



# RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES

A GUIDE FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESSES



## During an emergency, government resources may be strained, leading to service gaps. Employees, clients and community members may turn to local organizations for support.

As a community partner, you have a strong understanding of your community's risks, needs and capabilities, and you already address the needs of your community on a daily basis. You can use this knowledge and your relationship with community members and partners to help keep your community safe and healthy.

This kit provides quick guidelines about how to help your community prepare for and respond to an emergency. The first section provides tips about how to **prepare** your facility and your community for emergencies. The second section outlines general guidelines to help you, your staff and

your community **stay informed**. The third section provides event-specific guidelines to help you and your community members **stay safe and healthy** during an emergency and recover quickly.

Use this information to create or update an emergency plan and as a quick reference manual in the event of an emergency. Share the tips in this guide with employees and clients during emergency training.

Handouts for individuals and families provide quick, event-specific guidelines on how to stay safe. If possible, photocopy and distribute the handouts to staff, clients and individuals in your community. To access these handouts in additional languages, visit [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health) and search "Responding to Emergencies."

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, contact the Health Department's Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response at [emergencyprep@health.nyc.gov](mailto:emergencyprep@health.nyc.gov)

## PREPARE

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- Develop a business continuity plan that outlines what is needed for critical operations to continue during an emergency. Be sure to include critical services, acceptable minimum levels of service, resource/supply needs, commitments to other entities/clients, contracts/agreements with partners and a communication and staffing plan (including employee/client contact information and critical employees/roles). Visit <http://www.fema.gov> and search "continuity plan template" to learn more.
- Organize training activities and exercises, and remind your employees and clients about what they can do to prepare for an emergency, such as creating a family emergency plan and packing a "Go Bag" with important documents, identification, medication, bottled water, nonperishable food, a first aid kit and a battery-operated flashlight and radio. Go to <http://www.nyc.gov> and search "Go Bag" for more information.

- Identify vulnerable clients and community members and develop methods to reach them during an emergency.
- Determine what resources you can share with your community during an emergency (such as power, telephone access, internet access, shelter, heat or air conditioning) and share this information with community members and partners.
- Build and strengthen partnerships with other community organizations and businesses, including social groups, community service groups, faith-based groups and educational facilities. This will help you improve coordination before, during and after an emergency.
- Work with partner organizations to understand how your resources can complement others' during an emergency to keep your community safe and healthy.
- Create an emergency management team within your organization.
- Share your emergency plan with community partners.
- Tailor emergency management activities to your organization's strengths.
- Sign up for the Advanced Warning System (AWS), the emergency notification system designed for service provider organizations in New York City. AWS disseminates helpful, and often critical, emergency messaging to organizations that serve people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. Visit <https://advancewarningsystemnyc.org> to sign up.
- Sign up for Notify NYC for information about emergency events. Encourage staff, clients and partners to do the same. Visit <http://www.nyc.gov> and search "Notify NYC" to sign up.
- Visit <http://www.nyc.gov> and <http://www.nyc.gov/oem> for additional preparedness resources and information.

## STAY INFORMED

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### *In the event of an emergency:*

- Get health information from credible sources (such as [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov), [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov) and 311).
- If available, use radios, televisions, computers or mobile devices for information from officials about how to stay safe. Share this information with your employees and clients.
- Photocopy and distribute the corresponding "Individuals & Families" handout to employees and community members.
- If you are a service provider, contact your vulnerable clients early and often to make sure they are staying safe and following instructions from authorities.
- Note that communication with loved ones is very important in an emergency. Providing power to recharge phones, as well as telephone, cell phone, internet, Wi-Fi, radio or television access to those who need it will help to alleviate anxiety.

# STAY SAFE AND HEALTHY

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## PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

An influenza pandemic is a widespread flu outbreak. Mild symptoms of influenza include fever and cough. Severe symptoms include trouble breathing or shortness of breath, pain or pressure in the chest or stomach, bluish skin color, dizziness or confusion, nausea or vomiting, or increasing fever.

- Encourage vaccination (once available).
- Encourage frequent hand washing.
- Place hand sanitizer and tissues around your facility.
- Post health tips in shared spaces.
- In order to limit the spread of influenza, encourage staff members who are sick to stay at home until 24 hours after symptoms are gone. Consider offering paid sick days or teleworking options.



## EXTREME WEATHER

### Extreme Heat

A heat emergency is triggered when the heat index, a measure combining temperature and humidity, is above 100°F for one day or above 95°F for two or more days. However, heat-related illness and death can occur at lower temperatures.

