How to Prepare for an Emergency or Disaster When You Have Lung Disease or a Sleep Disorder

Emergencies and disasters can happen to anyone. Sometimes there will be advanced warning about the event, such as when a severe storm is coming your way, or there is an outbreak of an illness that could affect you or your community. Other times, there may be no warning, such as a fire, earthquake, or a gas, water, or carbon monoxide leak in your home. It helps to PLAN AHEAD for these situations, especially if you or a family member has a lung problem or other health conditions.

Planning ahead includes the following steps:
- Start planning BEFORE an emergency happens!
- Develop a basic family emergency plan. Discuss this plan with your family to ensure everyone is familiar with it.
- Develop an emergency medical plan and have it handy at all times. Make this plan together with your healthcare providers, homecare company, nursing service, and medical equipment company.

If I have a lung disease, am I at more risk during an emergency or disaster?
If you have lung disease or a sleep disorder that requires therapy, you may be at increased risk during an emergency or disaster. This risk will vary depending on the type of health problems you have. If you already have a lung problem, respiratory infections such as the flu or COVID-19 can be especially dangerous. To reduce your risk of these infections, wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, do not touch your mouth, nose or eyes with your hands, and stay away from those who are sick. If you are sick, cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and discard the tissue, and clean frequently touched surfaces and objects with a household cleaning spray or wipe.

During an emergency or disaster, you may lose access to health care, medications, electrical power, oxygen, and other medical supplies. Local authorities (officials) try to plan to provide special services for everyone who is at increased risk. These people are described as having “special needs” or a “vulnerable” population. You may be included in this group if you are a child or elderly, have a chronic problem like lung disease, or do not speak English. Your local officials may not be prepared for your specialized care and needs, depending on where you live. Therefore, your planning for an emergency is also very important.

What should I have at home to help me prepare for an emergency?
Everyone should have a basic family emergency plan. This plan should include how you will communicate with one another and obtain medication, food, water, and shelter.

The following list includes items that are important to have if you have a lung disease or sleep disorder:
- Be sure you have a safe place to go and way to evacuate if needed. Figure out how you will travel. If you are driving, be sure you have a full tank of gas in your car and get this as early as possible when you learn of an impending storm.
- You need to have a way to communicate with local authorities or emergency personnel. Keep your cell phone charged if you have one and see how you can charge it with a power pack if needed. Make sure you have a way to reach help if your telephone is out of service.
- You need to have enough medication to last several weeks. Don’t let your medicine run low, even if it is a medicine that you use just as needed.
- You will want to plan for enough food and water for you and those who are with you. You should plan on ideally 1 gallon per person per day of drinking water. Choose foods that don’t require refrigeration and plan for how you will prepare and eat them.
- Always have some emergency cash on hand and hidden in a safe location.

How can local officials help me prepare for an emergency?
A relationship with local officials and public health providers is helpful in making sure you get the care you need during an emergency. The local officials include your public health office, the local emergency provider office (such as an emergency agency or fire department), and your hospital. Contact these agencies before an emergency and find out the following:
- Is there a local or regional plan for oxygen delivery in case of emergency or disaster?
- Is there a local plan for dealing with and contacting “vulnerable populations” in the event of a disaster? If so, how will I be contacted?
- Is there a local plan in dealing with people who need support from a PAP device or mechanical ventilator? Who will assist me with your medical equipment and care if I cannot stay at home?

Power
- Contact your local power/utility companies and notify them if you have a critical need for electricity to power medical equipment and/or heat/air conditioning. Complete a power
Location
Choose a location that is far enough away (such as inland in the case of a hurricane) so it will not likely be affected by the storm.

- Relatives or friends are usually best first option to try.
- If you are booking a hotel room, figure out which one you want to try and call early! Have a list of alternatives as well.
- If you need to stay in a public shelter, call 2-1-1 and make sure you know it will be able to handle your medical equipment.
- If you have pets make sure to find a hotel that is pet friendly.
- Most shelters do not accept pets. Check with your local vet about shelters for pets. You can find more about caring for your pets at the Center for Disease Control webpage (http://www.cdc.gov/disasters/petshelters.html)

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RX Action Plan
Remember, you need to watch out for your health and family and prepare ahead for a possible emergency.

✔ Have an emergency plan and keep informed.
✔ Talk to your healthcare provider, pharmacy and durable medical equipment company to get extra medicine and any necessary forms for emergency power or equipment.
✔ Start planning as early as you can.
✔ Figure out where you can go if you cannot stay at home and how you will get there.
✔ Keep a list of important phone numbers and call early if you need help.
✔ Talk to your healthcare provider and take precautions to avoid exposure to infection in a major outbreak.

If you have been exposed to an illness such as COVID-19 or the flu and have symptoms such as fever, cough, difficulty breathing, contact your healthcare provider to check if you need medical care.

Healthcare Provider’s Contact Number:

Further Resources:
American Thoracic Society
- www.thoracic.org/patients/
American Red Cross
FEMA
2-1-1 National Help Line to local public resources
- www.211.org
Centers for Disease Control
- http://emergency.cdc.gov/

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