

Are you ready?

Nova Scotia's Guide to Disaster Preparedness:
Tips for Persons with Disabilities
Tips for Frail or Older Seniors

Who Do I Call During a Disaster?

For immediate medical, police, or fire assistance during a disaster, call 911 (voice and TTY for Deaf or Hard of Hearing).

If you need information during a local disaster, call your [Municipal Emergency Measures Office](#): You can insert the phone number here for easy reference:

If you are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and use a TTY to communicate, you can call the RCMP at **1-866-297-7554**. (24/7)

[Nova Scotia Power's Critical Customer Communication Program](#) call: **1-800-428-6230** (provincial toll-free number) or **428-6230** (Halifax Regional Municipality)

For more information on personal preparedness, go to www.redcross.ca or call your local [Canadian Red Cross Office](#):

Eastern Nova Scotia (Cape Breton): **564-4114**

Central Nova Scotia (Halifax): **424-1432**

Northern Nova Scotia: **893-8339**

Western Nova Scotia: **678-0982**

or contact:

[Emergency Management Office \(EMO\) Nova Scotia](#)
1-866-424-5620 (provincial toll-free number)
424-5620 (Halifax Regional Municipality)
www.gov.ns.ca/emo

Introduction

The Persons with Disabilities Emergency Preparedness Committee was formed in 2004 after Hurricane Juan and “White Juan.” Persons with disabilities felt they needed more information to help them prepare for the different types of disasters that affect Nova Scotia.

This guide provides general emergency preparedness information along with a range of specific tips for those individuals who may be older, frail, have a disability or mobility issues that need to be considered when preparing for an emergency or disaster. Make sure you read the tips marked with “❄” carefully.

Disasters happen fast, especially when you do not expect them. What would happen if you did not have water, electricity, or telephone during a disaster? Help may not be able to arrive right away. It is up to you to be prepared to be on your own for the first 72 hours after a disaster occurs.

Stay informed. In the event of an emergency, tune in to your local station (radio or television) for updates and instructions. Since power outages often result from emergency situations, such as storms, you should also keep a battery powered/crank radio in your home or residence.

Notes

Table of Contents

Steps to Get Ready	2
Prevent	5
Prepare	6
Respond.	10
Recover	12
Food Safety	13
Handy Hints	14
Disaster Supply Checklist.	16

Specific Tips for:

Mobility or Agility	20
Deaf or Hard of Hearing.	22
Blind or Visually Impaired	26
Speech Disability	27
Developmental Disability	28
Mental Health	30
Frail or Older Seniors	31
References	33
Acknowledgements	34

What Everyone Should Know about Disaster Readiness

Being ready for a disaster has **4 steps**:

- 1 Prevent:** Make your home safe. Make sure you have insurance coverage for all possible disaster risks in your community.
- 2 Prepare:** Knowing what to do when a disaster happens will help you stay calm and recover more quickly. Create a support network. Fill a disaster kit with important items before the hurricane season and winter storms. This will help you during a disaster. Please refer to page 14 for a list of handy hints for preparation, and page 16 for a list of supplies. Make a list of important phone numbers and addresses. Keep a copy of your list next to the telephone and another copy in your wallet or purse.
- 3 Respond:** Remain calm. Follow instructions from officials and emergency workers — Police, Fire, and Paramedics. Stay informed of the disaster situation by watching the television, listening to the radio, or call your local Municipal Emergency Measures Office. If you are deaf or hard of hearing and use a TTY to communicate, you can call the RCMP at 1-866-297-7554.

4 Recover: Everyone reacts differently to disasters. You can expect physical and emotional reactions after the disaster. These are a normal part of the recovery process. Remember that it takes time to recover.

Prevent

Who should I inform of my specific needs before a disaster?

Register with the [Critical Customer Communication Program of Nova Scotia Power](#). If you have electric-powered medical equipment at home that is vital for your health, registering will allow you to be on the most important list for restoring power.

How do I find out if there is a bad storm coming to my community?

- ▶ Look online for weather warnings at www.theweathernetwork.ca
- ▶ Call the weather line of Environment Canada at 902-426-9090.
- ▶ Call your local Municipal Emergency Measures Office.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing and use a TTY to communicate, you can call the RCMP at 1-866-297-7554.

