

Health tip: Natural disaster readiness and resources



Facts to know

- From 1980-2024, the U.S. experienced 403 major weather and climate disasters, resulting in 16,941 deaths
- Disasters included heatwaves, tropical storms, tornadoes, droughts, floods, wildfires, and extreme cold
- Tropical cyclones caused the most deaths (7,211) followed by drought/heatwaves (4,658) and severe thunderstorms (2,145)
- Survivors often experience psychological distress, and some develop depression, anxiety, or PTSD
- **Preparedness and early mental health monitoring may reduce long-term impacts^{1,2}**

For your health:

- Keep a written list of all prescription medications, including diagnosis, medication name, dosage, frequency, and allergies³
- Print a copy of your insurance card (front and back)
- Download the UHC app for easy access to ID card, virtual care, and resources
- Write down phone numbers for all medical providers and important contacts
- Remember medical devices like hearing aids and other assistive devices

For your family:

- Talk about what you might do in the event of a natural disaster
- Make a plan for what happens if you get separated from one another
- Create written contact cards for each family member with important phone numbers and names of family members
- Practice your plan with your family⁴



Emergency preparedness checklist⁵

One of the best ways to prepare for a natural disaster is to make a plan and be prepared. Know which type of natural disaster is most common in your area and think about what you and your family can do to prepare.

Use this checklist to prepare:

- Water (1 gallon per day for several days)
- Food (non-perishable food for several days)
- Battery powered radio with extra batteries
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Whistle
- Dust mask
- Plastic sheeting, scissors and duct tape (for emergency shelter)
- Moist towelettes or baby wipes
- Garbage bags
- Wrench or pliers (to turn off utilities)
- Manual can opener
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers and backup battery
- Soap, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes
- Prescription medications
- Non-prescription medications
- Prescription eyeglasses and contact lens solution
- Infant formula, bottles, diapers, wipes and cream
- Pet food and extra water for pets
- Cash
- Important family documents (insurance policies, IDs, bank account records)
- Sleeping bag
- Change of clothes
- Feminine hygiene products

Tip:

Have an evacuation plan that includes evacuation routes, a communication plan, and emergency shelter locations⁶

During a disaster:

- Stay informed
- Be aware of evacuation or shelter in place orders
- Follow the guidance of local officials⁶

After a disaster:

- Follow advice from local authorities on when it is safe to return home
- Be mindful of potential electrical, chemical, and biological hazards
- Protect yourself and loved ones by using safety gear to clean up (masks, rubber gloves or heavy work gloves, waterproof boots)
- Avoid floodwater that may contain raw sewage or downed power-lines
- Pace yourself
- Follow all safety guidelines when using cleaning products like bleach⁷



Mental health support

Natural disasters are difficult to experience. Emotional distress, depression and anxiety are normal feelings following a natural disaster. They may happen immediately after an event or may take time to appear. It is important to remember most people will return to their normal baseline with time and support.

Possible mental, emotional, and behavioral reactions

Immediate psychological reactions	Shock, fear, and fight-or-flight responses are natural immediate reactions to disaster stress and threats
Emotional effects	Anxiety, disorientation, emotional numbing, and intrusive thoughts often follow as the brain copes with trauma
Physical and behavioral symptoms	Headaches, fatigue, appetite changes, and social withdrawal can indicate unresolved emotional strain post-disaster.
Importance of early recognition	Early identification helps enable timely support and reduces risk of long-term psychological complications. ⁶

Tips to support mental health include:⁸

- Eat on a regular basis
- Exercise and get plenty of rest
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
- Practice relaxation through meditation, mindfulness, positive self-talk, or breathing exercises
- Socialize with others in positive ways
- Stay informed using credible sources
- Limit exposure to social media
- Stay connected with social support through family, friends, and neighbors
- Connect with local resources
- Remember that it is normal to have a wide range of emotions during the recovery period
- Seek professional help if symptoms last for several weeks
- Call 988 and seek help immediately if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or someone else



If you're thinking about hurting yourself or others in any way, get help immediately. **Call or text 988.**

UHC resources

UnitedHealthcare App

24/7 virtual visits

Behavioral health support

liveandworkwell.com

Member services

Call the number on the back of your ID card

Visit myuhc.com

UHC Public Support Line

1-866-447-3573

Optum Critical Support Center

www.optumwellbeing.com

Other resources

FEMA

1-800-621-3362

American Red Cross

text SHELTER and your zip code to 4FEMA

or visit <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/disaster-relief-and-recovery-services.html>

Salvation Army National Response Center

1-800-424-8802

HUD

1-800-304-9320

or email recovery@hud.gov

National Suicide Prevention Line

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline

1-800-985-5990

www.disasterdistress.samhsa.gov

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Helpline

1-800-950-6264

www.nami.org/help

Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH)

1-800-985-5990



Sources:

¹ NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/>. 2025. Accessed May 2026.

² CDC. https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/media/pdfs/2024/08/Coping_with_Disaster_2_English.pdf 2024. Accessed May 2026. .

³ U.S. Department of Homeland Security. <https://www.ready.gov/collection/tips-for-medications>. 2025. Accessed May 2026.

⁴ American Red Cross. <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/make-a-plan.html>. 2026. Accessed March 2026.

⁵ U.S. Department of Homeland Security. <https://www.ready.gov/kit>. 2026. Accessed May 2026.

⁶ CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/floods/safety/>. 2024. Accessed May 2026.

⁷ CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/safety/index.html>. 2024. Accessed May 2026.

⁸ Mental Health America. <https://mhanational.org/resources/coping-with-disaster-traumatic-event/>. 2026. Accessed May 2026.

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