMENT

- ✓ Keep a separate supply of at least seven days worth of any medication or critical medical supplies, such as oxygen.
- ✓ If you rely on electric medical equipment, such as wheelchairs, ventilators and oxygen compressors, talk to your medical supply company about getting batteries or a generator as a back up power source.

Links

Red Cross:
www.redcross.org

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Before a Disaster

Involving children in developing and practicing a Family Disaster Plan can help lessen their anxiety during an actual emergency situation.

- ✓ Have children participate in developing your family's disaster plan.
- ✓ Teach your children to recognize danger signals and what they mean (such as fire alarms, smoke detectors and community warning systems).
- ✓ Explain how and when to call 9-1-1.
- ✓ Help your young children memorize important family information such as address and phone number.
- ✓ Make sure your children carry a small card with emergency information on how to contact family members and an out-of-area contact number.

Helping Children Cope Following a Disaster

Be aware that after a disaster, children are most afraid that the event will happen again, someone will be killed or injured, they will be separated from their family and they will be left alone.

Children may exhibit the following behaviors after a disaster:

- ✓ Change from being quiet and caring to loud and aggressive, or change from being outgoing to shy and afraid.
- ✓ Develop night-time fears.
- ✓ Become easily upset.
- ✓ Lose trust in adults.
- ✓ Revert to younger behavior such as thumb-sucking or bed-wetting.
- ✓ Want to stay close to parents. Refuse to go to school or day care.
- ✓ Feel that they caused the disaster.
- ✓ Have symptoms of illness, such as frequent headaches, vomiting or fever.



What you can do to help

- ✓ Talk with children about how they are feeling. Assure them that it is okay to have those feelings.
- ✓ Help children learn to use words that express their feelings, such as "sad," "angry," or "confused."
- ✓ Children should not be expected to be brave or tough. Tell them that it is okay to cry.
- ✓ Don't give children more information than they can handle about the disaster.
- ✓ Go back to former routines as soon as possible.
- ✓ Reassure children that the disaster was not their fault.
- ✓ Let children have some control, such as choosing clothing or what meal to have for dinner.
- ✓ Allow children time to grieve losses, even for something as small as a lost toy.

Links

FEMA: <http://www.fema.gov/>