

4 HEALTH, FIRST AID & SANITATION

CLIMATE-INDUCED HEALTH RISKS HEAT STROKE, HYPOTHERMIA, ETC.

The human body is sensitive to temperature extremes. Climate events increase the risk of heat stroke, dehydration, and hypothermia. Learn to recognize early signs: confusion, dizziness, shallow breathing, or shivering can signal life-threatening conditions. Have a plan for the elderly, infants, chronically ill, and those without stable housing. In hot weather, stay hydrated, rest often, and cool the body with water or ventilation; in cold, insulate both body and shelter.

Climate change also increases indirect risks such as mold, allergens, and vector-borne diseases spreading to new regions.

SANITATION & HYGIENE IN RESOURCE-SCARCE CONDITIONS

Without running water or functioning sewage systems, hygiene becomes both a health and dignity issue. Stock wet wipes, disinfectants, and trash bags for short-term sanitation. Create emergency toilet systems using buckets, composting setups, or dig pits well away from water sources. Wash hands before eating or preparing food, even if using minimal water; alcohol gel or ash can help if soap is unavailable. Proper waste disposal prevents rodents, contamination, and disease. Never let trash pile up inside or near shelter areas.

FIRST AID & EMERGENCY MEDICAL RESPONSE

In serious disasters, healthcare systems may be overwhelmed. Community members may become first responders by necessity. A basic first aid course can save lives; everyone should learn how to stop bleeding, stabilize fractures, recognize and treat shock, and perform CPR. Keep a stocked and portable first aid kit in both your home and vehicle. Essential items include bandages, antiseptic, gloves, scissors, painkillers, and any personal medications.

FIRST AID KIT

- ☐ Adhesive bandages in assorted sizes for minor cuts, scrapes, and injuries
- ☐ Sterile gauze pads, nonstick gauze, and adhesive tape
- ☐ Elastic bandage
- ☐ Moleskin to apply on blisters or hotspots
- ☐ Eyeshields and pads
- ☐ Aluminum finger splints
- ☐ Thermometer
- ☐ Tweezers
- ☐ Small pair of scissors
- ☐ Syringe
- ☐ Face masks
- ☐ Sterile cotton balls
- ☐ Hand sanitizer
- ☐ Latex or non-latex gloves
- ☐ Antiseptic solution or wipes, such as hydrogen peroxide, povidone-iodine, or chlorhexidine
- ☐ Antibiotic ointment
- ☐ Sterile eyewash such as saline solution
- ☐ Calamine lotion
- ☐ Hydrocortisone cream
- ☐ Cold medication
- ☐ Laxatives
- ☐ Antidiarrheals
- ☐ Antihistamines
- ☐ Pain relievers (acetaminophen, ibuprofen) and fever reducer (aspirin - not for children)
- ☐ If needed: EpiPen, inhaler



DEALING WITH WATERBORNE & AIRBORNE DISEASES

Floods, heatwaves, and sanitation breakdowns increase the spread of bacteria, parasites, and respiratory illnesses. Use only clean or purified water for drinking and cooking. Boiling is the most reliable method in emergencies. Practice safe food handling, especially when refrigeration is unavailable. Avoid cross-contamination and wash with clean water. When respiratory disease risk is high (pandemics, smoke, pollution), wear masks and improve indoor ventilation. Keep soap, disinfectants, and hand sanitizer on hand; simple hygiene is one of the most powerful forms of disease prevention.

MENTAL HEALTH IN A CRISIS

Disasters trigger fear, anxiety, and disorientation; especially when basic needs or routines are disrupted. Maintaining emotional resilience is as critical as securing food and water: it affects decision-making, relationships, and motivation.

Create calming routines and designate rest times, even in a crisis; especially for children and sensitive individuals. Singing and group games bring people together and allow for laughter even in a crisis. Possibilities that don't need any supplies or prior knowledge include charades, broken telephone, collaborative storytelling, "Never Have I Ever", and "Two Truths and a Lie". Talk to others regularly: isolation worsens trauma. If professional help is unavailable, peer support and active listening are vital. Remember that not everyone needs the same thing at the same time. Some people may need alone time. Allow for quiet moments and space.

After the crisis passes, PTSD or depressive symptoms may linger. Seek help early and encourage community healing.

POLLUTION, TOXINS & RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

Wildfires, industrial accidents, and urban breakdowns can release toxic substances into air, water, and soil. Know local environmental risks: areas near industry or old buildings may hide chemical hazards or asbestos.

Stay indoors with windows sealed when air quality is poor; if necessary, use improvised air filters (wet cloths, furnace filters with fans).

N95/FFP2 masks or better protect against fine particles, smoke, and airborne diseases. Keep several in your kit.

After disasters, wear gloves and boots when handling debris or flood water. Chemicals, mold, or bacteria can cause long-term health damage.