

## Preparing for hurricanes during COVID-19

Riding out hurricane season looks a little different this year because of the need to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

### For up-to-date information

For the latest updates on the weather in your community, look to your local news as well as the National Weather Service. The Department of Health will also share the latest on its social media channels (@LaDeptHealth on Twitter and Facebook). We encourage residents with questions about the storm, sheltering or medical needs to call 2-1-1.

### Protecting yourself and others from COVID-19

To protect yourself and others from COVID-19 during this emergency, remember to:

- Wear a mask
- Stay 6 feet apart from others
- Minimize your trips and how many family members join
- Wash or disinfect your hands when you return home.
- Check on neighbors, but consider calling them instead of visiting in person. If you visit in person, wear a mask and stay six feet apart.

Community-based COVID testing is on hold for the rest of the week. We will keep you updated. We want you to be able to get tested for COVID as soon as possible if you are symptomatic or have been exposed to someone with COVID.

### Prepare for power outages

- When the power is out, throw away any medication that should be refrigerated, unless the drug's label says otherwise. If your life depends on the refrigerated drugs, use them only until a new supply is available. Replace all refrigerated drugs as soon as possible.
- Assume that any downed utility line is energized. Stay away and keep children and pets away from downed lines. Call the electric company to report them. Learn more on how to protect yourself from [electrical hazards after a disaster](#).
- Extreme heat can be especially dangerous for those with chronic medical conditions like heart disease, mental illness, poor blood circulation and obesity. Check on friends and loved ones, and follow these tips on how to [prevent heat-related illness after a power outage](#).
- Here are 3 ways to prepare your health for a possible power outage:
  - Fully charge your mobile and medical devices, and your back-up power sources
  - Make an emergency power plan
  - Test your carbon monoxide detectors

- We know many of you may be dusting off your generators for the first time all year. Please remember:
  - **Portable generators should never be used indoors.** This includes in a garage, carport, basement, crawl space or other enclosed or partially enclosed area, even those with ventilation.
  - **Gas-powered generators produce an exhaust of carbon monoxide (CO)** which is odorless and colorless. CO inhalation can rapidly lead to full incapacitation or death. Opening windows or doors or using fans will not prevent the build-up of CO. If you start to feel sick, dizzy or weak while using a generator, get to fresh air IMMEDIATELY. Be sure to place the generator away from doors, windows and vents that could allow CO to come indoors.
  - **Keep the generator dry** and do not use in rain or wet conditions. Protect the generator from moisture by operating it on a dry surface under an open canopy-like structure, such as a tarp held up on poles.

### **Staying with friends or family**

- If you plan to stay with others, talk to them in advance about how you can all best protect yourselves from COVID-19.
- Follow everyday preventive actions, including covering coughs and sneezes, washing your hands often, and avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Consider taking extra precautions for people living in close quarters.
  - If your household includes one or more vulnerable people, then all members of the household should behave as if they themselves are at higher risk.
  - Vulnerable members should avoid caring for children and those who are sick.
  - Separate a household member who is sick.
- Know what to do if someone in your family or in the household you are staying with becomes sick with COVID-19, such as creating a sick room or at least distance where possible between the sick person and others.

### **Food and water safety**

- Listen to water advisories from local authorities to find out if your water is safe for drinking and bathing after a hurricane. You may only be able to use bottled, boiled or treated water for drinking, cooking, etc.
- If you are in a disaster or emergency, it's important that you take steps to prevent illness from unsafe food and water.
- Throw away food that may have come in contact with flood or storm water. Unsafe food can make you sick even if it looks, smells and tastes normal. Throw away perishable foods that have not been refrigerated properly due to power outages; also discard foods with an unusual odor, color or texture. When in doubt, throw it out.

### **Floodwaters and cleanup**

- Avoid floodwaters, both driving and walking through them, especially on highways and roads. They could be mixed with sewage or other dangerous contaminants. Or it could be covering other dangers, such as exposed electrical wires or sharp objects. For your health and safety, just stay out of the water.

- Take steps to protect yourself and your loved ones during cleanup after a hurricane.
  - Follow safety precautions before reentering your flooded home.
  - Follow our cleanup tips and monitor your radio or television for up-to-date emergency information.
- Parents: When you return home after a flood, keep your children out of the affected area until cleanup is completed. Don't allow children to play in or near floodwaters. CDC offers tips to keep your family safe after a flood.
- If your home was flooded, check for mold growth. CDC offers information on how to clean up mold safely after the flood.

### **Take care of yourself**

- The risk for injury during and after a hurricane and other natural disasters is high. Get first aid quickly to help heal small wounds and prevent infection. Learn more about proper wound care after a disaster.
- Dealing with disasters can cause stress and strong emotions, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is natural to feel anxiety, grief, and worry. Coping with these feelings and getting help when you need it will help you, your family and your community recover. You can call our special Keep Calm through COVID hotline. This connects you to trained, compassionate counselors who can offer support and who can direct you to mental health and substance abuse counseling services. **Call 866-310-7977.**
- The Behavioral Health Recovery Outreach Line connects individuals to real-time support to avoid, prevent or intercept a crisis from occurring. This line offers recovery support 24/7/365 for those with substance use, mental health, mental illness or co-occurring disorders. Additionally, this line is focused on providing assistance to individuals in the healthcare field and as such they can access these services any day, any time. **Call 833-333-1132** to speak with a qualified support provider who can connect you to trained specialists and clinicians in multiple languages.
- People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms.
- The Louisiana Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) is encouraging Louisianans to check out an electronic resource from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Taking Care of Your Own Behavioral Health which promotes positive coping and self-care during these unique times.
- There are several other resources and guidance documents on the OBH webpage that can be found at: <https://ldh.la.gov/index.cfm/page/3883>.