SECTION 8
SAFETY &
EMERGENCY SERVICES

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Elders are especially susceptible to the effects of natural disasters and emergencies. It is more important than ever that Floridians, especially elders and their caregivers, take the essential steps to prepare for a disaster. Our state is particularly vulnerable to severe weather, such as hurricanes. Most natural disasters give little advance warning before disrupting our everyday lives. Each year thousands of Floridians are affected by hurricanes, tropical storms, tornadoes, floods, lightning storms, and wildfires.

“How do I prepare for a disaster?”

All elders in Florida need to prepare for a possible disaster. Those who live alone or do not have the support of family and friends must take special precautions. Those who are frail or disabled may need special assistance. Older adults who are caregivers may also require outside help. Each family needs to establish a plan for its protection during an emergency. This plan should include the actions you will take and where you will go in case of an evacuation order. Share your plan with other family members so they know what to expect. As part of your plan, you should also organize a disaster preparedness kit that will sustain you and your family for

### Important Items for Your Disaster Supply Kit

- One-week supply of non-perishable food
- Water - 1 gallon per person per day for 3-7 days
- Flashlight and batteries
- Battery-powered radio
- First-aid kit
- Two-week supply of prescriptions/other medicines
- Sturdy clothing and footwear
- Blankets, pillows, sleeping bags
- Toiletries and hygiene items
- Bug repellent and sunscreen
- Personal items (books, toys, etc.)
- Tools
- Important papers (e.g., valid ID)
- Credit cards and cash
three to seven days. Many residents have specific medical needs that must also be considered.

Each year the Florida Department of Elder Affairs publishes the Disaster Preparedness Guide for Elders. This guide contains important information concerning hurricanes, tornadoes, severe storms, flooding, and wildfires, and what elders can do to protect themselves in these and other kinds of emergencies. The guide also provides a recommended list of critical items for a disaster supply kit. You can request a copy of this guide by calling the toll-free Elder Helpline at 1-800-96-ELDER (1-800-963-5337) or access the guide online at elderaffairs.org.

Florida law requires that evacuation assistance be available to individuals with access and functional needs. If family or friends are not available to provide help to a person with special needs, this person may qualify for evacuation assistance services.

Special needs shelters are designed to care for people who have medical or physical conditions that require assistance but do not require hospitalization. The operation of special needs shelters varies based on the severity of the hurricane or other disaster. Please note that a special needs shelter is intended as a refuge of last resort and is not equipped as a medical-care facility. Trained medical staff, emergency power, bedding, and other supplies may be limited or totally lacking during an emergency.

If you feel that you will need the assistance of a special needs shelter, you should register with the local emergency management office or at FLGetAPlan.com before disaster strikes. The telephone number for each county’s special needs registry is listed in this guide under “Resource Directories – County Special Needs Registries.” Telephone numbers can also be obtained by calling the local Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). The telephone numbers for the ADRCs are listed by county under “Resource Directories.”

QUICK FACT:
The Florida Division of Emergency Management has a website that can assist in developing a step-by-step preparedness plan. It is FLGetAPlan.com/family.aspx.
QUESTION:
After I register with the local emergency management office for FLGetAPlan.com special needs registry, what happens if a storm approaches?

ANSWER:
Prior to the storm’s arrival, you will be contacted and asked if you need assistance to evacuate to a special needs shelter.

If you need assistance, please be ready to go when help arrives. Be sure you have your disaster kit, which should include all necessary medical supplies (wheelchair, cane, glasses), prescriptions, special foods/nutritional supplements, blanket, pillow, clean clothes, and important documents (wills, insurance documents, and other essentials that you may need).

QUESTION:
If a disaster affects me, how can I apply for assistance through FEMA?

ANSWER:
If you have questions about assistance programs and what aid may be available, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides several methods of getting important recovery information. A good starting point is fema.gov.

The FEMA website, fema.gov, provides a wealth of information. On the home page includes links to information about what to do for different types of disasters, how to deal with things immediately after a disaster, what assistance is available, and how to apply. You can also call FEMA’s Helpline at 1-800-621-FEMA (1-800-621-3362), or for hearing impaired TTY callers, 1-800-462-7585. In addition to answering your questions, a Helpline representative can tell you the status of your application for FEMA disaster assistance.

QUESTION:
How can I obtain FEMA’s in-depth preparedness guide?

