

Emergency Preparedness for Individuals with Hearing Loss: A Family Guide

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES



Why is emergency preparedness for individuals with hearing loss important?

From a natural disaster to unexpected emergencies in the home, the need to plan, practice, and store away information and materials specific for someone with hearing loss is important. During an emergency, planning for the communication needs of someone with a hearing loss might help reduce stress and also save a life.

What should be packed in an emergency kit?

The basic materials packed in an emergency kit for anyone such as food, first aid, and clothing should remain the same. However, additional items that can help with communication should be included. The following items should be considered for the emergency kit:

- Flashlight and batteries for those who need light to speech read or for those who use a sign language interpreter.
- Pen and paper in case the first responder does not know how to sign and needs to write back and forth.
- Disposable batteries for those with hearing aids or cochlear implants. Keep about 4 weeks of batteries in the emergency kit in case there is no access to purchase or recharge batteries.
- Waterproof/sealed container that is large enough to hold hearing aids or cochlear implants to protect if there is no shelter from the weather.
- Communication cards if sign language is used. Important signs printed on this card would help explain basic needs to first responders, or workers at a local shelter such as “food,” “water,” “sick,” and “help.”
- Phone number of the hearing aid or cochlear implant company in case the device needs to be repaired.

- Phone number of local communication center for the deaf and hard of hearing in case an interpreter is needed.

How should one prepare a child with hearing loss for an emergency?

Parents of children who have hearing loss should talk with their children about how to ask for help if their hearing aid or cochlear implant fails or if they need to ask for an interpreter. It is helpful to discuss as well as role play the plans the family has made for specific emergencies. For assistance in planning for an emergency, videos are available for individuals with hearing loss. Plan ahead and assign a family member with hearing or a neighbor who can contact the child with hearing loss about weather-related emergencies by text, email, phone call, or by stopping by the child’s home. Children’s hearing aids or cochlear implants should be insured on a home owner’s insurance plan in case they are lost or destroyed.

What about hearing dogs?

A hearing dog’s job is to alert his or her owner to sounds such as alarms, telephones, or environmental sounds. An additional advantage to having a hearing dog is as a companion in everyday life as well as during possible emergencies. There are various organizations that train dogs to become service animals for individuals with hearing loss located in and around the United States.

What devices are available to alert individuals with hearing loss about potential disasters in their homes?

- Fire Safety Alerts: Devices are available that alert an individual with hearing loss to fire or smoke in the house either through a bed shaker or flashing lights. Most devices work with the existing smoke detector. Contact your local fire department or fire marshal for possible free smoke alarms designed for individuals with hearing loss.
- Weather Alert Systems: Weather alert radios are available that tune into National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) 24 hour/7 days a week National Weather Service broadcast. Weather alert radios are particularly designed for individuals with hearing loss that indicate NOAA’s alerts in closed caption messages as well as vibration or flashing lights. NOAA also has NOAA Weather Wire Service (NWWS), which offers a direct delivery of messages through email. This may be helpful for individuals who can receive emails on their personal contact devices, such as a cell phone.



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RESOURCES

- **Assistive Communication Devices:** Being able to call and receive calls is essential. For individuals who use sign language this may involve a Video Relay Service, for those who do not use sign language there are other Telecommunication Relay Service(s) that are accessible by all telephone companies.
- **Alerting Devices:** If you have a hearing loss, devices can be set up in your child's bedroom to alert you of your child's cries for help.

Family Preparedness Tips for 10 Possible Emergencies: Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) offers suggestions for families when preparing for one or more of the following events: tornado, flood, transportation, hazardous materials, fire, extreme temperature, geologic event, severe winter storm, other severe storms, and other threats. www.tnema.org/public/familypreparedness.html

SMART 9-1-1 is a service made available in specific regions/counties to individuals with or without disabilities who want to make known their critical needs when calling any 9-1-1 operator for help (i.e., police, fire, or EMS). Prior to dialing 9-1-1, this service requires the entry of critical information (e.g., hearing loss, allergies) on a secure online database that will show up when calling 9-1-1. This service is made available by Rave Mobile Safety. www.smart911.com

Library Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: The Tennessee Library for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing provides resources and links to regional communication centers for the deaf and hard of hearing (i.e., interpreting services) and links to companies that offer assistive listening devices free or to purchase. Voice/TTY (615) 862-5750, Toll-free: (800) 342-3262, www.tndeaflibrary.nashville.gov/weblinks.htm,

Bridges: An organization that provides resources, educational classes, and links for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Voice/TTY (615) 248-8828, Video Phone Local (615) 290-5147, Video Phone Toll-free (866) 385-6524, www.bridgesfordeafandhh.org

International Hearing Dog, Inc.: A nonprofit organization located in Henderson, Colorado, that specializes in the training and placement of hearing dogs for the deaf and hard of hearing in the United States and Canada free of charge. Voice/TDD (303) 287-3277, www.hearingdog.org

Canine Companions for Independence Hearing Dogs: A nonprofit organization that trains and places hearing dogs for individuals who are 18 years or older and are deaf or hard of hearing. www.cci.org/site/c.cdKGIRNqEmG/b.4011125/

SafeAwake Smoke Alarm Aid: www.safeawake.com

Lifetone Sleep Safety: lifetonesafety.com

NOAA Weather Radio – Emergency Warnings Available for Individuals with Hearing Loss: A question and answer page that explains the usefulness of having a National Weather Radio as well as referral to vendors that sell NWR receivers and accessories for individuals with hearing loss. www.nssl.noaa.gov/users/wood/public_html/NWR/spc-nds-nwr.html

Telecommunications Distributions Access Program (TDAP): A program that distributes appropriate telecommunication devices to individuals with disabilities for free. (615) 741-2904, Toll-free: (800) 342-8359, www.tn.gov/tra/topic/telecommunications-devices-access-programs-tdap

Tennessee Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: A state office that assists citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind that offers programs and services. Six regional community service centers (Johnson City, Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville, Jackson, and Memphis) provide information, public awareness and advocacy services. www.tn.gov/humanservices/article/tcddbhh

Cap-Tel: A company that provides a captioned telephone for individuals with hearing loss. (800) 233-9130, www.captel.com

Contact the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Nashville (615) 322-8240 Toll-Free (866) 936-VUKC [8852] vk.vumc.org kc@vumc.org

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