- Provide air conditioning during working hours. Set the thermostat to 78°F to stay cool and conserve energy.
- If possible, offer your facility as a cooling area to the public.

#### ***For outdoor workers:***

- Provide training on safe work practices during hot weather and recognizing symptoms of heat-related illness.
- Limit outdoor work if possible.
- Encourage workers to use sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher.

- Provide drinking water. Remind workers to drink water often (every 15 minutes, or about four cups per hour).
- Remind workers to take frequent breaks in shaded or air-conditioned areas.
- Visit the Occupational Safety & Health Administration’s website at <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatillness> for more information on how to protect employees who work outdoors during hot weather.

## Cold Weather

Winter storms may be accompanied by dangerously low temperatures, heavy snowfall, strong winds, icing, sleet and freezing rain. Low temperatures can cause health problems such as hypothermia and frostbite.

- Heat your facility safely. Plug space heaters directly into the wall and never leave them unattended, especially around children.
- Encourage safe outdoor travel, including avoiding travel during heavy or blowing snow conditions.

### *For outdoor workers:*

- Provide training about safe work practices during cold weather and recognizing symptoms of cold-related illness.
- Limit outdoor work if possible.
- Encourage workers to dress properly for the cold, including hats, gloves and multiple layers of dry clothing.
- Visit the Occupational Safety & Health Administration’s website at [https://www.osha.gov/dts/weather/winter\\_weather](https://www.osha.gov/dts/weather/winter_weather) for more information on how to protect employees who work outdoors during cold weather.

## Coastal Storms

Coastal storms, which include nor’easters, tropical storms and hurricanes, can cause severe flooding, strong winds, heavy rain and storm surges. Strong winds and high waters can create other risks such as falling trees, downed power lines, flying debris and loss of heat, water and power.

- Review your building’s evacuation plan with staff. If you are a tenant in the building, coordinate evacuation plans with your building manager.

- Know your zone. If you are in an evacuation zone, be ready to follow all evacuation or shelter-in-place directions from City officials. Visit [nyc.gov](http://www.nyc.gov) and search “Evacuation Zones” to find out what zone you are in.
- Encourage employees to keep their “Go Bag” handy. Go to <http://www.nyc.gov> and search “Go Bag” for more information.
- Offer your staff the option of working from home if possible.
- Visit the Occupational Safety & Health Administration’s website at <https://www.osha.gov/dts/weather/hurricane/response.html> for more information on how to protect employees who are involved in coastal storm response and recovery work.

## Earthquakes and Aftershocks

An earthquake is a sudden, rapid shaking of the earth caused by breaking and shifting rock beneath the earth’s surface. Earthquakes strike suddenly, without warning, and can occur at any time of the day or night, and any season of the year. Earthquakes may be followed by “aftershocks,” smaller earthquakes or tremors that can happen minutes, days, weeks and even months later.

- Look for damage in and around your facility if safe to do so. Check for dangerous conditions such as fallen power lines, structural damage, broken glass and gas leaks. Get everyone out if conditions are unsafe.
- Advise employees and clients to expect and prepare for aftershocks. Remind employees to drop to their hands and knees, take cover under a strong table or desk and hold on when they feel an earthquake or aftershock.
- If you need to evacuate, use stairs instead of elevators in case of aftershocks, power outages or other damage.
- Help employees or clients who may need special assistance such as children, older adults or people with limited mobility.
- Beware of earthquake-related hazards such as:
  - Water system breaks that may flood basement areas
  - Exposure to bacteria from sewer system breaks
  - Airborne smoke and dust (asbestos, silica, etc.)
  - Gas leaks
  - Exposure to bacteria or viruses through blood



## POWER OUTAGE

Power outages or blackouts can result from storm damage, flooding and high winds, or from unexpected incidents such as a building collapse or an explosion. They can also happen during hot weather when power usage is at its peak. Many services, including transportation and healthcare services, can be disrupted during a power outage.

- Keep emergency supplies such as flashlights, battery-powered radio and a supply of batteries on hand.
- Make sure employees and clients avoid dark staircases during a power outage and use flashlights if needed.



## EXPLOSIONS

Explosions may result in injuries from blast pressure, fire, contaminated air or falling debris (such as sharp objects and glass). They may also cause health problems such as shortness of breath or irritation of the lungs, nose, mouth, throat, eyes or skin.

- Offer your facility as a shelter if possible. If there is wall or window damage, move to an interior room or find another building.
- Shut windows, outside doors and other openings, and turn off fans and heating/cooling systems that bring air from outside.



## RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR EMERGENCIES

A radiological emergency can be caused by nuclear weapons, explosives mixed with radioactive materials (“dirty bombs”), nuclear power plant accidents, transportation accidents involving radioactive materials or occupational accidents. In high enough quantities, radiation can cause skin burns, radiation sickness and an increased risk of cancer.

- Make sure employees and clients get and stay inside. If there is damage to a wall or window, move to an interior room or find another building.
- Shut and close windows, outside doors and other openings.
- In the case of a nuclear weapon explosion, go to the center of the building, as far from the roof and windows as possible. Going to the basement is best.
- Provide shelter for employees, clients and the public. Providing shelter to someone who was outside during a radiation emergency can save his or her life without endangering your own.

- Ask people to remove shoes and outer layers of clothing and put them in sealable bags or containers. The City will provide instructions on disposal.
- If possible, allow people to shower with soap and water from the top down. If showers are not available, let them wash hands, face and exposed parts of their bodies at a sink, or wipe themselves down with a wet cloth.
- Provide clean clothing, if available. This will help limit radiation exposure.
- Provide food, water and other basic services if possible. Anything packaged or in a freezer, refrigerator or pantry away from the incident is safe. If in doubt, rinse packaging before opening.



## INHALATION ANTHRAX

Inhalation anthrax is a disease caused by breathing in anthrax spores. Early symptoms may include fever, chills, sweats, fatigue, headache, cough, nausea, vomiting or muscle aches. As the illness progresses, symptoms become more severe and commonly include shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chest discomfort, confusion or dizziness. **You cannot catch inhalation anthrax from another person.**

**The anthrax bacteria (called *Bacillus anthracis*) is found in nature, but it can also be grown in a lab and could be released into the air on purpose. Since the 1990s, the New York City Health Department has been working with other City, State and federal agencies to plan and prepare for this unlikely possibility.**

- If there is an emergency involving anthrax, City officials will work with federal and state partners to find out who may have been exposed.
- If necessary, the Health Department will open Points of Dispensing (PODs) in the city to give free antibiotics. The Health Department will provide instructions about when, where and how to pick up antibiotics that prevent illness.
- PODs do not provide medical services or treatment for people who are already sick. **If someone thinks he or she has been exposed to anthrax and experiences any of the symptoms listed above, the person should seek medical care right away.**

### ***If the City opens Points of Dispensing (PODs):***

- Help employees and clients access the Antibiotic Screening Form from [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health).
  - Help staff and clients who may not have access to computers complete and print forms. Encourage them to take completed forms for themselves and up to five additional people to the POD.



- One form must be completed for each person getting antibiotics, including each child.
- Help employees and clients find the nearest POD.
  - Check <http://www.nyc.gov/health>, local television, radio and social media, or call 311 to find the nearest POD. If your employees or clients do not live in New York City, they can check with their local public health agency to find a POD in their community.
  - If possible, help others by picking up their antibiotics. A person can pick up antibiotics for him or herself and up to five additional people, including family members, coworkers or others not in their household.
  - PODs are wheelchair-accessible. POD staff will make every effort to accommodate those with special needs.
  - **People will NOT be asked for identification at a POD.**
- Encourage employees and clients to take antibiotics as directed.



## HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS

Hazardous chemicals are dangerous substances. They can be in solid, liquid or gas form. Acids and pesticides are examples of hazardous chemicals. If released, hazardous chemicals may cause coughing, difficulty breathing, nausea or vomiting, or irritation of the nose, mouth, throat, eyes or skin.

- If the hazardous chemical was released outside, offer your facility as shelter if possible.
- Ask people to remove shoes and outer layers of clothing and put them in sealable bags or containers. The City will provide instructions on disposal and about safe decontamination.
- Shut windows, outside doors and other openings, and turn off fans and heating/cooling systems that bring air from outside. Only recirculate air that is already in the building.
- If the chemical was released indoors, leave the building and get yourself and others to fresh air.
- Call 212-POISONS (212-764-7667) or the National Capital Poison Center at 800-222-1222 if you or others have been exposed to a hazardous chemical and experience any of the symptoms listed above. Injury by a hazardous chemical depends on the type of chemical released, the amount released, the length of exposure and how the person was exposed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT [NYC.GOV/HEALTH](https://nyc.gov/health)  
OR CONTACT [EMERGENCYPREP@HEALTH.NYC.GOV](mailto:EMERGENCYPREP@HEALTH.NYC.GOV)

