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Inclusive Emergency Preparedness Guidelines

Emergencies can happen at a moment's notice. Mobility, hearing, visual, or cognitive disabilities can create specific needs that individuals need to address to be able to respond to an emergency. People with and without disabilities, as well as those in their support networks, may benefit from the tips below.

C-MIST Functional Needs Framework

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services uses a functional needs framework to identify and understand at-risk individuals' needs in emergency planning and preparedness. The framework includes five essential functional needs categories: **communication, medical needs, maintaining independence, supervision, and transportation (C-MIST)**. C-MIST provides a useful and flexible framework for emergency planning and response, emphasizing a person's functional needs rather than a disability.

C - Communication

Some people have difficulties receiving and responding to information. This includes individuals who:

- Have reduced or no ability to see, hear, or speak
- Have limitations understanding or learning
- Cannot speak, read, or understand English

M - Medical Needs

This category includes individuals who:

- Need assistance with activities of daily living such as grooming, bathing, eating, dressing, or toileting
- Are managing chronic, contagious, or terminal illnesses
- Require medications, IV therapy, feeding tubes, dialysis, oxygen, suction, catheters, and ostomies

I - Independence

Some individuals use medication or assistive devices to function independently daily, such as:

- Mobility aids (wheelchairs, walkers, canes)
- Communication aids (hearing aids, computers)
- Medical equipment (syringes, oxygen)
- Service animals

S - Supervision

This category includes individuals who:

- Experience Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia
- Have psychiatric conditions such as schizophrenia, severe depression, or chronic and severe mental illness
- Have intellectual or developmental disabilities
- Have brain injuries

T - Transportation

Transportation is essential for emergency planning. This category includes individuals who:

- Do not drive because of a disability, legal restriction, temporary injury, age, poverty, or lack of access to a vehicle

Personal Preparedness—Be Prepared to Self-Rescue!

1. **Survival Kit:** Help people with disabilities pull together a [survival kit](#).
2. **Emergency Plan:** Work with each individual to develop an [emergency plan](#), considering:
 - **Personal Care:** Assistance with bathing, grooming, or adaptive equipment for dressing.
 - **Water Service:** Plan for water service cut-offs.
 - **Personal Care Equipment:** Use of equipment like shower chairs or tub-transfer benches.
 - **Adaptive Feeding Devices:** Special utensils for food preparation or eating.
 - **Electricity-Dependent Equipment:** Back-up power supply for devices like dialysis or lifts.
3. **Building Evacuation:**
 - Assess the need for help to leave home or office.
 - Ensure the ability to reach and activate alarms.
 - Identify exits if elevators are not working.

- Ensure readability of emergency signs in print or Braille.
 - Check that emergency alarms have audible and visible features.
4. **Getting Help:**
- Plan for calling for help.
 - Identify locations of text telephones and phones with amplification.
 - Consider hearing aids' functionality if wet from sprinklers.
 - Plan for communication with emergency personnel without interpreters or word boards.
5. **Mobility Aids/Ramp Access:**
- Plan for missing mobility aids.
 - Check ramp stability and connection to buildings.
6. **Service Animals/Pets:**
- Plan for caring for service animals during and after a disaster.
 - Identify a caregiver for the animal.
 - Ensure appropriate licenses for service animals in emergency shelters.
7. **Personal Support Network:**
- Identify and create a personal support network or self-help team.
 - Meet with family, personal care attendants, and building managers to review community hazards and emergency plans.
 - [Learn how to create and implement your personal support network](#)
8. **Escape Routes and Drills:**
- Ensure wheelchair accessibility for home exits.
 - Practice emergency evacuation drills at least two times a year.
 - Practice new emergency evacuation drills whenever your plan or the layout of your home changes.
9. **Prepare and Practice:**
- Review and rehearse the plan regularly to ensure the person with disabilities knows what to expect.
 - Plan for each hazard impacting the local community and ensure accessible shelter locations.

Inclusive Emergency Preparedness / Evacuation Considerations

1. **Planning Committee:**
- Include persons with disabilities in the planning committee.
 - Provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to opt-in and identify needs confidentially.
 - Ensure participation in tabletop drills.
2. **Escort Groups:**
- Assign escort groups for shelter-in-place and evacuation planning.
 - Train escort groups in first aid.

