

If your family members consist of the almost 800,000 Georgians over age 65, emergency planning should reflect their unique needs. Surviving tomorrow's disaster often depends on the preparation made today. Ready Georgia and the Gwinnett Office of Emergency Management encourage Gwinnett County families to help their elderly loved ones prepare for emergencies so they don't have to worry about their safety in the event of a disaster. Here are some tips on how seniors can prepare:

Be informed

- Know what disasters could affect your area, which could call for an evacuation and when to shelter in place.
- Georgia is prone to extreme heat. If you don't have home air conditioning, plan to go to an air-conditioned location for at least a few hours during extreme weather to avoid heat stroke.
- Keep a NOAA Weather Radio tuned to your local emergency station and monitor TV and radio warnings about severe weather in your area.

Make a plan

Next, determine any special assistance you may need, and include in your emergency plan.

- Create a support network of family, friends and others who can assist you during an emergency, and share your disaster plans with them. Practice your plan with them.
- Make sure they have an extra key to your home, know where you keep your emergency supplies, and how to use lifesaving equipment or administer medicine.
- If you undergo routine treatments administered by a clinic or hospital, find out their emergency plans and work with them to identify back-up service providers.
- If you have a communication-related disability, note the best way to communicate with you.
- Don't forget your pets or service animals. Not all shelters accept pets, so plan for alternatives.
 - Consider loved ones or friends outside of your immediate area
 - Prepare a Ready kit for your pet

Get your benefits electronically

A disaster can disrupt mail service for days or weeks. If you depend on Social Security or other regular benefits, switching to electronic payments is a simple, significant way to protect yourself financially before disaster strikes. It also eliminates the risk of stolen checks. The U.S. Department of the Treasury recommends two safer ways to get federal benefits:

- Direct deposit to a checking or savings account. Federal benefit recipients can sign up by calling 800.333.1795 or at www.GoDirect.org.
- The Direct Express® prepaid debit card is designed as a safe and easy alternative to paper checks. Call toll-free at 877.212.9991 or sign up online.

Build a kit

Start with the basic Ready kit items, then add supplies to meet your unique daily needs:

- Extra eyeglasses, hearing aids and hearing aid batteries, wheelchair batteries, and oxygen
- Extra medications and copies of all prescriptions, in case there is no access to a drugstore or medical facility. Include dosage and a list of allergies.
- Contact information for your doctors; copies of Medicare cards insurance
- Copies of important documents in a watertight container: Family records, wills, power of attorney documents, deeds, bank information, tax records, cash or travelers checks, and names and contact information of your support network