

BE INFORMED

PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES



Some of the things you can do to prepare for the unexpected, such as making an emergency supply kit and developing a family communications plan, are the same for many emergency situations. However, there are important differences among potential emergencies that will impact your decisions and the actions you take.

Knowing what to do during any of the following emergency situations is an important part of being prepared and may make all the difference when seconds count.

Tornadoes



Floods



Thunderstorms & Lightning



Pandemic Influenza



Biological or Chemical Threat

Tornadoes

Tornadoes are nature's most violent storms.

They can appear suddenly without warning and can be invisible until dust and debris are picked up or a funnel cloud appears. Planning and practicing specifically how and where you take shelter is a matter of survival. Be prepared to act quickly.

Prepare for a Tornado:

- Familiarize yourself with the terms that are used to identify a tornado hazard.
 - A **tornado watch** means a tornado is possible in your area. You should monitor NOAA Weather Radio, local radio, and television news outlets for the latest developments.
 - A **tornado warning** is when a tornado is actually occurring; take shelter immediately.
- Determine in advance where you will take shelter in case of a tornado warning.
 - Storm cellars or basements provide the best protection.
 - If underground shelter is not available, go into an interior room or hallway on the lowest floor possible; avoid windows, doors and outside walls.
 - A vehicle, trailer or mobile home does not provide good protection. Plan to go quickly to a building with a strong foundation, if possible.
 - If shelter is not available, lie flat in a ditch or other low-lying area. Do not get under an overpass or bridge. You are safer in a low, flat location.

- Stay in the shelter location until the danger has passed

- After a tornado, be sure to remain out of damaged buildings and stay clear of downed power lines.

Floods

Flooding is the nation's most common natural disaster.

However, all floods are not alike. Some can develop slowly during an extended period of rain. Others, such as flash floods, can occur quickly, even without any visible signs of rain. Be prepared for flooding no matter where you live, but particularly if you are in a low-lying area, near water or downstream from a dam. Even a very small stream or dry creek bed can overflow and create flooding.

Prepare for a Flood:

- Be prepared to evacuate. Plan how you will leave and where you will go if you are advised to evacuate.
- Do not drive or walk into flooded areas. If you find yourself trapped in your vehicle in rising water, get out immediately and seek higher ground.
- Do not return to your home until local authorities say it is safe. Be aware that a house that has been flooded may be contaminated with mold or sewage, which can cause health risks.

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak.

An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population and the virus begins to cause serious illness and then spreads easily person-to-person worldwide. It is important

to be informed and prepared in the event that a pandemic influenza outbreak occurs. By being prepared you can lessen the severity of the outbreak. See the newsletter on pandemic influenza or visit www.health.cwftx.net for more information.

Thunderstorms & Lightning

In the United States, lightning kills 300 people and injures about 80 each year.

Thunderstorms produce lightning and have the potential for danger (tornadoes, hail, flash flooding). Lightning's risk to individuals and property is increased because of its unpredictability. It often strikes outside of heavy rain and may occur as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall. Most lightning deaths and injuries occur when people are caught outdoors in the summer months during the afternoon and evening.

Prepare for a Thunderstorm:

- Familiarize yourself with the terms that are used to identify a thunderstorm hazard, including understanding the difference between a severe thunderstorm watch and a severe thunderstorm warning.

- **A thunder storm watch** means there is a possibility of a thunderstorm in your area.
- **A thunder storm warning** means a thunderstorm is occurring or will likely occur soon. If you are advised to take shelter do so immediately.

- Remove dead or rotting trees and branches that could fall and cause injury or damage during a thunderstorm.

- Use the 30/30 lightning safety rule. If you see lightning and you cannot count to 30 before hearing thunder, go indoors. Then stay indoors for 30 minutes after hearing the last clap of thunder.

Have a Thunderstorm Plan that may include the following actions:

- Postpone outdoor activities and seek shelter inside a home, building, or hard top automobile.
- If shelter is not available go to the lowest area nearby and make yourself the smallest target possible but do not lie flat on the ground.
- Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage.
- Avoid showering or bathing during a thunderstorm. Plumbing and bathroom fixtures can conduct electricity.
- Listen to radio or watch TV for information.

Biological or Chemical Threat

A biological attack is the deliberate release of germs or other biological substances that can make you sick.

Many agents must be inhaled, enter through a cut in the skin, or be eaten to make you sick. Some biological agents, such as anthrax, do not cause contagious diseases. Others can result in diseases you can catch from other people.

A chemical attack is the deliberate release of a toxic gas, liquid, or solid that can poison people and the environment. Signs of a possible chemical attack are many people suffering from watery eyes, twitching, choking, having trouble breathing or losing coordination. Many sick or dead birds, fish or small animals are also cause for suspicion.

In the event of a possible release of a biological or chemical agent, protect yourself by covering your mouth and nose, move quickly away from the release site, wash with soap and water, and contact medical authorities.

