



# Preparing for emergencies

A GUIDE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH  
PULMONARY FIBROSIS



## FIND IT FAST

<a href="#">Introduction: Getting prepared</a>	1
<a href="#">First step: Make a plan</a>	1
<a href="#">Creating a go-kit</a>	2
<a href="#">Managing power outages and oxygen needs</a>	3
<a href="#">Fighting flooding</a>	4
<a href="#">Wildfire smoke and PF</a>	4
<a href="#">Important information to keep with you</a>	5

Have questions that aren't answered in this guide?



Contact the PFF Help Center at  
844.TalkPFF (844.825.5733) or  
[help@pulmonaryfibrosis.org](mailto:help@pulmonaryfibrosis.org).

## Introduction: Getting prepared

From hurricanes, floods, and wildfires to winter storms, tornadoes, and severe heat, natural disasters and extreme weather events are on the rise, largely driven by climate change. While these incidents create risk for everyone, they can be especially dangerous for people with pulmonary fibrosis (PF) if they lose access to healthcare, medication refills, electricity, and oxygen supplies. Depending on how far their disease has progressed, people with PF may also find it difficult to travel or evacuate. In this booklet, the Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation (PFF) offers detailed guidelines for emergency preparation if you or a loved one is living with PF.

### First step: Make a plan

Because extreme weather and other emergency events can escalate quickly, it's important to know your local risk profile and make a plan well ahead of time. Consider your area's vulnerabilities. Are you in a flood zone? Do heavy rains bring standing water? Are you in a hurricane region? Are local fires and wildfire smoke a risk? Have summer temperatures been rising in your community? Understanding your local environment, risks, and resources and having a solid plan in place improves your safety, expands your options in a potentially changing situation, and reduces last-minute stress.

Many natural disasters and severe weather situations, like hurricanes, wildfires, winter storms, and extreme heat, have regular seasons. Before the season begins, think about options for staying at home for a few days versus moving to another location in your area or traveling to a safe place outside the risk zone. Keep in mind that you may need to change your location and adjust your plans as an emergency situation unfolds.

### Before an emergency develops:

- Make sure your phone is receiving **alerts and warnings** issued by the federal government and local health and safety officials. Familiarize yourself with the **different types of alerts and warnings**—and what to do if you receive them. Download the **FEMA mobile app** to receive real-time weather and emergency alerts, send notifications to loved ones, locate emergency shelters in your area, get preparedness strategies, and more. If you use social media, follow accounts from the National Weather Service, your local emergency agencies, and other important sources of information in an emergency.
- Prepare and keep handy a **“go-kit”** of necessary items to take with you—including food, water, medications, oxygen supplies, phone chargers, and important documents—if you need to leave your home or completely evacuate the area (see page 2 for details).

### PREPARATION POINTER



**Monitor how you feel:** Natural disasters and weather emergencies can cause extra physical stress for people with chronic illness. Pay special attention to how you feel—and seek medical care if you find your condition worsening.

- Talk to your healthcare providers about how best to prepare for your **special health needs** during severe weather or a natural disaster. An emergency can make it difficult to refill a prescription or find an open pharmacy, so ask whether you can obtain a couple of weeks of **extra medications**. Some insurance plans will cover emergency prescriptions for one-time use—discuss first with your doctor and pharmacist.
- Keep **important phone numbers**, including healthcare providers, pharmacies, medical equipment providers, and utility companies, on a single page you can take with you.
- On the same page, include an up-to-date **list of medications** and your **oxygen prescription**, as well as a list of your oxygen equipment, settings, type, model, and make of equipment, and your supplier's contact info (see page 5).
- Be ready for **electrical outages** by arranging for backup sources of power and possible special assistance (see page 3).
- If you use **oxygen**, ensure you'll have adequate supplies in case new deliveries aren't possible during the emergency (see page 3).
- If you live in an area affected by wildfire smoke, take precautions to **protect your lungs from smoke** (see page 4).
- Contact **211.org** to learn about other local emergency resources in your **area**.
- Check your **financial preparedness**, such as having insurance coverage, cash reserves, and an emergency savings account.
- Visit [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) for **more planning tips**.

## If an emergency is likely to happen in the near future:

- Make arrangements to **stay with family or friends** outside your area in the event of a natural disaster or severe weather that requires you to evacuate. If possible, choose several family members and friends in case roads in one direction become impassable.
- Contact your county's emergency management agency to see if there are **specified evacuation routes** for your city or region.
- If you intend to **stay in a hotel** during a weather emergency, plan ahead and choose several options.
- Keep your vehicle's tank full of **gas**, your phone **charged**, and an **extra phone charger** in the car.
- Identify local **emergency shelters or disaster recovery centers** (DRCs) by using the FEMA mobile app described on page 1 or the **FEMA shelter and DRC locator**. You can also text DRC and your ZIP code to 43362 (example: DRC 01234). Check which emergency shelters will allow you to run an oxygen concentrator and take care of other medical needs. Don't assume that hospitals, which may close during natural disasters, will be able to care for you outside of a medical emergency.
- Remember that having a chronic illness means your threshold for evacuation may be lower than other people's. If you do need to evacuate, **plan your route** ahead of time and **leave as early as possible** to minimize traffic jams. Bring a **printed map** of your exit route in case GPS doesn't work.

### PREPARATION POINTER



**Keep communication lines open:** Maintaining a relationship with local authorities and public health agencies helps ensure you receive care if you need it during an emergency. Contact your county emergency management office, your police or fire department, and your hospital and ask how they assist vulnerable populations during an emergency. Find out how you can access oxygen if your supplier cannot deliver it (see page 3).