ANSWER:
Copies of Are You Ready? An In-depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness are available through the FEMA publications warehouse (1-800-480-2520) or fema.gov.
*Are You Ready? An In-depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness* is FEMA’s most comprehensive source on individual, family, and community preparedness.

*Are You Ready?* provides a step-by-step approach to disaster preparedness by walking the reader through the process of getting informed about local emergency plans, identifying hazards that affect their local area, and developing and maintaining an emergency communications plan and disaster-supply kit. Other topics covered include evacuation, emergency public shelters, animal care during a disaster, and information specific to people with disabilities.

**QUESTION:**
If I need to evacuate and have a pet, where can I get information on lodging for pets?

**ANSWER:**
The Department’s Disaster Preparedness Guide has information to help you plan for your pet’s evacuation. You can request a copy of this guide by calling the toll-free Elder Helpline at 1-800-96-ELDER (1-800-963-5337) or access the guide online at [elderaffairs.org](http://elderaffairs.org).

Most elders with pets will be hesitant to leave them behind during an evacuation. Many who choose to evacuate wonder where they can find shelter with their animal. Below are websites with information on pet-friendly lodging and pet-friendly shelters:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEB SITE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>floridadisaster.org/petplan.htm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humanesociety.org/issues/animal_rescue/tips/pets-disaster.html</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pets-allowed-hotels.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>petswelcome.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>floridapets.net</td>
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</table>
Pet-Friendly Shelters  Many county emergency management officials are considering the need to provide shelters that will accommodate pets as well as their owners. Some counties already have pet-friendly shelters. In some cases, the pets are kept separately from people, but the pet shelter is often near the people shelter.

Service Animals  Service animals for the blind, hearing-impaired, handicapped, or others with special needs are allowed to stay in emergency shelters with their owners. Check with your county’s emergency management office for more information.

QUESTION:
What are some key disaster tips I should know?

ANSWER:
You should be prepared, be informed, and be aware.

Although Floridians must contend with a wide range of emergencies and natural disasters, hurricanes are the ones most readily associated with our state. In addition to having a plan and a disaster kit, the information below provides tips for dealing with disasters, but also applies to other kinds of emergency situations.

Evacuating the Area Ahead of a Hurricane  If a hurricane warning is issued for your area or authorities tell you to evacuate, take only essential items. If you have time, turn off gas, electricity, and water. Disconnect appliances to reduce the likelihood of electrical shock when power is restored. Make sure your automobile’s emergency kit is ready. You can purchase an emergency kit if you do not have one. Be sure to take prescription medications with you. Follow the designated evacuation routes — others may be blocked — and expect heavy traffic. To learn more, contact your local emergency management authorities.
Prescription Medications  As you evacuate, remember to take your prescription medicines with you. Many businesses, including pharmacies, may be closed during and after a hurricane. If you are unable to evacuate and cannot drive, ask a friend or a relative to drive you to pick up items you may need during the emergency, including a two-week's supply of medication.

Section 252.358, Florida Statutes, requires certain specific entities to waive time restrictions on prescription medication refills. These include all health insurers, managed care organizations, and other entities that are licensed by the Office of Insurance Regulation and provide prescription medication coverage as part of a policy or contract. This requirement includes suspending pharmacy electronic “refill too soon” denials.

The law enables those who are insured or are subscribers of prescription medication plans to refill prescriptions in advance of a hurricane. To do this, you must have authorized refills remaining for the prescription medication. The law authorizes payment to pharmacies for at least a 30-day supply of any prescription medication. It does not matter when a pharmacist most recently filled the prescription.

This law is in effect when the following conditions occur:

1. The person seeking the prescription medication refill must live in a county that:
   - Is under a hurricane warning issued by the National Weather Service;
   - Is declared to be under a state of emergency in an executive order issued by the Governor; or
   - Has activated its emergency operations center and its emergency management plan.

2. The prescription medication refill must be requested within 30 days:
   - After any of the conditions listed above (in section 1) occur; or
   - Until these conditions are terminated by the authority that issued the conditions; or
   - When these conditions no longer exist.
3. The time period for the waiver of prescription medication refills may be extended in 15- or 30-day increments by emergency orders issued by the Office of Insurance Regulation.

**Florida 511 System** Dial 511 from your cell phone or landline to obtain real-time travel information on all interstate highways in Florida, as well as Florida’s Turnpike. 511 informs you about accidents, road construction, severe weather conditions, or other situations that can slow you down. The traffic information is free, although standard cell phone minutes or roaming charges may apply. You can access information for specific highways from the speech-activated menu. You can also request information about roadways in a specific county or city. Additional information on 511 is available at FL511.com.

