

Emergency Preparedness Amidst COVID-19

A GUIDE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

As local governments grapple with the COVID-19 challenge, hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and other disasters continue to threaten communities across the US. How can local leaders keep residents safe and prepare for these hazards amidst a global pandemic that requires physical distancing and other precautions?

New Challenges

EVACUATIONS AND SHELTERING:

Indoor spaces are potential hot spots for virus transmission if physical distancing requirements are not maintained.

EMERGENCY AND TEMPORARY HOUSING:

Fewer residents may find temporary lodging with friends and family if elderly or vulnerable residents are unable to host.

CRITICAL SUPPLIES:

Longer delivery timelines have strained supply chains and deliveries.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT:

Communities may find fewer residents available, and encounter challenges due to physical distancing requirements.

RESIDENT COMMUNICATION:

Providing clear guidance for COVID-19 is already a challenge. In many communities with inequitable access to internet, libraries and community centers are closed.

LONGER POWER OUTAGES:

Utilities must institute physical-distancing procedures, require personal protection equipment, and sanitation procedures.

MENTAL HEALTH STRAIN:

First responders and residents may already be taxed by direct or indirect virus impacts.

LIMITED PERSONAL RESOURCES:

The economic downturn may limit a resident's ability to purchase preparedness items.

LONGER RESPONSE TIMES:

Local governments may face longer response times from state and federal agencies. Residents should be prepared with up to two weeks of disaster supplies.



Preparing Your Community



REVIEW LOCAL RESPONSE CAPACITY IN ADVANCE

Prepare critical infrastructure & infrastructure operators: New physical distancing and shelter-in-place guidance will help ensure that your critical infrastructure and health care apparatus are not strained by a spike in COVID-19 cases. Federal guidance is available from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

Prepare IT systems and virtual emergency operations centers instead of using in-person facilities.

Leverage the diverse slate of funding streams available to bolster preparedness capabilities

Review supply chains:

If possible, prioritize policies that allow for individualized delivery of goods, such as food or emergency supplies (sandbags, plywood) for reinforcement of infrastructure.

- Review in-house emergency management supplies and order early.
- Explore pre-disaster partnerships: Consider public-private partnerships (Home Depot, Walmart, Target, etc.) in advance of storm and fire season to ensure that residents have access to supplies for reinforcing homes or meeting basic needs, particularly if supply chain disruption is a barrier.
- Connect with local nonprofits to ensure they have adequate funding and tactical resources.
- Acquire PPE for first responders and distribute in advance.

Mobilize community volunteers through your local or state [Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster](#) (VOAD) in advance of events. Work with community responders including their networks of faith and civic organizations to assess critical life safety needs in communities.

This document is a short guide about local emergency preparedness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please consult FEMA's COVID-19 Pandemic Operational Guidance for the 2020 Hurricane Season, the American Flood Coalition dual disaster document, and Department of the Interior for COVID-19 and wildfire information for a full checklist of actionable steps. These and other resources are listed at the bottom of this info sheet. Local elected officials should also contact their own local emergency management staff before reaching out to state or FEMA officials.

Utilize online trainings to safely train local volunteers. This will both mitigate the risk of outside volunteers bringing COVID-19 into the community and help ensure you have a local workforce trained for multiple disaster types. Courses are available through [FEMA Independent Study](#) or the [Red Cross](#).

Promote community cohesion. Recovery is tied to preparedness. Local governments can encourage residents to share resources and reduce financial burden on individuals and families. There is no formal guidance on social cohesion, but this [FEMA PrepTalk](#) from Dr. Daniel Aldrich offers excellent guidance for city leaders.

Examine past disasters for supply needs and conduct community vulnerability assessments to identify residents requiring extra assistance. Share data with county and state logistics teams.

Continue to monitor data from healthcare providers to determine if any are near capacity and/or are challenged with the availability of critical equipment (e.g., ventilators). Provide that information to county and state logistics teams.

Manage mental health strain on first responders and healthcare workers. They may already be taxed by COVID-19. If possible, provide crisis counseling early and often for these professionals and other community leaders. Encourage residents to connect with faith-based community providers to ensure stress management is addressed (faith-based leaders should be trained).

Ensure proper PPE is worn during post-disaster cleanup efforts.

Rescue workers and residents should protect their respiratory systems and diligently practice good hygiene post-disaster. Compromised respiratory systems may increase COVID-19 risk



IMPROVING RESIDENT COMMUNICATION

Connect to and test [FEMA's IPAWS](#) system.

