Prescriptions: Prepare Your Medicine Cabinet for an Emergency

Many people depend on daily medications. Nearly half of Americans take at least one prescription medication; 1 in 4 take three or more.ii

A large-scale natural disaster, such as a hurricane, or other emergency could make it difficult to find an open pharmacy let alone get a prescription filled. You and your family may need to rely on a prepared emergency supply.

If, for example, you or a loved one rely on daily medication to treat or manage a chronic disease, it is in your best interest to prepare your medicine cabinet for an emergency. Here’s how:

- Keep at least a 7 to 10-day supply of prescription medications. Keep your medications in labeled, childproof containers.
- Keep an up-to-date list of all prescription medications, including dosage amounts and the names of their generic equivalents, your medical supply needs, and known allergies.
- Create a supply of nonprescription medications, including pain and fever relievers, diuretics, antihistamines, and antidiarrheal medications.

Don’t let the medications in your emergency supply kit expire. Remove, use, and replace any food and water, medications, and supplies before they expire.

Safe Storage

In the wrong hands, medicines are dangerous. Too often, the wrong hands belong to kids. About 60,000 children are taken to emergency rooms each year because they got into medicines.iii

The threat of medication poisoning in kids and adults is also there in an emergency evacuation when families are forced from their homes and into a shelter, a hotel, or the home of a friend or family. Under stressful circumstances and in unfamiliar surroundings, people can forget to practice safe medication use and storage. Here are three ways you can prepare for and prevent medication poisoning after a disaster.

- Keep all prescription medications and over-the-counter medicines and vitamins, including your emergency supply, Up and Away and out of the reach and sight of children and pets—this includes medicines in suitcases, purses, and “grab and go” bags.
- Create an Emergency Action Plan that includes important contact information, such as phone numbers for your physician, pediatrician, pharmacist, veterinarian, and the Poison Control Center: 800-222-1222.
- Properly dispose of unused, expired, or contaminated medicines in your medicine cabinet and emergency supply. Discard medications that touched floodwater or have changed in appearance or smell. Contact a pharmacist or healthcare provider if you are unsure about a drug’s safety.

For more Prepare Your Health information, tips, and checklists, visit cdc.gov/prepyourhealth.