

Emergency Planning for People with Cancer [1]

People with cancer have specific medical needs, especially during active treatment and in the time after treatment. These needs may become serious in the event of a natural or man-made disaster, such as tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, outbreaks of disease (such as the flu or measles), and terrorist attacks. Even if such an event is unlikely where you live, it is important to be prepared. This article will help you and your family plan for emergency situations.

Here are some tips to help you and your family prepare for an emergency:

Make a Plan

During a disaster, electricity, gas, water, and telephone services may be interrupted. Roads may be closed and emergency services that are especially important for people with cancer, such as ambulance and hospitals, may be unavailable. When making a plan, it is important to consider how these outages might affect you.

- Develop your plan with your oncologist. Talk to him or her about what you need to do to manage your cancer during emergencies. For example, what are your options if you cannot get to a scheduled radiation treatment or to the clinic for chemotherapy?
- Talk with your family about different disasters that could occur and how the person with cancer could be affected. Write down a few solutions for coping with each scenario.
- Choose a place where everyone will meet during a disaster.
- Identify a friend or a relative for everyone to communicate with in case you and your loved ones are separated or cannot get to the meeting place. This person can also be a back-up for any important information you may need, such as phone numbers for your doctor or pharmacy.
- Don't forget to brainstorm specific needs, such as evacuation transportation assistance or help coordinating medical appointments during and after a disaster.

[Use this form](#) [2] to start on your plan today.

Be Ready To Stay or To Go

Depending on the type of disaster, you may be asked to evacuate (leave your house), or you may be asked to shelter in place? (stay home). It is important to be ready for both. Contact your local [American Red Cross](#) [3] chapter or public health department for information about how best

to prepare to either evacuate or shelter in place and to learn about your community's warning signals for natural disasters or public health emergencies—what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them.

Evacuate

Gather and keep supplies in a waterproof “go bag” that you can grab if you need to quickly leave. A “go bag” can be a backpack, tote bag, or even a small container that is easily carried.

In addition to basic supplies, such as water and blankets, your “go bag” should include any cancer medications and supportive care items.

Know where or who you will stay with if you need to be evacuated and be sure to consider areas that are convenient for the person with cancer. For example, if you will stay at a shelter, make a list of shelters in your area, including ones that have special medical facilities or ones that accept service animals. If you know in advance that you or your loved one will need assistance with evacuation transportation, make a list of transport services in your area that are available to help.

Learn more about [evacuating](#) [4].

Shelter in Place

During other disasters, you may be asked to “shelter in place.” In this scenario, you will need enough water, food, medication, and other supplies, such as a first-aid kit, to survive on your own until help is available.

Water: Each day a person needs to drink at least 2 quarts (a half gallon) of water. Plan on an additional half-gallon of water per person to prepare food and for personal hygiene. If the person with cancer is taking medication that makes them extra thirsty, plan on having more water. Have enough water for at least three days.

Food: Stock up on foods that you eat regularly and that don't need a refrigerator, such as energy bars, peanut butter, crackers, and canned fruit (don't forget a can opener). Talk with your doctor about any vitamin, mineral, or protein supplement to help you get the nutrition you need. Have enough food for at least three days.

Medication: Make sure you have enough medication for at least one week, including any cancer medication and other medications for pain, nausea, and other side effects of cancer treatment. If it is not possible to have a week-long supply of medications and supplies, keep as much as possible on hand and talk with your pharmacist or doctor about what else you should do to prepare. For example, if the electricity goes out for a long time, it will be difficult to keep medications refrigerated.

Other supplies: Make a first-aid kit to treat basic injuries, such as cuts or burns. Many people with cancer are at high risk of developing an infection. To protect yourself or your loved one, include sanitizing supplies in your first-aid kit, such as antiseptic spray, peroxide, or alcohol. If you or your loved ones have a central venous catheter, or an intravenous line to receive treatment, include extra dressings and supplies in your kit.

Learn more about [sheltering in place](#) [5].

Keep Important Medication Information Together

Work with your doctor to summarize your medical history, including information about your cancer diagnosis and treatment, in a simple document. Include your current medications and dosages, current and recent treatments, and other dietary and health needs.

In addition to your medical history, keep a copy of other important documents related to your cancer treatment and care, including:

- Pathology reports
- Lab reports
- Imaging results
- Names, addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers of all the doctors who are treating you or your loved one
- Insurance information

Store all of this information in a waterproof container and take it with you if you evacuate. This will help you continue treatment wherever you are. [Learn more about a wallet card](#) [6] from the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the National Cancer Institute to help you and your doctor stay connected during a disaster.

More Information

[Keeping a Personal Medical Record](#) [7]

[Traveling With Cancer](#) [8]

[When to Call the Doctor During Cancer Treatment](#) [9]

Additional Resources

National Cancer Institute: [Help for Cancer Patients and Researchers Affected by Catastrophic Events](#) [10]

Federal Emergency Management Agency: [Ready.gov](#) [11]

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Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/cancernet-feature-articles/emergency-planning-people-cancer>

- [2] http://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/Family_Emegency_Plan.pdf
- [3] <http://www.redcross.org/>
- [4] <http://www.ready.gov/evacuating-yourself-and-your-family>
- [5] <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/preparedness/shelter/home/>
- [6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25320>
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24569>
- [8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24707>
- [9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/26366>
- [10] <http://www.cancer.gov/aboutnci/emergency/disasters>
- [11] <http://www.ready.gov/>