Statewide Florida 511 features:

- Travel information on Florida interstate highways and Florida’s Turnpike;
- Information on accidents, lane closures and construction;
- Severe weather, evacuation and child abduction alerts;
- 24-hour-a-day availability;
- Toll-free calls with speech-activated menus;
- Accessibility by cell phone or landline; and
- Access to regional 511 systems in Florida.

**Staying Safe in Your Home During a Hurricane**

If emergency personnel recommend that you evacuate your home because of an oncoming hurricane, follow local emergency management instructions. However, if you are unable to evacuate for the duration of a hurricane, there are things you can do to protect yourself. Seek shelter in an interior room with no windows. Stay away from all windows and exterior doors. Monitor the radio or television for weather reports. If possible, listen to reports on a NOAA weather radio. Stay indoors until authorities declare that the storm is over. Do not go outside even if the weather appears to have calmed, because dangerously strong winds can resume quickly. Do not attempt to shelter in your home if it is damaged. Follow all instructions of government officials and emergency personnel.
**Boil-Water Advisory**  Tap water may be unsafe for drinking in the wake of a hurricane or flooding. In this event, you can create a supply of water for cooking, drinking, and brushing teeth by bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute. Timing starts when the water starts to bubble. Cool the water, then place it in clean containers for use. Hot (not boiled) soapy water can be used for dishwashing and kitchen/bathroom surface cleaning. As a precaution, add one tablespoon of bleach per gallon. Laundry water does not need to be treated, nor does water for showering unless this is specified in the advisory.

**Prepare for Prolonged Power Outages**  During and after a storm, you may experience a prolonged period of time without power. Authorities will be working to restore power quickly, but it may take longer to restore in outlying and rural areas. Make sure you have batteries for flashlights, weather radios and other electronic devices that can run on battery power. If you can afford to do so, consider a backup generator as part of your preparedness plan.

**Fire Hazards**  Use battery-powered lanterns and flashlights, if possible, rather than candles or other flame-based sources of light. If you use candles, make sure you put them in safe holders away from curtains, paper, wood or other flammable items.

**Electrical Safety**  During and immediately after hurricanes, power outages and flooding can cause electrical hazards. Never touch a downed power line or anything in contact with a downed power line. Contact the utility company before performing work near a downed power line. If a power line falls on your car, remain in the car unless it catches fire, or until authorities tell you to get out. Shut off electricity and natural gas in your home. Do not turn the power back on until a qualified technician has conducted an inspection. Do not touch a person who appears to have been electrocuted without checking to make sure the person is no longer in contact with the electrical source.

**Carbon Monoxide**  When a hurricane or other disaster leaves homes without electrical power, many residents turn to portable generators, gas grills, and other short-term means to cook food, stay warm, and sustain other aspects of daily life. However, these actions carry risks, including the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. One of the most common causes of accidental poisoning in the United States, carbon monoxide is a gas that has no color, odor, or taste. The early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can
resemble food poisoning or influenza. Symptoms may include headache, weakness, nausea, and fatigue. The next stages may include vomiting, chest pain, confusion, and finally unconsciousness, convulsions, and death.

Young children and pets may be the first to be affected. However, people who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol can die from carbon monoxide poisoning before ever showing symptoms. If you think you, a friend, or a family member are showing symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, consult a health care professional immediately.

To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning in your home, follow these safety tips:

• Purchase a carbon monoxide detector. It works just like a smoke detector to sound an alarm when carbon monoxide in the air reaches hazardous levels.
• Never use a generator indoors (including garages, crawl spaces, or basements).
• Outside, do not put a generator near any doors, windows, or vents that could let carbon monoxide seep inside the home.
• Do not operate a barbecue grill indoors or in an enclosed porch or garage, even with the door open.
• Do not use a gas range or oven to heat your home.
• Do not adjust stove pilot lights yourself.
• Do not leave a vehicle running inside an attached garage.

If you think you have a carbon monoxide problem in your home, leave the house immediately and call your local fire department.

Building Safety Buildings may no longer be safe following a hurricane or flood. You should be aware of a number of potential hazards as you return to and begin cleaning up your home or another building. In general, return to buildings during the daytime so you do not have to use any lights and be aware of possible structural, electrical or gas-leak hazards.