What should I do if a storm is coming to my community?

- ▶ Cover up windows and doors with wood. Take other steps to prevent wind from damaging your home.
- ▶ Tie down outdoor furniture, garbage bins, and bicycles.

Prepare

Support network: A group of at least three people who you know and trust and who will assist you with your specific needs in the event of a disaster.

How do I create a support network?

- ▶ Ask people if they are willing to help you in case of a disaster. Be sure to ask people at important locations such as home, work, or school.
- ▶ Tell these people where you keep your disaster supplies. Give one member a key to your home when you know a storm is coming.
- ▶ Include someone who lives outside of your area in your support network. Choose someone who is far enough away that they will not be affected by the same disaster.
- ▶ Work with your support network to make your plan match your needs.
- ▶ Make sure that you have a phone that does not require electric power to work. (for example, a cordless phone or a TTY)

Prepare

Disaster Plan: A set of instructions you create for yourself on how to respond to a disaster. For example, a disaster plan can include knowing different ways to get out of a building or out of your community and specific telephone numbers to call.

Suggestions for your disaster plan:

- ▶ Plan for home, work, school, or any place you spend a lot of time. At home, have a disaster kit ready to go. Have a smaller kit at school or work.
- ▶ Know the disaster plans at places you spend a lot of time. Review them every six months to make sure they continue to meet your needs.
- ▶ Create a communication plan to contact your support network in other ways if telephones are not working.
- ▶ Plan to stay with friends or family during a disaster. Ask if they have a wood stove or a generator in their home.
- ▶ Community shelters should be considered as an important but last resort.

Prepare

Evacuation Plan: A set of instructions on how to safely leave your home, workplace, public building, or community.

Leaving your home or residence:

- ▶ If you live in a home, create an evacuation plan and practice it.
- ▶ If you live in an apartment building, learn the evacuation plan.
- ▶ Learn the street names or road numbers for possible evacuation routes around your home. Officials may only give out route numbers, not give you a map.

What should I do with my pet?

Pets are not allowed in shelters. You may need to be prepared to leave your pet behind. If you need to leave your pet behind, leave an extra supply of food and water, and make sure your pets have ID tags with your address and phone number.

If you are evacuating with your pet, be sure to have leashes, and carry extra food and water.

What should I do with my service animal?

Service animals are permitted inside shelters.

- ▶ Have extra food and water, disposable gloves, garbage bags, and other items for the animal's care.
- ▶ Service animals must be identified as service animals and should have ID tags with your address and phone number.

Suggestions for your service animal disaster kit:

- Water and food bowls
- Plastic bags
- Medications with a list of identifying reasons (medical conditions) instructions for medications, dosage, and contact information for prescribing veterinarian
- Leash/harness/muzzle (if required)
- Current photo of your service animal in case they get lost or separated from you
- Copy of license

Respond

Emergency Shelter: A location chosen during a disaster by emergency management officials and managed by the Red Cross. A shelter offers you safety and fulfills basic needs. (Food, bed, medical care etc).

What should I do if I am asked to leave my home or work?

- ▶ Leave immediately.
- ▶ Follow instructions.
- ▶ Listen to the radio or ask an emergency worker if you need further instructions.
- ▶ Take evacuation routes specified by officials.
- ▶ Do not take shortcuts because those roadways may be blocked.

What can I expect at an emergency shelter?

- ▶ Trained volunteers will help you with basic needs: food (including food for special diets), clothes, and personal services.
- ▶ Tell the shelter workers about your disability and your specific needs.
- ▶ You will probably sleep on cots, gym mats, or air mattresses.
- ▶ Do not take valuables to the shelter.
- ▶ Registering at a shelter, even if you are not staying there, can help reunite people after the disaster.

Recover

After a disaster you may experience exhaustion, sleeplessness, anger, frustration, a sense of loss, or mood swings.

How will I recover after a disaster?

- ▶ Rest and relax more than usual.
- ▶ Get back to normal routines as soon as possible.
- ▶ Keep normal schedules.
- ▶ Limit the time spent on watching programs or reading about the disaster.
- ▶ Eat healthy, regular meals.
- ▶ Spend time with other people.
- ▶ Talk with friends and family.
- ▶ Seek professional help, if needed, such as a counselor or doctor.

