Be Ready: Emergency Tips for Moms & Caregivers

Moms handle emergencies every day—and when a big emergency happens, you're often the one your family turns to. Being prepared helps keep you and your children safe. This guide breaks down the most important steps.

Make a family plan

KNOW THE RISKS

- ☐ Identify the most likely emergencies in your area.
- ☐ Check your local or state emergency management site to learn how alerts are delivered (texts, sirens, radio, etc.).

PLAN WHERE TO GO

- ☐ Identify safe places you can go (family, friends, and out of designated emergency zones).
- ☐ Map backup routes in case roads are blocked.

PLAN WHERE TO STAY

- ☐ Search for open shelters by texting SHELTER and your ZIP CODE to 43362.
- ☐ Choose a safe meeting place if family members get separated.





Make a communication plan

- ☐ Know your child's school or daycare emergency procedures and how they will contact you.
- ☐ Create emergency contact cards with important phone numbers in case cell service doesn't work and ensure each child keeps one in their backpack and go-bag.
- ☐ Power outages can impact local communication during emergencies. Choose one "out-of-town" contact who can help relay information and would not be impacted if local lines are down.

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Gather emergency supplies: Make a go-bag

ESSENTIALS

- ☐ Water, non-perishable food
- ☐ Flashlights, radio
- ☐ Chargers and batteries
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Extra clothes
- ☐ Cash
- ☐ Copies of important documents (insurance, birth certificates)



BABY SUPPLIES (IF APPLICABLE)

- ☐ Diapers, wipes
- ☐ Extra clothes, socks, blankets
- ☐ Nursing supplies
- ☐ Breast pump (manual or electric)
- ☐ Small cups for feeding if needed
- ☐ Ready-to-use formula



MEDICATIONS

- ☐ Keep at least 7–10 days' worth of prescription medicines on hand.

PERSONAL NEEDS

- ☐ Journal, blanket, book, games, or music
- ☐ Feminine hygiene products
- ☐ Contacts/glasses

KIDS' GO-BAGS

- ☐ Comfort items
- ☐ Notebook + pen
- ☐ Activities or games
- ☐ Snacks
- ☐ Hygiene items
- ☐ Blanket or jacket

Emergency Tips for Pregnant People

Pregnancy adds unique medical and comfort needs during emergencies. Taking steps to prepare ahead of time can help you feel more equipped before, during, and after a disaster.

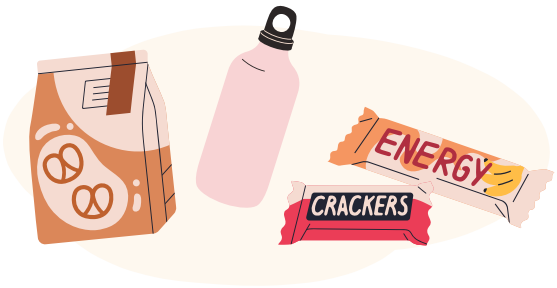
Keep important information accessible

- ☐ Have a physical copy of your birth plan, key details about your medical history and contact information for your care provider.
- ☐ Your hospital bag can double as your emergency preparedness kit—ensure it includes all the items you would need for you and your baby post-birth.



If you need to evacuate

- ☐ Travel with a support person if possible (e.g. partner, family member, friend).
- ☐ Don't drive more than 3–4 hours at a time.
- ☐ Stop to stretch often when you're able to.
- ☐ Drink plenty of water and keep snacks with you.



Know the warning signs

- ☐ Learn the signs of labor and urgent maternal warning signs. Call for help if something doesn't feel right.
- ☐ Share your birth plan with your support person so they can help advocate for you.

URGENT MATERNAL WARNING SIGNS

- ☐ Signs of pre or post eclampsia: (persistent headaches, dizziness, changes in your vision, extreme swelling of your hands, feet or face, upper right chest pain, trouble breathing)
- ☐ Fever of 100.4 or higher
- ☐ Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby
- ☐ Severe nausea and throwing up
- ☐ Severe belly pain that doesn't go away
- ☐ Abnormal vaginal discharge, or heavy bleeding before and/or after giving birth
- ☐ Baby's reduced movement outside of their typical patterns

Get virtual support

JustBirthSpace.org provides national call and text support that can help connect you with doula care and/or help you locate additional services if displaced.

Feeding Your Child Safely During an Emergency

Natural disasters can make it hard for parents and caregivers to feed their infants and young children safely. These tips provide information for feeding your young child during an emergency.

Breastfeeding is best

Breastfeeding is the safest option during an emergency. It provides ideal nutrition and protects you and your baby's safety and health. Even if you've stopped nursing, it may be possible to start producing milk again, especially if your baby is under six months. Let your care provider know so they can support your efforts to nurse.