Mold Prevention and Cleanup To prevent illness, disinfect, and dry your home and the items in it. This will prevent growth of
some bacteria, viruses, mold, and mildew that can cause illness. Rain or floodwaters that get into buildings can create conditions that enhance mold. You can take steps to prevent mold growth, including: make repairs to stop water from entering the building; clean and dry wet items within 48 to 72 hours; keep wet areas well ventilated; and discard materials that retain water and can’t be repaired, including damaged building material. If you see or smell mold, clean it with a solution of one cup of household liquid bleach per 1 gallon of water. For further cleanup, clean walls, floors, and counter surfaces with soap and water. Disinfect them with a solution of one cup of bleach per 5 gallons of water. Wash all clothes and linens in hot water. Air-dry and spray all unwashable items (for example, mattresses and furniture) with a disinfectant, and steam-clean carpets. Throw away all items damaged by water that cannot be disinfected.

**Animals and Mosquitoes** Secure all food sources and remove any animal carcasses to avoid attracting rats. Be cautious of wild or stray animals, which may be disoriented and dangerous following a hurricane or flood. Snakes may be hiding in unusual places after flooding, so be cautious. If you are bitten, try to identify the type of snake so that, if it is poisonous, you can be given the correct anti-venom. Do not cut the wound or attempt to suck the venom out. Flooding may also lead to more mosquitoes, which can carry disease, so be sure to wear insect repellent when outdoors.

**Register Contact Information** Part of your disaster plan should be sharing your plan with friends and family so they know where you will be going if you must evacuate. However, plans do not always go the way you expect. The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the American Red Cross have developed websites where you can register yourself and provide location and contact information. These websites can then be searched by people trying to find friends and family with whom they have lost contact due to a disaster. These websites are:

- National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System (NEFRLS) – fema.gov; and
- American Red Cross Safe and Well List website – safeandwell.communityos.org.
**Cell Phones and Landline Phones**  More and more people use cell phones as their primary—sometimes their only—phone. During a disaster, though, cell towers and service may be knocked out for an extended period of time. Those areas with cell service may experience spotty service and/or busy circuits. Unlike cellular service, landline phones will not be as greatly affected. Landlines do not require towers but rely on cables, which in some areas are located below ground. If you have a landline phone that does not rely on electrical power (i.e., a cordless phone), your service may still be operational both during and after an event.

**QUESTION:**
How can I get information about government and social services in my area that can assist me after a disaster?

**ANSWER:**
You can contact your local ADRC or 2-1-1 for assistance with locating services in your area.

Contact your local emergency management office or the Elder Helpline at 1-800-96-ELDER (1-800-963-5337) for more information on disaster and hurricane preparedness. The county emergency management office contact information is listed in this guide under “Resource Directories – County Emergency Management Directory.” You may also contact your local 2-1-1. Calls to 2-1-1 are free and confidential. 2-1-1 is a valuable resource in the aftermath of a disaster. More information is available at [www.211.org](http://www.211.org).
EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE

The need for emergency medical care can be triggered by any number of unforeseen circumstances. If your emergency is not life-threatening, you should call your doctor and describe the nature of your illness or injury and ask advice on what to do. If your doctor advises you to call emergency medical services (EMS), hang up and dial 911 immediately. You should always dial 911 for illnesses and injuries that you believe are life threatening or are so painful that you fear losing consciousness. Once emergency personnel arrive, be prepared to explain what hurts, where it hurts and how much it hurts. Do not be afraid to ask questions or express discomfort with certain procedures or medications. If you are allergic to certain medications, make sure you let this information be known. Also, be sure to tell medical personnel about medications you are currently taking. This information should be readily available on a medical ID card. If you do not have one, ask a friend or relative to help you prepare one. You should carry this card with you at all times.

QUESTION:
What emergency care costs are covered by Medicare and/or Medicaid?

ANSWER:
Medicare and Medicaid will help pay the costs of emergency ambulatory service that is deemed the safest mode of transportation to a medical facility, given the nature of the emergency.

Contact your medical insurance carrier or HMO, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or your local hospital for information on emergency medical care.

