

Emergency Preparedness: Sheltering at Home

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It's easy to think that disasters won't happen in New Mexico. However, New Mexico is at risk for drought, wildfires, floods, flash floods, high winds, landslides, severe winter storms, severe thunderstorms, hail storms, tornadoes, and earthquakes. The more prepared you are before a disaster occurs, the less impact it will have on your life.



In most cases during severe weather or a natural disaster, the safest action is to take shelter, generally at home. In some cases, though, you may need to evacuate the area. Recommendations on how to prepare for evacuations are covered in NMSU Extension Guide G-110, *Emergency Preparedness: Evacuation* (https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_g/G110.pdf).

The following are recommendations to prepare for an at-home sheltering event.

EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

As you start assembling your emergency supplies, begin with enough to last three days, then continue storing supplies until you have enough to last your household two weeks or more. Keep in mind that after a disaster it may take several days for utilities to be restored and local stores to restock and reopen.

DRINKABLE WATER

The minimum recommendation for storing emergency water is to have at least one gallon per person and pet per day that will be used for drinking and basic sanitation. Additionally, children, nursing mothers, and the sick may need more water per day, and if you live in a warm climate, hot temperatures can double your water needs. Medical emergencies also require additional water, so it is beneficial to have extra water stored for first aid.

Observe the expiration dates for store bought water. Bottled water generally has a one-year shelf life. Replace non-store bought water every six months. To improve the taste of water stored for a long time, pour it from

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one clean container into another clean container several times to replace its oxygen. Opened water bottles should be used within two weeks. For more information on storing non-store bought water and disinfecting contaminated water, see NMSU Guide M-116, *Treating and Storing Water for Emergency Use* (https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_m/M116.pdf).

FOOD

When selecting emergency food supplies, choose food products that are easy to prepare, are what your family will eat, meet the dietary needs of everyone in the household, have a long shelf-storage life, are easy to open, and don't make you thirsty. Some examples of these include:

- Ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits, and vegetables
- Protein or fruit bars
- Dry cereal or granola
- Peanut butter
- Dried fruit
- Canned juices
- Non-perishable pasteurized milk
- Freeze dried meals
- Baby formula and baby food (if needed)
- Pet food (if needed)

You should also have a manual can opener, scissors, and any other unpowered cooking tools that you may need stored with your emergency supplies.

Food Safety in a Disaster

Keeping food safe is critical to staying healthy during and after a disaster. Be sure to follow normal food safety procedures, such as handwashing before preparing food and eating, keeping perishable foods out of the food safety danger zone (between 40°F and 140°F), and washing dishes in hot water. Additionally, avoid opening your refrigerator and freezer unnecessarily; if unopened, a refrigerator should stay cold for about four hours, a full freezer should stay below freezing for two days, and a half-full freezer will thaw in about one day. If either your refrigerator or freezer warms to above 40°F for more than two hours, discard any perishable food inside. For additional food safety information, see NMSU Extension Guide E-508, *Keeping Food Safe* (https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_e/E508.pdf), and Guide E-118, *Storing Food Safely* (https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_e/E118.pdf).

MEDICAL

During an emergency, you should be prepared to handle both ongoing family medical issues and any acute issues that may arise. To handle acute medical needs during an emergency, have a well-equipped first aid kit. For ongoing medical issues, have seven days of medications on hand if possible, as well as needed medical supplies, such as hearing aid batteries, contact lenses and cleaning supplies, a repair kit for glasses, and blood glucose testing supplies and equipment. Additionally, add over-the-counter medications your family may need, such as pain relievers, allergy medications, and diarrhea/constipation medication to your emergency storage. When you buy new medical supplies for your family's general use, switch them with your emergency supplies to ensure your kit's supplies don't expire.

HYGIENE

Maintaining good hygiene is critical to preventing the spread of disease. This includes hand washing, feminine hygiene, dental hygiene, and wound care; all should be done with clean water and proper supplies, so it is important to store a large supply of both. Bathing is also important for good hygiene and should be done as needed with soap and clean water. If applicable, make sure diaper changing practices remain hygienic, including cleaning the child, disposing of the diaper, and handwashing with soap and water for both the caregiver and child. For more information on diapering in an emergency setting, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fact sheet "Safe and Healthy Diapering to Reduce the Spread of Germs" (<https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/pdf/diapering-in-emergency-settings508c.pdf>).

ENTERTAINMENT

Having entertainment options available during and after a disaster can reduce stress and anxiety for everyone in the family. In most emergency situations, power and internet will be lost, so having entertainment options, such as paper books, board games, puzzles, and toys, for everyone in the family is important. While having entertainment is important, limit cell phone use to monitoring instructions from your local emergency management office and checking on the health and safety of family to preserve battery life as long as possible. It is also recommended that you have an emergency battery-powered or hand crank radio in your emergency supplies, and know what stations your local emergency management office uses to broadcast updates and instructions during an emergency.

PETS

If you have a pet, it's equally important to store emergency supplies for them. This includes a two-week supply of pet food and water, any medical supplies they may need, pet toys, and pet hygiene supplies. Additionally, your pet may not be able to go outside for some time during the disaster, so you should have a plan and supplies for your pet to relieve itself indoors. Never leave a pet chained or kenneled outdoors during a disaster. For more information, see the Federal Emergency Management Agency fact sheet "Prepare for Emergencies Now: Information for Pet Owners" (https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1390846777239dc08e309debe561d866b05ac84daf1ee/pets_2014.pdf).

UTILITIES

During a disaster, you may need to shut off your utilities. As part of your preparedness process, locate and know how to use the main shutoffs for your home's gas line, electrical system, and water system. Additionally, you should place the tools needed to operate each shutoff by them so you don't have to look for the tools in an emergency. For more information on when and how to turn off utilities, as well as procedures for turning them back on, contact your local utility company. In some cases, only a utility company technician will be able to turn them on. You should also keep emergency flashlights or lanterns and their respective batteries with your emergency supplies.



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AIR QUALITY

Some disasters affect local air quality, such as wildfires or chemical spills; therefore, you should have the ability to create a sealed "clean room" to keep out hazardous air particles. To do this, close all windows and doors, turn off air conditioner units, and close fireplace dampers in your home. In a room with as few windows and vents as possible, seal the windows, vents, and door with 2- to 4-milliliter-thick plastic sheeting and duct tape and place wet towels under the door to block air flow. Additionally, have a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter you can use in the room to filter any air that does flow into it. Lastly, monitor your local emergency management office for updates, and evacuation orders if the situation worsens.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Ready.gov Make a Plan website: <https://www.ready.gov/plan>
- NMSU Extension Guide M-116, *Treating and Storing Water for Emergency Use*: https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_m/M116.pdf
- NMSU Extension Guide E-118, *Storing Food Safely*: https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_e/E118.pdf
- NMSU Extension Guide E-508, *Keeping Food Safe*: https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_e/E508.pdf
- FEMA publication "Prepare for Emergencies Now: Information for Pet Owners": https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1390846777239dc08e309debe561d866b05ac84daf1ee/pets_2014.pdf

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