Food Safety

To learn about potential risks for poisoning call the [IWK Regional Poison Centre](#) at **470-8161** (Halifax Regional Municipality) or **1-800-565-8161** (toll-free).

Frozen Food

- ▶ If you know that a power failure will last a long time, move your food to a friend's or family member's freezer.
- ▶ Get rid of any thawed food that has remained at room temperature for two or more hours.
- ▶ Food that still contains ice crystals or feels refrigerator cold can be re-frozen.

Refrigerated Food

- ▶ During a power failure the refrigerator will keep food cool for 4–6 hours.
- ▶ Place securely wrapped packages of raw meat, poultry, or fish in the coldest section of your refrigerator.
- ▶ Put ice in the refrigerator to help keep it cool. When in doubt—throw it out!

Handy Hints

- ▶ Fill your bathtub with water for pets.
- ▶ Fill empty pop bottles with drinking water.
- ▶ Cover freezer contents with blankets or towels to keep food cold longer.
- ▶ Move food and liquids, such as milk and un-frozen meats, to the freezer so that it will last longer.
- ▶ Keep supplies of non-perishable food if you know there is a storm approaching. Try to store canned soup, canned beans, canned meats or fish, peanut butter, and crackers in your home.

Notes

Disaster Supply Checklist

- Two litres of water (per person, per day)
- Prescription medication (at least three day's supply) and if applicable medical supplies needed to administer medication (i.e. syringes, needles, glucose testing strips).
- Non-perishable canned and dry foods
- First-aid supplies
- Lighter or waterproof matches
- Flashlight
- Extra batteries for all devices that need them. Pay close attention to the size and type of battery the device uses.
- List of all important medical information. Including a list of medical conditions, prescription medications, instructions—dosages, allergies, doctor's name and contact information.
- Portable radio
- Manual can opener and plastic dinnerware (forks, knives, and spoons)
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Change of clothing and shoes for you and your family
- Personal hygiene items such as soap and shampoo
- Money

-
- Copies of all important papers (ex, insurance papers, driver's license, birth certificate)
 - Paper and pen or pencil
 - House keys and car keys
 - Extra rolls of toilet paper
 - Keep car gas tank at least half full where there is potential for a disaster. Have a car disaster kit with blankets, shovel, kitty litter for traction, and a flashlight
 - A small item such as a book or puzzle
 - If you have pets, you should have a carrier or leash in case you have to leave with your pet
 - If you have a child or children, you may want to bring a couple of their favourite toys

Suggestions for your disaster kit:

- ✿ If you have difficulty opening items, keep this in mind when preparing your disaster kit. For example, consider purchasing flip-top cans.
- ✿ Nova Scotians are encouraged to have enough supplies to last **72 hours/3 days** following a disaster.

-
- ✿ Replace food and water once a year.
 - ✿ Check expiry dates and re-stock if necessary.
 - ✿ Make sure you have enough supplies in your disaster kit for each member of your family.
 - ✿ Your disaster supply kit should also include other items that are specific to your disability.
 - ✿ Consider the **Vial of Life** program. The Vial of Life consists of a list of medications that is kept in a vial in the fridge. A Vial of Life sticker is placed on the door of the fridge and alerts emergency personnel to the vial in case of emergency. It is available free of charge to anyone who wants it.

If you live in Nova Scotia and would like a Vial, contact the VON at 902-454-5755, or check with your local VON branch to find out if they provide the service.

Disaster Supply Kit: Pack the items in a tote bag or box, ready to use or take with you at all times, in the event that you have no power or you may need to go to a shelter.

Tip Section



STOP

Although the information in the tips section of this booklet is focused on specific disabilities, the information may be useful to **ANYONE** whether it be in preparing themselves for disaster, or helping another individual during a disaster.

