



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

COPING WITH CANCER AND NATURAL DISASTERS

When a natural disaster strikes, people living with cancer and their families who have been displaced are not only dealing with the challenges of their cancer diagnosis and treatment, but also with the trauma of uncertainty and temporary relocation. Here are helpful tips to prepare for a natural disaster.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

It's important to plan ahead considering natural disasters can disrupt roads, electricity, gas, water and cell phone service. Emergency situations can also cause individuals to leave or stay in their home for a long period of time. Here are suggestions that may help you and your loved ones:

Talk to your doctor about an emergency plan. It's important to talk with your doctor about how you can continue your treatment in the event of a natural disaster. You may want to ask your doctor the following questions:

- What supplies should I have on hand in the event of a disaster?
- What is the best method to contact you?
- If I have to see another doctor during a natural disaster, what information should I provide?



Keep important documents in one place. If you have to leave your house on short notice, it's helpful to have all your medical information in one place (such as a three-ring binder). These important documents can include:

- Copies of medical records
- Health care team's contact information
- Prescription information
- Health insurance records
- Insurance information
- Veterans benefits information

Talk to your family about an emergency plan. Consider having a meeting place or designating a family member to help you with any transportation needs. Talking about what supplies you may need on hand and having a water-resistant "to go" bag may also be helpful.

DURING A NATURAL DISASTER

Contact your doctor or the nearest health care professional. Try to contact your doctor if you have relocated or are in an emergency shelter. If you are in a shelter and are unable to reach your doctor, talk to a health care professional on staff such as a nurse. It's important to let them know you're currently receiving treatment for a cancer diagnosis and of any medications you're currently taking. If you are at a shelter without health care professionals, ask the shelter director for help contacting the closest hospital.

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Protect yourself from infections. A natural disaster may cause you to evacuate your home or treatment center. If you must travel or are staying in an emergency shelter, it's important to protect yourself from infections. Here are practical steps that can help you to lower your risk of getting an infection:

- Avoid germs. Try to stay away from people with a cold, bronchitis, pneumonia or other infectious disease. Shelters may have separate areas for people with medical issues.
- Wash your hands regularly. Be sure to use plenty of soap and warm water, and wash your hands for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are unavailable, try locating alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Take care of your skin and avoid scratches or cuts. Skin is an important barrier to germs.
- Be careful when engaging in activities that could lead to injury or infection. Wear gloves when doing these chores. Gloves can be helpful even when cooking and handling food.
- Clean cuts and scrapes right away. Use an antiseptic, and keep wounds clean and dry until they heal. If possible, carry a first aid kit with you.
- Keep surfaces clean and avoid contact with animal-related items such as cat litter boxes or bird cages.

Take important documents with you. If you are evacuated and are unable to take your medical information with you, write anything you can remember down. This can include your cancer type, your doctor's name, types of treatment and any medications you are currently taking.

Contact your health insurance company. Ask if they can help you locate oncologists, hospitals or treatment centers nearby that accept your insurance plan and if you can seek services outside of your network.

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancer.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

Facebook: [facebook.com/cancercare](https://www.facebook.com/cancercare) | **Twitter:** @cancercare

RESOURCES

CancerCare

800-813-4673

www.cancercare.org

American Cancer Society

800-227-2345

www.cancer.org

American Red Cross

www.redcross.org

Cancer.Net

*Patient information from
the American Society of
Clinical Oncology*

888-651-3038

www.cancer.net

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

800-621-3362

www.fema.gov

National Cancer Institute

800-422-6237

www.cancer.gov

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