

COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Pandemic Household Preparedness

Background

- Preparing your household for an ongoing pandemic involves considerations and challenges beyond standard disaster readiness. These considerations center on being prepared to comply with social and physical distancing that will impact many of our daily work and personal routines over an indeterminate amount of time to reduce exposure and slow the spread of the disease.
- The following is a list of key considerations and lessons learned as they relate to coronavirus disaster (COVID-19) pandemic preparedness activities across the country. These are best practices for consideration and do not constitute nor should they be considered as guidance in any way.¹

Key Considerations

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides a guide to preparing your household for coronavirus [here](#). The paper below includes additional considerations for pandemic preparedness and social distancing.
- Prepare for long-duration social and physical distancing by obtaining needed cleaning, food, and medical supplies that allow you to avoid stores for longer periods of time. Be sure to consider the needs of pets, too. Being prepared allows you to avoid unnecessary trips and to address minor medical issues at home, alleviating the burden on urgent care centers and hospitals.²
- Not everyone can afford to respond by stocking up on necessities. For those who can afford to do so, shopping less often will help protect those who have to shop more frequently.³

Household Preparedness in a Pandemic

Create a Pandemic Plan of Action

- **Potential Best Practice:** Create a plan to care for those in your household at greater risk for serious complications that allows them to observe strict social distancing guidelines. Ensure that they have sufficient supplies, such as prescriptions, in case they must stay at home for long periods of time. Your plan may also

¹ This document contains references and links to non-federal resources and organizations. This information is meant solely for informational purposes and is not intended to be an endorsement of any non-federal entity by FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or the U.S. government.

² 2020 CDC, Get Your Home Ready, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/get-your-household-ready-for-COVID-19.html>

³ 2020 VOX, A One-page Printable Guide for Preparing to Shelter at Home, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2020/3/19/21177527/coronavirus-guide-shelter-at-home-preparedness>



FEMA

consider how you, as a caretaker, can social distance to the greatest extent possible to avoid unnecessary risk by decreasing contact outside your home.⁴

- **Potential Best Practice:** Check in with your neighbors and discuss in advance how you may be able to support those who need extra help. Discuss emergency plans and try to pool key resources you may need. If your neighborhood has a website or social media page, consider joining it to maintain access to neighbors, information, and resources.⁵ Lending an ear to family, friends, and neighbors who may need someone to talk to about their feelings can help others cope with their anxiety and stress and can make your community stronger. Follow [CDC guidance for managing stress about COVID-19](#).
- **Potential Best Practice:** Identify aid organizations in your community. Create a list of local organizations that you and your household can contact you need access to information, health care services, support, and resources. Consider including organizations that provide mental health or counseling services, food, and other supplies.⁶
- **Potential Best Practice:** Create an emergency contact list. Ensure your household has a current list of emergency contacts for family, friends, neighbors, carpool drivers, health care providers, teachers, employers, the local public health department, and other community resources.
- **Potential Best Practice:** Identify a room in your home that can be used to separate sick household members from those who are healthy. Identify a separate bathroom for the sick person to use, if possible, and follow [CDC guidelines on how to safely care for someone at home](#) who is sick.
- **Potential Best Practice:** Pay attention to guidance from local authorities about preparing for other disasters, such as hurricanes, wildfires, and flooding, that could occur while pandemic restrictions remain in place. Review your emergency plans and consider alternative options to maintain social and physical distancing and adding additional supplies such as hand sanitizer and face coverings to emergency kits to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Practice your emergency plan while following the [latest guidelines](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and guidance from your state and local authorities.
- **Potential Best Practice:** Ensure that each person in the household has two cloth face coverings that they can wear in public to help slow the spread of the virus. Children under 2 years old and people who have trouble breathing should not wear cloth face coverings. Cloth coverings should be routinely washed and may be cleaned in a washing machine. In addition, maintain a physical distance of at least six feet in public areas to slow the spread of the virus.⁷
- **Potential Best Practice:** Talk with your kids about the steps they can take to stay healthy. Remind children to cover their coughs and sneezes, to throw tissues away immediately after use, and to wash their hands after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing, using the bathroom, and eating or making food.⁸ If possible, have children over the age of two wear a cloth face covering in public.

