Hurricane Health Tips: Special Needs & the Elderly

General Preparations

Preparation in advance of hurricane season is essential for people with special needs. Advance preparation should include how to evacuate and where to relocate. Many areas have special needs shelters that are equipped with medical staff and specialized equipment. Please call the Miami-Dade County Health Department for more information regarding available shelters and pre-registering for a special needs shelter. Some shelters may not be able to accommodate your special needs. Therefore, it is important to have another plan in place:

1. Determine with whom you will stay in the event evacuation is necessary. Select family or friends who are unlikely to be evacuated from their homes and obtain their commitment for you to be housed with them.

2. Make arrangements for transportation in the event of evacuation. If family or friends have agreed to transport you to safe housing, be sure they can accommodate any equipment or supplies that need to be taken with you. Also, be assured that your driver will transport you well in advance of the hurricane evacuation warnings.

3. Have any special provisions at the home in which you will be staying — in advance of hurricane season. This will prevent you from having to pack these items at the last minute and alleviate the possibility that you may forget something very important for your condition. The following is a list of some items that could be stored in advance:

   o At least a one-month supply of medications
   o Extra copies of your prescriptions in case your physician's office is damaged and not operational
   o Identification and important information (Please refer to the "Identification and Important Information" section of this page for a complete listing.)

Plan on 14 days worth of items below:

- Foods for special diet (non-perishable)
- Food supplements
- Special medical equipment
- Oxygen for portable units
- Batteries for wheelchairs
- Adult diapers, over-the-counter medications, etc.
- Water — Store enough water for your stay with family and friends. Have at least one gallon per person for each day you plan to stay. Label the
container with the date of purchase. Bottled water does not stay pure for long periods of time.
- Changes of clothing
- Hearing aid batteries

**NEED-SPECIFIC PREPARATIONS**

**Homebound Patients**

Homebound patients who are on advanced technical equipment must have a caretaker who will make plans for them. Have arrangements made with family or friends who are able to provide the care you need.

**Individuals with Hearing or Communication Difficulties**

Special needs children or individuals who have difficulty communicating should have identification with them. This should be carried in the wallet or purse. (For a complete listing of things to include, refer to the "Identification and Important Information" section of this page.) Individuals who rely on a hearing aid should purchase extra batteries prior to hurricane season. Keep them with your other hurricane supplies, so they will be on hand in the event your supplier is closed after a hurricane strikes.

**Individuals with Sight Difficulties**

If you currently have an established list or chart of medications that guide you on how to take them, share this information with the people with whom you plan to reside. You may want to make a duplicate copy of this information and have it at the house where you plan to stay well in advance of hurricane season. Store extra contact lenses or glasses.

Remember, if you have a leader dog, it needs to have hurricane supplies too. Have plenty of food and water stored for your dog. Store 1/2 gallon of water per day.

Braille or low-vision equipment is expensive and important to you. Make plans to take it with you in the event of an evacuation. Label equipment with your name, address and telephone number.

**Individuals Using Medical Supplies and Aids**

Individuals who currently have medical aids such as wheelchairs, walkers, canes, toilet seats, etc., should label everything with your name, address and phone number. You may need to evacuate to a facility where many people are using similar medical supplies. The labeling will help identify which items are yours during your stay as well as when you leave.
Emergency Evacuation Registration for People with Special Needs

Residents who are home-bound, need assistance with daily living, have electrically dependent needs or require specialized transportation and will need help evacuating from a hurricane, should register for the Miami-Dade County Emergency Evacuation Assistance Program (EEAP) at 311 or 305-513-7700. The TDD number for EEAP is 305-468-5402.

Shelters

If you find it necessary to go to a shelter for evacuation, please be aware that not all shelters can accommodate individuals with special needs. Watch and listen to local news broadcasts. They will name the shelters that have the facilities for people with special needs.

Sheltering in Place

If you don't find it necessary to evacuate because your residence is not in an evacuation zone and is protected adequately and you have a caregiver to stay with you, you may want to take shelter in your own home. Remember these safety tips:

- Take refuge in an interior hallway or smaller room with no windows, such as a closet near load-bearing walls.
- Keep a fire extinguisher nearby, and only use battery-operated lamps or flashlights.
- Be sure to leave a clear path to exit in case of a fire.

The Elderly

The elderly may have special needs too and should follow the "General Preparation" instructions outlined in the "Special Needs" section on this page. It is wise and comforting to have plans in place.

There are many elderly who are perfectly functional in their own environment and do not currently have special needs. Do not assume that because these people are functional today that they will be functional during a disaster. Often, when the elderly are taken from their familiar surroundings and relocated during a hurricane, they become disoriented and confused.

As a consequence, the elderly often become forgetful about names, addresses, phone numbers, medications, etc. In a rush to get out of their house they may forget some important items. Therefore, preparation is key. Have a small bag packed and ready to go with several changes of clothes, one month's supply of medications, important papers and favorite pictures. In addition, have the proper identification as listed below.
Identification and Important Information

It is advised that adults and children with special needs and the elderly have identification and important information prepared well in advance of the hurricane season. Basic identification information can be printed on an armband. More extensive identification should be in a wallet or purse. The following is a list of items to be included:

- Name, address, phone number and social security number of the bearer
- Names, addresses and phone numbers of family and friends. This should include people to contact in case of an emergency. List at least one person who lives locally and another who lives out of state. Remember, your local contact may have home damage and downed phone lines, so an out-of-state contact may be easier to reach by phone.
- Medical history
- A list of medications and prescribing instructions
- Extra copies of your prescriptions
- Names and phone numbers of physicians
- Health insurance information including addresses, phone numbers, policy numbers, etc.
- A list of models and serial numbers, as well as suppliers, for medical equipment such as pacemakers, feeding pumps, home IV units, suction machines, wheelchairs, Braille or lower vision equipment, etc.
- Name and phone number of your home health care agency. Have the name of a back-up agency that carries any necessary supplies in the event your regular agency is unable to perform its duties.
- Check your home or renters’ insurance coverage to be sure it includes replacement coverage. Keep the policy information with you.

Pets

Pets are not allowed at evacuation centers/shelters. Only service animals for people with disabilities are permitted. Make arrangements in advance for your pets to stay with friends or at an inland pet shelter. You will need to store adequate food, water and medications for your pets: dry and canned food for 14 days and 1/2 gallon of water per day.