Utilize emergency notification systems such as [CodeRED](#), [Everbridge](#), and [Nixle](#) to get messages out to residents. Use social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Nextdoor to amplify emergency alerts.

Don't forget residents without smartphones or internet.

Translate resources for non-English speaking communities and connect with local nonprofits in advance of disasters to keep lines of communication open and ready.

Ensure messages are sent in other languages common in your region.



SUPPORTING RESIDENT PREPAREDNESS

Provide residents with a checklist for an emergency supply kit as well as an emergency preparedness plan. Printable resources are available for any community at [Ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov), the preparedness site of the Department of Homeland Security.

Ensure homebound residents have access to needed supplies as they may be more at-risk for COVID-19. Additionally, due to economic downturn, some residents may not be able to afford all items.

Increase the availability of equipment such as generators, pumps and debris removal machinery to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to move debris and water out of communities. Both create conditions for vector development such as mosquitos.



PLANNING FOR EVACUATIONS AND SHELTERING

Encourage/enforce (as required) physical distancing on buses and transportation. This may require more buses and alternative forms of transportation.

- Use taxis or rideshares to supplement shelter buses.

Consider new sheltering approaches. FEMA's rules for non-congregate sheltering are different. Contact your FEMA region to get approval. More info on [non-congregate](#) sheltering from FEMA can be found [here](#).

- House displaced residents in hotels or short-term rentals to replace or supplement shelters.
- Use dormitories or campgrounds.

Prepare emergency and temporary housing with adequate protective measures such as easy-to-assemble self-isolation wall partition systems to ensure self-quarantine.

Advanced hygiene protocols should be enforced in areas where smaller shelter options are not possible: mandatory temperature testing, mobile handwashing stations, protective equipment like masks and gloves, hand sanitizer stations, and separate areas for individuals with fevers or other COVID-19 symptoms.

Develop evacuation messaging for those at high-risk for COVID-19 encouraging them to leave earlier.

Create separate areas for elderly and immunocompromised residents or house them in smaller facilities to reduce their risk of contracting the virus.

Utilize individualized food and water delivery instead of buffet lines.

Additional Resources



COMPREHENSIVE COVID-19 FLOOD & STORM PREPAREDNESS GUIDES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

[FEMA: COVID-19 Pandemic Operational Guidance for the 2020 Hurricane Season](#):

actionable guidance to State, Local, Tribal & Territorial officials to prepare for response and recovery operations

[American Flood Coalition Dual Disaster Handbook](#):

- [Checklist for Local Leaders](#): action steps to prepare for a flood during COVID-19
- [Full Handbook](#): 6 recommendations for local leaders responding to floods during COVID-19

[National Mass Care Strategy](#): guidelines on sheltering, feeding, pets, and more



COVID-19 RESIDENT/INDIVIDUAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS GUIDES

[Red Cross](#): Preparing for Disaster During COVID-19

[Consumer Reports](#): How to Prepare your Home before Evacuating

[Hurricane Strong](#): Home preparation

[Ready.gov](#)



COVID-19 AND WILDFIRES

[Department of the Interior](#): Resource List

[CDC](#): COVID-19 Considerations for Cleaner Air Shelters/Wildfire Smoke Guide

[National Interagency Fire Center](#): COVID-19 and Wildland Fire Management

[Fire Management Board](#): Guidance for Prevention/Management of COVID-19 During Wildfire Ops

[Redzone](#): Coronavirus Implications on Fire Response in 2020

[CAL FIRE](#): Ready for Wildfire Apps and Checklists

[Grist](#): Risk to Wildland Firefighters and Responders



COVID-19 AND HEAT

[Global Heat Health Information Network](#): Heat and COVID-19 Information Series and Checklist and [Technica Brief](#)

[UCS](#): How to Keep US South Safe from COVID-19 and Scorching Heat

[CDC](#): COVID-19 and Cooling Centers



MENTAL HEALTH FOR RESPONDERS, INDIVIDUALS, AND MORE

[Psych Hub](#): free COVID-19 resource hub with wide variety of targeted resources

[US Dept of Health & Human Services](#): wide variety of COVID-19/mental health resources

[EMS.gov](#): resources for local governments

[CDC COVID-19 and stress reduction](#): tips for individuals, communities, health care providers and [First Responders](#)

[International Critical Incident Stress Foundation](#): sustaining resilience during COVID-19 response

[All Clear Foundation](#): hotlines, publications, apps, videos, events for first responders and their families

[Mental Health America](#): variety of free resources for first responders

[National Center for PTSD: Guide for Healthcare Workers](#) and [Mental Health Providers](#)