



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

Preparing for Tornado Season



Tornadoes can happen at any time. However, they are most likely to occur in the spring and summer months. While tornadoes have been reported in every state, they [occur most often](#) in Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. Tornadoes can cause extensive damage to buildings and structures, disrupt transportation, power, water, gas, and communications, hurl cars, trees, and other heavy objects into the air, and lead to loss of life.

With spring fast approaching, now is a good time to be sure that your program is prepared. Use the [Emergency Preparedness Manual for Early Childhood Programs](#) to assess your risk and develop a customized emergency plan. The manual has information and tools that address three distinct phases of emergency preparedness: planning for, responding to, and recovering from a disaster.

Phase 1: Preparedness

Develop a Plan

Preparing and planning for emergencies can help save the lives of children, staff, and families. All Head Start and Early Head Start programs are required to have [emergency preparedness and response plans](#) for natural disasters and other extreme events in or near programs (45 CFR § 1302.47(b)(8)). Each state is also required to have a child care disaster plan, which includes requirements for programs' emergency plans. The [Emergency Preparedness Manual for Early Childhood Programs](#) has worksheets to plan Shelter-in-Place Response for Centers (p. 16), Shelter-in-Place Response in Family Child Care Homes (p. 19), and other tools that are critical when planning for certain emergencies. The



“The only way to prepare for disasters is to consider various worst case or unique scenarios, and to develop contingency plans.”

Caring for Our Children

Mitigation Checklist (p.27) helps identify structural and nonstructural hazards in your program and prompts you to say how you’ll address the hazards to reduce the risk of damage or injury in case of an emergency. Access [Hazard Mapping for Early Care and Education Programs](#) and [Preparing for Tornado Season](#) for more information.

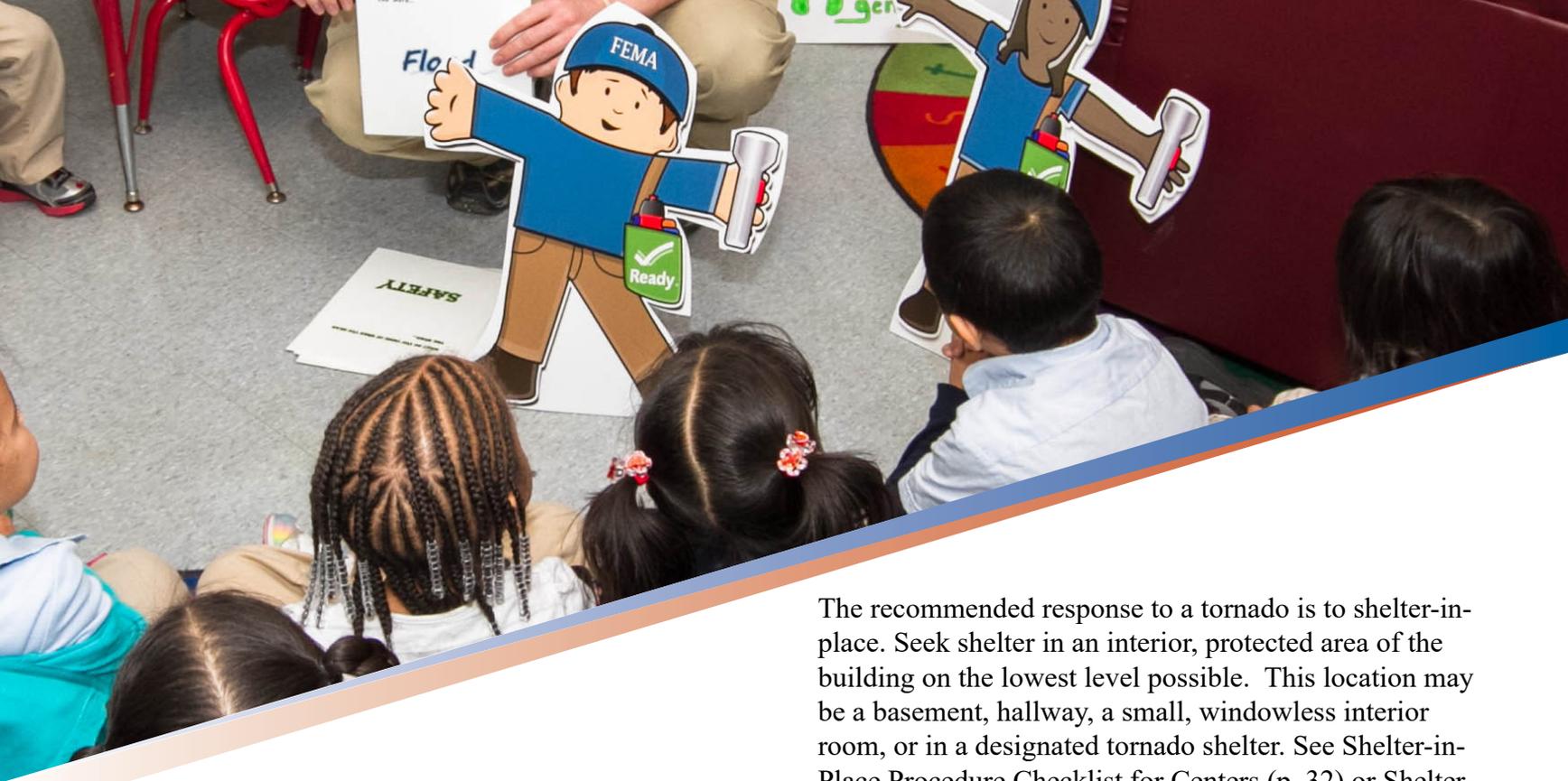
If you work in a center, make sure all staff knows their unique role in tornado response. Staff assignments are a necessary part in making your disaster preparedness and emergency response plan. Using the Establishing Your Communication Procedures Worksheet (p. 12) can help assign staff roles and responsibilities to fit the needs of your program. Learn more about how to prepare your program for tornadoes at usa.childcareaware.org/tornadoes.



