

Infection Prevention and You



Be prepared for natural disasters

Natural disasters are an unfortunate reality of living on planet earth. Some recent natural disasters include: massive and devastating earthquakes (Nepal), tsunamis (Japan), hurricanes (New Orleans), tornadoes (Joplin, MO), cyclones (Vanuatu), landslides (Philippines), sinkholes (Florida), and forest fires (California).

So what are we to do when Mother Nature barges in and takes control? **Be prepared.** As hard as we wish we could predict the future, we simply cannot. We cannot reliably and accurately predict tomorrow evening's winning lottery numbers, traffic on the expressway, or even a natural disaster. Our best option is to **be prepared.**

Fortunately, there are many resources to assist us in staying healthy and safe during and after a natural disaster.

1. Ready.gov provides information on determining disaster risk, making a plan, building an emergency kit, and community considerations. There is also a special section for children that educates through age-appropriate activities and games.
2. [The National Library of Medicine](http://TheNationalLibraryofMedicine.gov) and the [American Red Cross](http://AmericanRedCross.org) offer free apps that provide instant access to basic CPR instructions, disaster checklists, shelters, and other helpful information.
3. [FEMA](http://FEMA.gov) provides a full emergency preparedness guide, including checklists and tips.
4. [APIC](http://APIC.org) provides multiple links to different agencies through its consumer website, Infection Prevention & You.

But what happens after a disaster? Many things will go through your mind, including safety, shelter, clean-up, and rebuilding. Through it all, it is important to remember to remain as safe and healthy as possible. Some important considerations during the recovery period include:

1. **Hand hygiene.** [Hand washing](#) is the single most important way to prevent the spread of infection. If safe water sources are unavailable, utilize the hand sanitizer found in your emergency preparedness kit.
2. **When in doubt, throw it out.** If [food items](#) have been compromised due to flooding or power outages, do not risk your health. Throw them out.
3. **Water.** [Do not drink contaminated water](#) as it may harbor bacteria that can cause extreme illness. Check with your local water company to check on any alerts. Boiling is usually the recommended method for managing water.
4. **Injuries.** Treat injuries promptly and seek emergency care. Make sure to keep wounds covered and clean.
5. **Hazards.** Be careful of broken glass, downed power lines, contaminated water, and raw sewage. Make sure to wear protective clothing when dealing with debris. Do not use generators or camp stoves indoors.

Infection Prevention and You

These are just a few of the many things we can do to help us through a natural disaster. It is important to examine what risks are present in your area. Once you have determined your risk, take action and **be prepared!**

Additional resources

Ready.gov <http://www.ready.gov/>

Disaster Apps—The National Library of Medicine <http://disasterinfo.nlm.nih.gov/dimrc/disasterapps.html>

Disaster and Safety Library—American Red Cross <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster-safety-library>

Additional patient safety resources—APIC <http://www.apic.org/For-Consumers/Additional-patient-safety-resources>

Guide to Citizen Preparedness—FEMA https://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/areyouready_full.pdf

Clean your hands often—Infection Prevention and You <http://consumers.site.apic.org/healthcare-settings/wash-your-hands-often/>

Keep Food and Water Safe After a Disaster or Emergency—CDC <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/facts.asp>

Updated: 5/7/2015