



Disaster Preparedness for Schools: What Do You Need to Know?

Because children spend so much time at school, they may be there and not at home during a hurricane, earthquake, terrorist attack, or other disaster. Do you know how your child's school is planning for disasters and what you can do to help prepare your child?

What do you need to know about school emergency plans?

Schools have plans in place to protect children during disasters. You can contact your child's school if you want to know more about their plan. You may want to ask them:



- **“How can I help the school prepare for emergencies?”** Schools may want help collecting emergency supplies such as bottled water, canned food, and blankets. You may also be able to help just by talking with your child about their family and school disaster plans. To learn more about making a family plan, visit: <http://www.ready.gov/america/makeaplan/index.html>. Check with the school to see how you can help the school and your child prepare for emergencies.
- **“Who will be able to pick up my child in an emergency?”** Schools may have stricter pick-up policies during emergencies. Be sure to find out what the policy is now so you will know what to do if a disaster happens. You may be able to choose an emergency contact to pick your child up from school if you are not able to. Keep in mind that during a disaster, schools may ask people for identification (a driver's license, passport or other document with a name and a picture) before letting them pick up a student.

What can you do now?

- One of the best ways to prepare children is to talk with them. Tell them about disasters and their school and family plans. Talking with them involves them in the plans and can keep them calmer if disaster occurs.
- Make sure the school has up to date phone numbers for you and anyone else who picks your child up from school.
- Give your child emergency phone numbers (home, cell, work) for you and anyone else who might pick them up. Also chose an out-of-state contact you can both call. This is important, since local phone lines may be too busy to make calls during a disaster but long distance calls may still work.
- Make a mini emergency kit for your child to keep in their locker or cubby. Some items to include are:
 - an emergency contact list
 - a phone card or quarters for making phone calls
 - other important information the school or a caregiver may need such as any medical conditions (for example allergies or diabetes)

- instructions on what to do if you are in a disaster that does not affect their school. You may want to include bus schedules (for older children) and parts of the family plan such as who you've asked to take care of them after school
- If your child's school has a system to tell parents about closures and emergencies learn the website or phone number. Find out what radio and news station your child's school shares information with during emergencies so that you can tune in.

What are some common emergency actions schools may take?

Based on the safety threat, there may be an evacuation, a lockdown or students may shelter-in-place. These actions protect students and school staff. Learn what these actions are now so you will know what they will mean for you child in an emergency.

- **Evacuation:** Evacuation means quickly getting students out of the school and to a safe place. If they evacuate, the school will let you know where you can pick up your child.
- **Lockdowns:** Lockdowns take place when threats happen inside or outside the school. Outside and inside doors are locked while staff and students stay in safe areas until it is safe to leave the building and an all clear is given. School staff post signs to let parents and visitors know about the lockdown if they are able to do so safely.
- **Shelter-In-Place:** Sheltering-in-place keeps student safe when a hazard outside or in the air makes it too dangerous to evacuate or send students home. The school will choose the safest areas for students to stay until the hazard clears and they can go home.

School Emergency Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Tune in to the radio, television, or school information line. This is how the school will tell you when and where you can pick up your child. They may also post the information on the school website (if your child's school has one).

Don't:

- Call the school or rush to pick up your child during emergencies. All parents will be worried about their children and if everyone calls or shows up at the same time, it will be hard for the school to respond to everyone's needs. Schools will do their best to keep parents informed about their children's safety and when they can be picked up through information lines and media alerts.
- Send anyone who is not on your child's emergency contact list to pick them up. Most schools will ask for identification from anyone picking up a child during an emergency. Be sure whoever picks your child up remembers to bring their identification.



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