Check Your Emergency Kit

Consider the following when preparing your emergency preparedness kit:

- Child information sheets are up to date with current phone numbers and contacts.
- Medication needed by children and staff is included in your kit.
- Kit is stored according to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidelines, in the basement or wherever the tornado shelter is located.
- Toys and other items to keep children entertained and relieve tension are used and work.
- After you’ve practiced your tornado drill, it’s important to go back and double-check your emergency supplies to ensure they meet the needs of the children in your program. To learn what else your kit should contain, review [CFOC Standard 5.6.0.1: First Aid and Emergency Supplies](#).



Phase 2: Response

Practice Your Plan

Once you've developed a plan, it is important to practice executing your response. The more a plan is practiced, the more effective it will be. While states' minimum requirements may be different, all emergency preparedness plans should include regularly scheduled practice drills in the center or family child care home. Drills should include members of the community who may be needed during an emergency, such as first responders, child care health consultants, and emergency management officials. See your state's licensing regulations to review the frequency at which your program is required to conduct drills. Several states require programs to include tornadoes in their emergency plans. For example, in the following states, child care licensing regulations require:

- [Iowa](#): Monthly tornado drills and annual staff training
- [Missouri](#): Tornado plans to be posted in programs and shelter-in-place drills to be practiced at least every three months
- [Oklahoma](#): Tornado plans, shelter-in-place plans, and monthly shelter-in-place drills

The recommended response to a tornado is to shelter-in-place. Seek shelter in an interior, protected area of the building on the lowest level possible. This location may be a basement, hallway, a small, windowless interior room, or in a designated tornado shelter. See Shelter-in-Place Procedure Checklist for Centers (p. 32) or Shelter-in-Place Procedures Checklist for Family Child Care Homes (p. 35) for a list to follow when a tornado hits. Also, visit <https://www.ready.gov/tornadoes>.

When sheltering-in-place, make sure to:

- Keep children away from windows
- Take attendance
- Bring disaster supplies to the designated safe location

Know the Warning Signs of a Potential Tornado

- A dark, greenish sky
- Large, dark, low-lying clouds
- Large hail
- A loud roar, like a freight train

Learn the Lingo

- Tornado Watch: Risk of tornado has increased greatly, but timing and location are still uncertain. Watches are intended to set your emergency response plans into motion.
- Tornado Warning: Tornado is occurring soon or has a very high chance of occurring. Set your emergency response plan into motion as quickly as possible.



Phase 3: Recovery

Recovery starts when the emergency is over. Often, physical recovery (eg, repairing damage to a program) takes days, weeks, or months. [*The Emergency Preparedness Manual for Early Childhood Programs*](#) has a Damage and Needs Assessment (p. 46) to help you identify what needs to be done in your program. Emotional recovery — helping children, families and staff cope with the trauma they experienced—can take much longer than physical recovery (p. 47).

One important part of early recovery is reunification — the safe return of children to their parents/guardians. Browse the manual for guidance on maintaining up-to-date emergency contact information for each child (p. 24) and communicating with parents/guardians throughout the emergency (p. 12).



Join the Health, Safety, and Wellness Community

Have you experienced a tornado? How did your program handle it? Do you have lessons learned you'd like to share with other providers? Post them on the Health, Safety, and Wellness community of MyPeers. Engage with colleagues around the country in this online community hosted on the MyPeers platform.

New to MyPeers? Complete the MyPeers registration form to create your member account. If you are already a member, find the Health, Safety, and Wellness community in MyPeers under “All Communities,” and select the blue “Join” button. Select the link to sign up or log in: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-collaborative-platform-early-care-education-community>

Family Resources

Help families in your program prepare for tornado season. Share the [Family Preparedness: Thinking Ahead](#) handout from the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

Kid's Corner

Struggling to talk to children about tornado season? Check out the *Ready Wrigley* activity book series from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The books are available in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#).



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School readiness begins with health!

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