Table of Contents

Tips for Persons with Disabilities

Mobility or Agility	20
Deaf or Hard of Hearing . . .	22
Blind or Visually Impaired . .	26
Speech Disability	27
Developmental Disability. . .	28
Mental Health	30
Frail or Older Seniors	31

Tips for Persons with Mobility or Agility Disabilities

Prepare

- ▶ Know how much your wheelchair weighs and if it can be easily transported.
- ▶ Know different ways to leave a building. For example, have a plan for when the elevators are not working.
- ▶ Check with friends or family to make sure they have at least partial wheelchair accessibility at their home. This will make it easier for you to stay with them during a disaster.
- ▶ Find out if your workplace building has an area of refuge, which is a temporary shelter in an office or public building. It can be a stairwell where wheelchair users and others might stay and wait to be rescued.
- ▶ Choose clothing, linens, and blankets made of fire-resistant material in case of fire.

Respond

- ▶ Follow instructions of emergency responders.
- ▶ Make sure your furniture is not in the way of a quick and easy exit.
- ▶ Plan and practice other ways of leaving a building if elevators are not in use.

-
- ▶ Make sure a copy of your evacuation plan is easily available to people in your support network.
 - ✿ Evacuation devices can be bought to help you leave a dangerous area safely. The best are lightweight chairs to carry you downstairs.
 - ✿ An evacuation device is not a substitute for a wheelchair. Plan how to get along if you must leave your wheelchair behind.

Suggestions for your disaster kit:

- Pair of heavy gloves to use while wheeling or making your way over glass and debris
- Extra charger for your motorized wheelchair or scooter (Red Cross shelters have generators) or an extension cord
- Patch kit to repair flat tires
- Extra cane or aid if necessary
- ✿ If you have difficulty opening items, keep this in mind when preparing your disaster kit. For example, you may want to make sure that your can-opener is hand-held.
- ✿ Keep your disaster kit in a bag that can be attached to your wheelchair or walker.

Tips for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Prepare

- ▶ Install both audible alarms and visual smoke detectors. At least one should be battery operated or attached to a personal signaling device.
- ▶ At work, fire alarms should be visual as well as auditory.
- ▶ Your support network should know if you work alone or in an office that is far from visual alerts.
- ▶ Review the evacuation procedures for your workplace.
- ▶ Have a sign ready to post on your door saying you have left your home so workers will not break in to look for you.

Respond

- ▶ Follow the instructions of emergency responders.
- ▶ Be sure to have either a pen and paper, or your communication device on hand, so that you can communicate with emergency responders.
- ▶ The **Vial of Life** has been adapted for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to include communication information for emergency workers. They are available free of charge through Deafness Advocacy Association Nova Scotia. If you would like this version of the Vial of Life, call the Deafness Advocacy Association at (902) 425-0240.

Suggestions for your disaster kit:

- Pad of paper with pens or pencils (wrapped in a plastic baggie) or a small erasable white board for writing notes
- Blackberry, V box, or other text messenger, and power cord
- Extra batteries, portable TTYs, and hearing aids
- Alternate power source, such as an Eliminator, which can be plugged into a car battery to recharge TTYs and text messengers
- Cleaning kits for hearing aids and cochlear implants
- A sheet with the American Sign Language alphabet to help communication with rescue workers
- A communication binder with pictures or phrases to help you communicate, such as "I need a family doctor," "Where is the bathroom?" or "Where will I sleep?" The binder might also include a family contact name/phone number.

-
- A list of places such as local hospitals and Red Cross Centres where there is power during emergencies to recharge TTYs and text messengers
 - Portable visual notification devices that let you know if someone is knocking at your door or calling you on the telephone

Tips for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Prepare

- ▶ Practice your plan regularly so you will know what to do at home, work, or school in a disaster.
- ▶ If you have some vision, have security lights in each room to light paths of travel.

Respond

- ▶ Noise and confusion during an emergency may drown out clues like people running. Be aware of this, and have someone you trust to help you at work or school.

Suggestions for you disaster kit:

- Extra batteries for tape recorders
- Extra pair of dark glasses, if needed
- Folding mobility cane
- Talking or braille clock
- Extra aids such as electronic travel aid, monocular, binocular or magnifier
- ✿ Label your disaster supplies with Braille, large print, or fluorescent tape.

Tips for Persons with Speech Disabilities

Prepare

- ▶ Have your disaster plan written out. Keep copies at important locations.
- ▶ Practice your plan regularly so you know what to do.
- ▶ Listen carefully to instructions.
- ▶ Try to be around people you trust during a disaster. Have a support network at different locations.

