



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

Preparing for a Hurricane



What is a Hurricane?

A hurricane is a type of tropical storm that originates in the warm waters of the tropics. A tropical storm has strong winds and thunderstorms arranged in a spiral around a central “eye.” When a tropical storm’s maximum sustained winds reach 74 mph, it is called a hurricane. A hurricane can also be referred to as a typhoon or a tropical cyclone, depending on where the storm occurs geographically.

Although hurricanes weaken over land, they cause considerable damage along coastlines because of strong winds, rain, high waves, storm surge, and tornados. The North Atlantic Ocean has a distinct hurricane season—from June 1 to November 30 during which 97% of most hurricanes occur. But the hurricanes of the Northwest Pacific Ocean can occur year-round.

How Head Start Programs Address Hurricanes

Preparing for any disaster is composed of three parts: preparedness, response and recovery. To learn more about creating an emergency plan consult the Emergency Preparedness Manual for Early Childhood Programs.

Emergency Management





The response to an emergency is the implementation of the emergency preparedness plan. Emergency plans are effective only if they are kept current, practiced, and communicated to all staff.

Any Emergency Plan Should Be:

- All-hazard
- Specific to the child care center
- Relevant to natural, technological and man-made disasters that may occur in the location of the child care center
- Able to be implemented during the hours of operation of the center
- Coordinated with state licensing and emergency officials
- Read, reviewed, and practiced at least every six months

Preparedness

The preparations that are recommended by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies jointly with Save the Child are outlined in the publication, *Protecting Children in Child Care During Emergencies: Recommended State and National Regulatory and Accreditation Standards for Family Child Care Homes and Child Care Centers*.

Generally, these recommendations include the following eight planning directives:

1. Develop and maintain a written emergency plan.
2. Maintain the information needed to protect children's and staff's health and safety during emergencies.
3. Develop and implement plans and procedures for communicating with families before, during, and after emergencies.
4. Be prepared to evacuate the child care facility, shelter in place, or lock down the facility.
5. Have and maintain the equipment, supplies and materials needed to care for and evacuate children and staff during emergencies and to communicate with parents, staff members and community agencies during an emergency.
6. Prepare and train staff members to protect children's health and safety during an emergency.
7. Protect the health and safety of children and adults with special needs and chronic medical conditions during an emergency.
8. Protect program information and assets to help ensure the child care program can continue to provide child care after an emergency.

Extensive guidance on accomplishing each of these eight planning steps is available in *Protecting Children in Child Care During Emergencies*.



Response

Once program managers determine that a hurricane landfall is imminent, the response consists of the following stages:

- Determine appropriate response (evacuation, shelter in place, or lockdown)
- Activate the emergency-response plan
- Maintain communication with all staff and first responders
- Establish what information needs to be communicated to staff, teachers, assistants, children, families, and the community
- Provide emergency first aid as needed

Recovery

After the hurricane has passed, and first responders or local agencies determine it is safe to return to the facility, recovery may begin. Recovery extends from the end of the emergency to the time when the needs of staff, children, and families are met. It can last for a few days, weeks, months, or even years. Recovery includes:

- Repairing or rebuilding the facility and restoring services
- Meeting the physical, health, and emotional needs of children, families, and staff
- Providing a supportive and caring environment that brings normalcy back into children's lives





All state child care licensing requirements related to re-opening centers after a hurricane must also be met before service in centers resumes. Your local and state health authorities have information on recovery protocols. Additional flood recovery information is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Environmental Recovery

Hurricanes can cause damage from both high winds and flooding. Assessing damage includes inspecting indoor and outdoor facilities. To assess wind or tornado damage and assess for structural damage to a building, contact local authorities for the appropriate procedures. Do not enter a damaged building until local authorities deem it is safe.

Floodwaters, whether caused by rain, waves or storm surge, carry a wide variety of contaminants that can cause illness. Contaminants can worsen existing medical conditions and cause infections and infectious diseases. Services should only be resumed when children can be safely cared for in their centers and outdoor play areas.

If centers or playgrounds were flooded, test the indoor air quality and playground soil to be sure that contaminant levels are safe for children birth through age 5. Porous objects made of wood, cloth or paper should be carefully cleaned and inspected to assure they do not harbor contaminants that can be dangerous for children and staff.

Supporting Children, Families and Staff During Recovery

Recovery from a hurricane includes addressing the health and mental health of children, families, and staff. Children, families, and Head Start staff may experience stress and even trauma. Responses to a disaster such as a hurricane varies depending on the individual, and the response may be both short-term and long term. Work with local agencies and partners to ensure that all affected children receive needed health and mental health services as quickly as possible. If any children who are newly homeless enroll in the program, quickly ascertain children's health status and immediate needs.



DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

CHECKLIST

- FIRST AID KIT
- FLASHLIGHT, RADIO AND SPARE BATTERIES
- BLANKETS, CLOTHES AND SHOES
- TINNED AND DRIED FOOD
- EATING UTENSILS, CAN OPENER, MATCHES
- PLASTIC SHEETING FOR SHELTER AND TAPE
- TOOTHBRUSHES, SOAP TOWELS
- LIST OF EMERGENCY CONTACTS
- COPIES OF IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

Recovery information is best included in the preparedness plan so that staff are familiar with the materials available for helping families through hurricane recovery. Some options include:

- [Psychological First Aid](#), an evidence-informed approach for assisting children and families after a disaster. The field manual includes handouts for parents, caregivers, and children birth to five.
- [Helping Your Child Cope After a Disaster](#) [PDF, 125KB] is a tip sheet that provides families and staff with tools to help a child after a disaster or crisis.

Tips for Working with Families

The best way to help families through a hurricane is to prepare families before it occurs.

Emergency communication protocols. Families should have written notification of several methods of communication with the program, the program's evacuation procedures, and pick-up locations. Testing the emergency communication systems (text, voice calls, emails) is helpful so families and staff are aware of the processes.

Family home preparation. Instruct families on [preparing their homes for a hurricane](#) and provide information on any state or local guidance. This example, called [Texans, Get Ready!](#), published by Texas A&M University, may be useful for other areas.

Share recovery resources before a hurricane occurs. Periodically, provide recovery information for families so they have an understanding of the types of resources that are available to them after a hurricane. For example, SAMHSA offers a voice or text [disaster distress helpline](#) staffed by trained counselors.

For Your Family Newsletter

Tailor the messages below to include in your family newsletter.

Why plan for a hurricane? A hurricane can cut off your power or water supply. Young children are more at risk from hurricanes and their effects than older children and adults. Young children are less able to handle dehydration that may happen if water supplies are interrupted, the chemicals that may be in flood waters, and the poor air quality from mold that quickly grows after flooding.

Listen to the weather service for instructions. Know the difference between a hurricane watch (conditions are favorable for a hurricane) and a hurricane warning (a hurricane is approaching).



Plan for an evacuation. Determine ahead of time where you intend to go and the best routes. Local authorities can provide information on shelters.

Create an emergency supply kit that contains a three-day supply of food and water (and check it regularly for expiration), medicines (rotated with fresh supplies, so they do not expire), bleach (for disinfecting water and cleaning), flashlights, and a fire extinguisher.

Understand how to disinfect water for drinking. If water supplies are contaminated or interrupted, you may need to find alternate sources of water. In that case, boil water before first for one minute before using it. If boiling is not possible you may use bleach to disinfect the water. Follow the instructions on the container and let sit for 30 minutes before using.

Other water issues. If you are ordered to shelter in place, consider filling gallon containers with water for flushing the toilets. Do not fill the bathtub unless you are certain young children are unable to get into the bathroom by themselves. A tub with water is a drowning risk.

Resources

Resources Available on ECLKC

[Emergency Preparedness Manual for Early Childhood Programs](#) (Information for preparing a disaster plan, checklists, tools and tips for families)

[Emergency Preparedness](#) (tip sheets and links to other resources)

Other Resources

[Ready Wrigley Prepares for Hurricanes](#) (an activity book from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for parents and caregivers to read with young children)

[Resource Guide: Emergency Preparedness and Response Resources for Child Care Programs](#)

[Damage Assessment Tool](#)

[National Weather Service Hurricane Safety Tips and Resources](#)

[Ready.gov: Hurricanes](#) (information for families including an interactive game for preparing children for a hurricane)

[Children in Disasters: Teachers and Childcare](#) (general information on disaster preparedness for child care provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)



NATIONAL CENTER ON Early Childhood Health and Wellness

View other topics in the Embracing Health and Wellness Series on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center website: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/health-services-management/article/embracing-health-wellness-series>

Our Goal: To help Head Start and Early Head Start programs implement best practices and effective approaches within the areas of medical and dental care access, health awareness, healthy active living, emergency preparedness, and environmental safety to support healthy outcomes and school readiness for young children and their families.

Contact Us: The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback as well as your suggestions for topics for future resources! Please forward your comments to: health@ecetta.info or call us at 888-227-5125.

School readiness begins with health!