QUICK FACT:
It is a good idea to keep important medical and emergency telephone numbers near the telephone for quick and easy access.
HEAT EXHAUSTION/EMERGENCIES

Those aged 65 years and older are generally more prone to heat stress than are younger people, for several reasons. Elderly people do not adjust as well to sudden changes in temperature. They are more likely to have chronic medical conditions that upset normal body responses to heat. Seniors are also more likely to take prescription medicines that impair the body’s ability to regulate its temperature or that inhibit perspiration.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. Warning signs vary but may include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heavy sweating</th>
<th>Headache</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paleness</td>
<td>Nausea or vomiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscle cramps</td>
<td>Fainting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiredness</td>
<td>Cool and moist skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakness</td>
<td>Fast and weak pulse rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dizziness</td>
<td>Fast and shallow breathing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. The body’s temperature rises rapidly, the body loses its ability to sweat, and it is unable to cool down. In heat stroke, body temperatures rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided. Before a body reaches the point of actual heat stroke, it can show warning signs that may include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F)</th>
<th>Throbbing headache</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)</td>
<td>Dizziness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid, strong pulse</td>
<td>Nausea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What You Can Do to Protect Yourself

Follow these prevention tips to protect yourself from heat-related stress:

- Drink cool, non-alcoholic beverages. If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask him how much you should drink when the weather is hot. Also, avoid extremely cold liquids, because they can cause cramps.
- Rest.
- Take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath.
- If possible, seek an air-conditioned environment. If you do not have air conditioning, consider visiting an air-conditioned shopping mall or public library to cool off.
- Wear lightweight clothing.
- If possible, remain indoors during the hottest part of the day.
- Do not engage in strenuous activities.

What You Can Do to Help Protect Elderly Relatives and Neighbors

If you have elderly relatives or neighbors, you can help them protect themselves from heat-related stress:

- Visit older adults who are at risk at least twice a day and watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Take them to air-conditioned locations if they have transportation problems.
- Make sure older adults have access to electric fans whenever possible.

What You Can Do for Someone With Heat Stress

If you see any signs of severe heat stress, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the affected person. Do the following:
• Get the person to a cool or shady area.

• Cool the person rapidly, using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the person in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the person with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or, if the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously.

• Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101°-102°F.

• If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.

• Do not give the person alcohol to drink.

• Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

For information about heat-related illnesses, contact the Elder Helpline at 1-800-96-ELDER (1-800-963-5337). Your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter can also provide information on extreme heat and elder health.
NATURAL GAS ODORS/LEAKS

Each year thousands of people in the United States die as a result of gas leaks in their homes. As unlikely as it may seem, home natural-gas appliances like a stove, central air heater, and water heater can be hazardous to your health if they are not properly maintained. Understanding natural gas safety can help you and your loved ones better manage gas usage and prevent death or serious injury.

Natural gas distributors add harmless chemicals to their products to create an odor that helps consumers detect potentially harmful gas leaks. If you smell a weak odor of natural gas, take the following steps:

- Open all doors and windows.
- If possible, shut off your natural gas supply.
- Call your local gas or utility company for help.

A weak natural gas odor most likely means you have a gas leak due to an extinguished pilot light. Do not try to re-light your pilot until the gas odor has gone away.

If you smell a strong odor of gas throughout your home, you probably have a more serious gas leak. Follow these instructions:

- Have everyone leave the home.
- Do not operate light switches, your telephone, or any electrical appliances.
- Do not connect or disconnect any power plugs from electrical outlets.
- Do not light a match or lighter.
- From a neighbor’s phone, call your local gas or utility company and 911.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless and odorless gas that occurs naturally in homes. Minimal exposure to carbon monoxide can cause headaches, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, and loss of muscle control. Prolonged exposure can lead to unconsciousness, brain damage, and death. To reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, yearly maintenance checkups should be conducted on all appliances and heating systems.
QUESTION:
What can I do to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning?

ANSWER:
To prevent accidental poisoning, purchase and install carbon monoxide detectors above your heater and in the hall near your bedrooms.

Never operate a carbon monoxide-producing engine or heating source in a closed area. For example, you should not leave a car running in an enclosed garage.

For more information on carbon monoxide, see the discussion of “Hurricane/Disaster Preparedness” earlier in this section. For more information on natural gas odors and leaks, contact your local utility company or emergency management office.

Important Precautions for Gas Leaks

• Check the pilot light for leaks
• Open as many windows as possible
• Do not use lighters or turn electrical switches on or off
• Do not use your phone to report gas odors or leaks
• Get everyone out of the house at once
• Call the gas company from a neighbor’s house