Suggestions for your disaster kit:

- Extra batteries or power sources for communication devices
- A communication binder with pictures or phrases to help you communicate, such as “I need a family doctor,” “Where is the bathroom?” or “Where will I sleep?” The binder might also include a family contact name/phone number.

Tips for Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Prepare

- ▶ Work with someone you know and trust to help you create a plan. Make your plan with pictures instead of words so you will be able to follow it better. For example, show the exit route from the building in pictures.
- ▶ Keep a copy of your plan in your bedroom and in your communication book.
- ▶ Practice your plan regularly so you will know what to do.

Respond

- ▶ Listen carefully to instructions.
- ▶ If you do not understand something, look right at the rescuer and ask that he or she repeat. If the rescuer needs to know something about you, think of an easy and short way to explain your needs.

Suggestions for your disaster kit:

- A disaster and evacuation plan with pictures to help you remember what you are suppose to do
- Extra power source or extra batteries for communication devices
- Emergency communication book with pictures of essential items such as bathroom, medical, and exit routes
- Preprinted messages to show to rescue workers. For example, "I may have difficulty understanding what you are telling me. Please speak slowly." Include the name, address, and telephone number for next of kin.

Tips for Persons with Mental Health Disabilities

Prepare

- ▶ Practice your plan regularly so you will know what to do at home, work, or school in a disaster.
- ▶ Practice how to communicate your needs.
- ▶ Put copies of your plan in several places so you can find it quickly and easily.
- ▶ Identify the name of a support person you have a good relationship with, that you can contact right away in case of an emergency.

Respond

- ▶ Follow instructions exactly.
- ▶ Think about the types of reactions you may have after a disaster and plan strategies for dealing with them.

Suggestions for your disaster kit:

- A copy of your disaster and evacuation plan
- Instructions for your care and treatment in case you are hospitalized
- If you need medications, make sure you have enough to last for at least three days.

Tips for Frail and Older Seniors

Prepare

- ▶ Plan and practice the best escape route from your home.
- ▶ Arrange for two people you trust to check on you in case of a disaster or an emergency. If possible provide them with a spare key to your residence. Inform them of your special needs and where your emergency supply kit is located, and instruct them on how to use any special equipment.
- ▶ Have a plan to signal for help if you require assistance being evacuated from your home.
- ▶ If you receive home health care/support services, plan ahead with your agency in the event of an emergency.
- ▶ Post all emergency and non-emergency contact numbers next to your phone.

Respond

- ▶ Ensure that you have a plan that will allow you to clearly communicate your personal situation and individual needs to an emergency response provider.

Suggestions for your disaster kit:

See page 16 for suggested items for a disaster supply kit.

References

"Be prepared, not scared: emergency preparedness starts with you." *Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada and Canadian Red Cross*. <http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/prepared2004812124725.pdf>.

"Disaster Supply Checklist." *Canadian Red Cross*. <http://www.redcross.ca>.

"Emergency Preparedness tips for people with disabilities." *Independent Living Resource Center, San Francisco*. <http://www.ilrcsf.org>.

"Fire and Life Safety." *Betty Dion Enterprises Ltd*. Retrieved from <http://www.bdel.ca>.

"Food Safety Emergency Preparedness/Power Failure." *Canadian Food Inspections Agency*. <http://www.inspection.gc.ca>.

"Prepare yourself: Disaster readiness tips for people with disabilities." *National Organization on Disability*. <http://www.nod.org>.

"Preparedness at Home." *Emergency Management Nova Scotia*. <http://www.gov.ns.ca/emo>.

Acknowledgements

CNIB

Canadian Mental Health Association (Nova Scotia)

Canadian Paraplegic Association of Nova Scotia

Canadian Red Cross

Deafness Advocacy Association Nova Scotia

Department of Community Services

Halifax Regional Emergency Measures Organization

Independent Living Resource Centre

Melissa McInnis (MSVU Co-op placement program)

Nova Scotia Department of Seniors

Nova Scotia Disabled Persons Commission

Nova Scotia Emergency Management Office

Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities

People First Nova Scotia

Society of Deaf & Hard of Hearing Nova Scotians