Tips

- ☐ Continue breastfeeding to maintain milk supply.
- ☐ Keep hands clean—use soap and water or hand sanitizer (60%+ alcohol).
- ☐ If you can't use your pump, you can express milk by hand.
- ☐ Find out if local milk banks are available at **hmbana.org/find-a-milk-bank**.
- ☐ At shelters, ask workers for a quiet, private feeding area.
- ☐ Drink water regularly to stay hydrated and ask for snacks when needed.
- ☐ If transporting or storing breast milk or formula, bring ice packs or cooler bags.

Formula feeding

- ☐ Keep some ready-to-feed liquid formula (safer than powdered during emergencies) as recommended by your health provider.
- ☐ If ready-to-feed liquid formula is not available, it is best to use bottled water to prepare powdered or concentrated formula.
- ☐ Use bottled or boiled water for cleaning feeding supplies.
- ☐ In emergencies, feeding with a cup is safer and easier to clean than using bottles.

Power Outage Tip

If you lose power and have breast milk stored in your fridge, limit the number of times you open the door. If you must evacuate, put milk in an insulated cooler with ice packs and either use or return to a fridge within 24 hours.

Self-Care Tips for Caregivers

Your children and family members may look to you for comfort and how to respond during an emergency. Taking care of yourself helps you care for them and helps them cope with crisis.

Check your basic needs and body

- ☐ Eat when food is available, rest when you can, and keep up basic hygiene—check in with yourself: When did I last eat, sleep, or reset?
- ☐ Reduce physical tension by stretching regularly, and encourage your family to do the same in a safe space.
- ☐ Make your physical well-being a priority even if it is taking small steps like short naps and regular snacks.

Be patient— with yourself and others

- ☐ Everyone is stressed; that is normal.

Remember to breathe

- ☐ Sit or step outside for a few minutes when you're in a safe environment.
- ☐ Inhale for 2 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds.

Reach out for support

- ☐ Take turns on caregiving responsibilities with another adult when possible.
- ☐ Connect with shelter workers or disaster case managers for help accessing resources.
- ☐ Lean on your existing support network—family, trusted friends, or faith leaders.

Know when to ask for help

Seek support if you notice signs of depression, anxiety, or overwhelming stress that last for weeks and are affecting your relationships. Symptoms may include:

- ☐ Eating or sleeping too much or too little.
- ☐ Pulling away from people or things you usually enjoy.
- ☐ Feeling like you must keep busy.
- ☐ Worrying a lot of the time; feeling guilty but not sure why.

Disaster Distress Hotline | call or text: 1-800-985-5990

Provides 24/7 counseling to people who have experienced any disaster. Available in Spanish.

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline | call or text: 1-833-TLC-MAMA

Provides 24/7 counseling to people who are pregnant or just had a baby. Available in Spanish.

Call 211 for help or visit 211.org to find local contact information

Provides 24/7 help locating local resources and services in the country. Available in multiple languages.

Supporting Your Child During Stressful Times

Even the littlest humans are affected emotionally by emergencies. After a scary event, it's normal for young children to become more clingy, have tantrums, struggle with sleep, or regress in skills.

These reactions are usually short-term. However, it's important to monitor changes in personality, behavior, or reactions that persist. Big or lasting changes should be shared with a health professional.

Ways to help your child

CREATE A COZY SPACE

- [ ] Arrange your area in a shelter or living arrangement so it feels like your own little nest.

INCREASE COMFORT AND CONNECTION

- [ ] Hold, rock, sway, or bounce gently.
- [ ] Speak in a soft voice.
- [ ] Keep your child facing you while feeding or playing.
- [ ] Reassure them you'll stay with them.

USE GENTLE DISTRACTIONS

- [ ] Tell simple stories.
- [ ] Sing their favorite songs together.



SUPPORT EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

- [ ] Encourage your child to share their feelings—through talking or calming activities like drawing or coloring.
- [ ] Give simple, age-appropriate explanations, and be honest when you don't have answers.
- [ ] Limit exposure to distressing news and social media when possible, and guide them toward calmer, age-appropriate content.
- [ ] Acknowledge that some exposure to difficult situations may be unavoidable—offer reassurance, stay present, and help them process what they see and feel.

RESPOND CALMLY TO FEELINGS

- [ ] Acknowledge their worries with simple, reassuring words like:
  - "I know, I want to go home too. We're staying here together to keep safe."
  - "The big wind was scary. It's over now."

KEEP ROUTINES STEADY

- [ ] Stick to familiar rhythms: eat, play, nap, play, sleep.
- [ ] Let your child make choices over small things throughout the day to help them feel in control.