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Preparing for emergencies: Tips for pregnant women and new moms

There are a number of special precautions that soon-to-be mothers and new moms should take to keep themselves and their loved ones safe from harm. And planning for a disaster is no different.

Special care

Pregnant women and infants will have special needs in a disaster. Planning ahead is critical to staying safe and healthy as well as lessening the emotional stress of an emergency.

First, take some basic emergency preparedness steps. Learn about the kinds of disasters that can happen where you live, your community's emergency warning systems, evacuation routes and shelters.

It's also important to remember that during a disaster like a hurricane or tornado, you may not be able to make it to a hospital or even call for help. If you're pregnant, talk to your health care provider about the signs of preterm labor and how to prepare for an emergency birth.

There are often classes you can take to help you prepare for such a situation. If you're a new mom, consider taking a first aid class where you can learn the proper way to give CPR to newborns and toddlers.

When putting together your household emergency stockpile kit, make sure to include items related to pregnancy and newborn care in addition to basic emergency supplies such as a flashlight, battery-operated radio, first aid kit, extra batteries, clean water and nonperishable foods as well as important medications and documents.

If you're pregnant, it's a good idea to include copies of your prenatal medical records, prenatal medications, extra maternity clothes and plenty of hand sanitizer in your emergency kit, as pregnant women are more vulnerable to infections and toxins. Supplies needed for an emergency birth include clean towels and scissors, sterile gloves, sheets and sanitary pads.

If you're caring for an infant, be sure to include extra baby food, diapers and wipes, copies of medical and immunization records, hand sanitizer and a hands-free way to transport your baby, such as a sling, in case of evacuation.



Photo courtesy iStockphoto—Mark Bowden

Make a plan

When creating an emergency plan, make sure all household members are involved and know what to do. Designate an emergency contact person as well as an emergency meeting place in case a disaster happens when you and your loved ones are separated. Keep your plan in a place where other adult caregivers, such as grandparents or babysitters, can easily find it.

In case emergency officials instruct you to evacuate, you should have your emergency supplies ready and easily packaged to take with you. If you go to a shelter, immediately let officials know that you are pregnant and continue your regular prenatal care. Also, let shelter officials know if you are caring for an infant with special medical needs.



Photo courtesy iStockphoto—Aldo Murillo

Breast is still best



Photo courtesy iStockphoto—Benjamin Howell

Studies show that breastfeeding is one of the best ways to keep your baby healthy now and far into the future. And in an emergency, breastfeeding can be even more important and can even save lives.

Breastfeeding can protect infants from contaminated water supplies as well as respiratory illnesses and diarrhea. These illnesses can become serious in the wake of a disaster, especially if you have limited access to health care services. Continuing to breastfeed in an emergency will help you keep your milk supply up and can be a calming effect for both mom and baby. (But if you are not breastfeeding, don't forget to pack formula in your emergency supplies.)



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