

Emergency Food and Water Supplies

If a natural or human-caused disaster strikes your community, you might not have access to food, water and electricity for a while. By taking steps now to store emergency food and water supplies, along with a **disaster supplies kit**, you can reduce the affect of any such disaster on your family.

Detailed information on the steps outlined below can be found in the American Red Cross publication, "**Food and Water in an Emergency.**"

Water Supplies | Food Supplies

In an emergency, having a supply of clean water for drinking, food preparation, and hygiene is a top priority.

- Store at least 1 gallon per person and pet per day.
- Store at least a 3-day supply of water for each member of your family.

In an emergency, drink at least 2 quarts of water a day, 3 to 4 quarts a day if you are in a hot climate, pregnant, sick, or a child. If supplies run low, don't ration water: Drink the amount you need today and look for more tomorrow. Don't risk dehydration. Emergency assistance should be available within a few days at most.

Learn where the water intake valve to your home is. If you hear reports of broken water or sewage lines, or if local officials recommend doing so, you would need to shut off water to your house at the incoming water valve to stop contaminated water from entering your home.

How and Where to Store Water

- In a cool, dark place in your home, each vehicle, and your workplace.
- Preferably in store-bought, factory-sealed water containers.
- Alternately, in food-grade-quality containers made for storing water and available from sporting goods and surplus stores and other retailers. These containers must be thoroughly **washed, sanitized, and rinsed**. The water you store in them, if it's from your tap, may need to be treated before being stored. Ask your public health service or water provider for information on whether and how to treat the water. Follow those instructions before storing any.

(1) **Wash** containers with dishwashing soap and rinse with water, (2) **sanitize** by swishing a solution of 1 teaspoon of liquid household chlorine bleach to a quart of water on all interior surfaces of the container and (3) **rinse** thoroughly with clean water before use.

Avoid using—

- Store-bought water past the expiration or "use by" date on the container.
- Containers that can't be sealed tightly.
- Containers that can break, such as glass bottles.
- Containers that have ever held any toxic substance.
- Plastic milk bottles and cartons. They are difficult to clean and break down over time.

Do—

- Change stored water every six months.

Alternate Emergency Water Sources Inside and Outside Your Home

Inside—

If a disaster catches you without a stored supply of clean water, you can use the water in—

- your hot-water tank
- pipes and faucets
- ice cubes

If your tap water is safe to drink, so is the water in your pipes and hot-water tank, even if the idea seems unappealing. If you don't drink tapwater, the water in your pipes and hot-water tank may still be useful for sanitation.

To use the water in your hot-water tank, be sure the electricity or gas is off, then open the drain at the bottom of the tank. Start the water flowing by turning off the water intake valve at the tank and turning on a hot-water faucet. Refill the tank before turning the gas or electricity back on. If the gas is turned off, only a professional can turn it back on.

To use the water in your pipes, identify and turn on the highest faucet in your home to let air into the plumbing. You then can get water from the lowest faucet.

Outside—

If you need to find water outside your home, try—

- Rainwater
- Streams, rivers, and other moving bodies of water
- Ponds and lakes
- Natural springs

Take steps to make water from any of these sources safer before drinking it. You should not drink flood water. Avoid water with floating material, an odor, or dark color. Use saltwater only if you distill it first.

Ways to Make Outdoor Water Safer

Note: These instructions are not for treating water to be stored, only for emergencies when no other water is available.

Untreated water can make you very sick. Besides having a bad odor and taste, it can contain toxic chemicals, heavy metals and germs that cause such diseases as dysentery, typhoid and hepatitis. Before drinking outdoor water, using it in food preparation or for hygiene, make it safer to use by—

- **Straining it.** Pour the water through paper towels, a clean cloth, or a coffee filter to remove any suspended particles.
- **Boiling it.** In a large pot or kettle, bring water to a rolling boil for 1 full minute. Cool it and pour it back and forth between two clean containers to improve its taste before drinking it.
- **Chlorinating it.** Using household liquid bleach that contains 5.25 to 6.0 percent sodium hypochlorite (listed on the label) as its only active ingredient, add 16 drops (1/8 teaspoon) per gallon to water in a large pot or kettle. Stir and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water does not have a slight bleach odor, repeat the dosage and let stand another 15 minutes. If it still does not smell of chlorine, find another source of water and start over.
- **Distilling it.** Fill a pot halfway with water. Tie a cup to the handle on the pot's lid so that the cup will hang right-side-up inside the pot when the lid is upside-down without dangling into the water. Boil the water for 20 minutes. The water that drips from the lid into the cup is distilled.

None of these methods is perfect. The best solution is to use all of them. Boiling and chlorination will kill most microbes but will not remove other contaminants, such as heavy metals, salts and most other chemicals. Distillation will kill or remove most of any remaining contaminants.

For more information, contact any of the following:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Your local American Red Cross chapter
- Your state and local health departments
- Your local emergency management agency
- CDC Public Response Hotline (English 1-888-246-2675, Spanish 1-888-246-2857, TTY 1-866-874-2646)

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