- Pair individuals with disabilities with escorts.
- Confirm meet-up locations.
- Appoint an officer for contact information storage and reunification leadership.

3. Evacuation:

- Ensure clearly marked alarms with audio, flashing lights, Braille, and large text.
- Verify more than one accessible exit.
- Plan for smooth and barrier-free exit routes with audio prompts and signage.
- Ensure an effective communication plan for emergency responders and individuals with disabilities.
- Secure manual wheelchairs as backup for electric wheelchairs or scooters.
- Test and evaluate evacuation and shelter-in-place plans with the disabilities committee.

Shelter in Place (Active Shooter / Lockdown / Tornado)

- **Designated Spaces:**
 - Identify shelter-in-place spaces and ensure they are identifiable for those with communication barriers.
 - Store a three-day supply of nonperishable food and personal care items like blankets, medications, and adaptive feeding devices.
 - Plan for necessary power backup and equipment accessibility.
- **Supervision:**
 - Ensure supervision for individuals with cognitive disabilities.
- **Active Shooter Plan:**
 - Prepare a multi-option response plan including "Run, Hide, Fight," passive response, and evacuation.
 - Tailor responses for mobility, hearing, and visual impairments.
 - Establish a feasible fight method for escorts and persons with disabilities.
 - Communicate with first responders about special needs.
- **Service Animals:**
 - Ensure individuals with disabilities are not separated from service animals.
 - Involve persons with disabilities who use service animals in disabilities plan.
 - Train committee and escorts in proper handling of service animals.
 - Communicate to emergency personnel the importance of keeping service animals with their owners.

Emergency Communications Considerations

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that emergency preparedness plans include input from those with disabilities to ensure accessibility and effectiveness. This includes involving people with disabilities in all phases of emergency planning, from preparation to recovery, and ensuring their needs are adequately addressed.

1. **Responsibility:**
 - Ensure your emergency management program is accessible to all.
 - Regularly seek and use input from persons with disabilities and relevant organizations.
 2. **Practicing Inclusion:**
 - Involve local disability organizations for feedback on all emergency planning phases.
 - Recruit volunteers with disabilities for simulations and tests.
 3. **Multiple Formats:**
 - Provide public information in alternative formats (e.g., large print, screen readers, qualified interpreters, closed captioning, visual cues).
 4. **Effective Communication Tips:**
 - Partner with local disability organizations for outreach.
 - Clearly indicate how to request alternative formats in publications.
 - Disseminate materials in locations frequented by individuals with disabilities.
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Emergency Notification Systems

Traditional emergency warning methods (such as radio, sirens, or other audible alerts) are not always accessible to people with disabilities. For example, a person who is blind or has low vision may not be aware of visual cues, such as flashing lights. Combine different emergency notification methods to reach a greater audience, such as:

- Telephone calls with pre-recorded messages
 - Auto-dialed TTY messages
 - Text messaging or emails
 - Open captioning on emergency broadcasts
 - Dispatch qualified sign language interpreters for televised announcements
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Considerations for Emergency Shelter Accommodations

1. **Facility Accessibility:**
 - Ensure all pathways are at least 36" wide.

- Provide wayfinding methods for those with cognitive disabilities using intuitive layouts and signage with clear graphics, images, and directional indicators for all abilities.
- 2. **Quiet Rooms:**
 - Set up quiet or stress-free zones for those with sensory or anxiety disorders.
- 3. **Service Animals:**
 - Keep individuals with disabilities and their service animals together.
- 4. **Cots and Sleeping Arrangements:**
 - Ensure appropriate cot placement and height for easy transfer.
- 5. **Food and Dietary Needs:**
 - Plan for common dietary restrictions and food allergies.
 - Allow reasonable kitchen access for disability-related needs.
- 6. **Family Support:**
 - Keep families together whenever possible.
- 7. **Publicizing Accessible Shelters:**
 - Advertise accessible shelters in places likely to reach people with disabilities.

"Get Ready" Initiative by the American Public Health Association (APHA)

APHA provides emergency preparedness information and tips for people with disabilities, available in various formats including PDF, audio recordings, and ASL videos: [APHA Get Ready](#).

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