⁴ 2020 CDC, Create a Household Plan of Action, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/get-your-household-ready-for-COVID-19.html>

⁵ 2020 CDC, Create a Household Plan of Action, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/get-your-household-ready-for-COVID-19.html>

⁶ 2020 CDC, Create a Household Plan of Action, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/get-your-household-ready-for-COVID-19.html>

⁷ 2020 CDC, CDC Guidelines for Face Coverings, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

⁸ 2020 CDC, Keeping Children Healthy While School's Out, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html>

Cleaning Considerations

- **Potential Best Practice:** Keeping living quarters, personal appliances, and surfaces clean is increasingly important as we learn more about how the coronavirus can spread and linger on commonly used devices.⁹
 - Soap: Regularly wash your hands with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds. Encourage children to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice while they wash their hands.¹⁰
 - Disinfectants: Wiping down surfaces (including your phone) can ensure the virus doesn’t linger. Make sure your preferred cleaning product is virus-killing—for more information consult the EPA list of [effective disinfectants](#). Prioritize high-touch surfaces, including cell phones, doorknobs, light switches, refrigerator and microwave doors, drawer pulls, TV remotes, counters and tabletops, toilet handles and faucet handles.¹¹
 - Towels and clean linens: Consider buying extra bathroom towels and swapping them out more frequently. Follow [CDC recommendations for laundering](#), which include using the warmest appropriate water setting, drying clothes completely, and not shaking dirty laundry.
 - Disposable gloves: While the CDC does not recommend the public wear disposable gloves for day-to-day activities, keeping disposable gloves at home can be helpful if someone in your house gets sick, and you need to touch or have contact with blood, stool, or body fluids, such as saliva, mucus, vomit, and urine.¹² Used gloves should be thrown into a lined trash can.

Food, groceries, necessities

- **Potential Best Practice:** If able, households may want to slowly stock up on a 30-day supply of groceries, household supplies, and prescriptions,¹³ to include:
 - Shelf-stable food to include rice, beans, coffee, tea, pasta, and frozen or canned fruits and vegetables;
 - Toiletries to include soap, laundry detergent, toilet paper, and diapers;
 - Food and supplies for pets;
 - A first aid kit so you can address minor medical issues at home;
 - 90 days of medication - if your doctor and insurance will approve you stocking up, CDC recommends doing so.

⁹ 2020 San Francisco Chronicle, How Long Does Coronavirus Last on Surfaces? Stay in the Air?,

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/health/article/Coronavirus-FAQ-How-long-does-it-stay-on-15152021.php>

¹⁰ 2020 CDC, When and How to Wash Your Hands, <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>

¹¹ 2020 New York Times, How to Protect Yourself and Prepare for the Coronavirus, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/prepare-for-coronavirus.html>

¹² 2020 CDC, Caring for Someone Sick at Home, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/care-for-someone.html>

¹³ 2020 New York Times, How to Protect Yourself and Prepare for the Coronavirus, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/prepare-for-coronavirus.html>

- **Potential Best Practice:** For most people who contract coronavirus, the symptoms are mild, and hospitalization is not required. Getting by at home means that hospital beds can be reserved for those who need them. Experts recommend having access to the following medical items¹⁴:
 - Medication for reducing a fever, like acetaminophen (Tylenol)
 - A thermometer for monitoring your fever
 - Medication for managing a cough, including cough drops and cough syrups
 - A humidifier, if available, or a hot shower to ease sore throats and coughing
 - Rehydration solutions: Water and something similar to Pedialyte or Gatorade. Staying hydrated while you're sick can help you recover faster and ensure you don't require medical attention.¹⁵

Topics for the “Best Practices” series are generated from crowd sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov.

¹⁴ 2020 CDC, CDC Common Human Coronaviruses <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/downloads/Common-HCoV-fact-sheet-508.pdf>

¹⁵ 2020 Vox, A one-page printable guide for preparing to shelter at home, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2020/3/19/21177527/coronavirus-guide-shelter-at-home-preparedness>