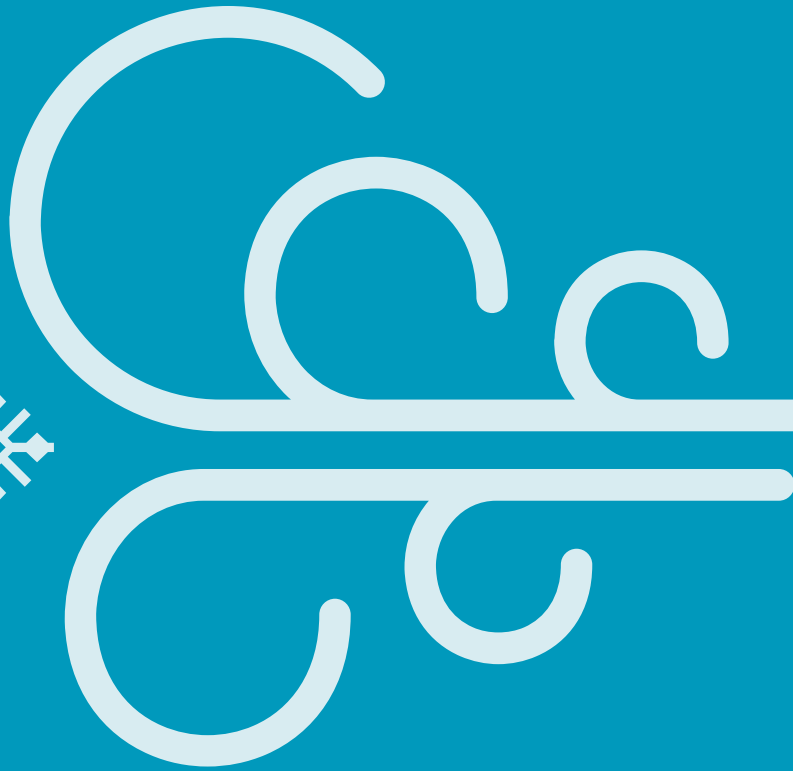
## Creating a go-kit

An emergency go-kit streamlines your ability to leave your home quickly during a natural disaster or severe weather. Keep a sturdy, waterproof or water-resistant bag packed with as many of these items as possible. Attach a list specifying items that will need to be packed at the last minute, and add items like cell phones or computers that don't have duplicates just before leaving your home.

Begin with these items and visit [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) for suggestions on what other supplies you may want to include:

- **Nutrition and hydration**—enough nonperishable food for several days and a gallon of water per person per day, plus a hand-operated can opener or multipurpose tool and utensils
- **Clothing and basic toiletries**—enough for several days
- **Important documents**—copies of identification, birth certificate, up-to-date list of medications, list of oxygen and other medical equipment, printed map of exit route, insurance policies, bank records, medical diagnoses, power of attorney records, advance directives, etc., placed in a waterproof, portable container, with original documents stored in a fire-safe lockbox in your home
- **Contact numbers**—a comprehensive list of phone numbers you may need (see page 5)
- **Flashlight**
- **First-aid kit**
- **Power sources**—batteries, conventional chargers for your phone and other devices, and a backup charger or portable power bank
- **N95 masks**—for potential smoke, dust, and fumes
- **Sanitation supplies**—moist towelettes, hand sanitizer, medical gloves, and trash bags
- **Medications**—enough for two weeks, if possible (see page 1)
- **Other medical equipment** you use regularly
- **Oxygen supplies**—see page 3
- **Cell phone**
- **Tablet or laptop computer**, if you use them
- **Cash**—in case debit or credit cards can't be used during power outages

Keep your go-kit in a designated cool, dry spot known to everyone in the household. Every few months, check your kit to ensure food and water haven't expired and packed clothing reflects the current season. Make additions or deletions to reflect your family's present needs.



## PREPARATION POINTERS

- ✓ **Generator safety:** Generators can create dangerous, even deadly, fumes. If you use one, make sure it's been installed by a professional according to local codes. Follow safe operation guidelines.
- ✓ **Creative charging:** From plugging into your laptop to using your car's jump battery pack, you have several options if you need to charge your phone when the power's out.

## Managing power outages and oxygen needs

In many emergency situations—especially hurricanes, floods, storms, blizzards, and excessive heat that stresses the electrical grid—loss of power creates a challenge for those within the affected zone. For people who use home oxygen or other medical equipment that runs on electricity, power outages can be especially daunting.

If you rely on a stationary oxygen concentrator or other electrical medical equipment like a motorized scooter or wheelchair, **it's extremely important to notify your electric company.** Ask to be put on the priority list for restoration if a power outage occurs. You may need to obtain documentation of your condition and equipment from your physician. In some areas, you can be placed on a list of individuals whose power must be kept on until the last possible moment in the event of a planned outage or a rolling blackout.

Follow these guidelines to prepare for oxygen and other electrical needs during a power outage:

- In the event of an **outage, contact your electric company immediately** and let them know you're an oxygen user and on the priority list for restoration.
- **Advocate for your oxygen needs** to ensure an emergency oxygen supply. If you use a stationary concentrator, your oxygen provider may be able to provide tanks or cylinders that don't require electricity.

- If you use a portable oxygen concentrator that can run on **battery power**, have a supply of charged backup batteries that can get you through a few days. Contact your oxygen supplier if you don't normally use batteries or aren't sure how long your concentrator can run on them.
- If you use oxygen cylinders instead of a concentrator, have **extra cylinders** on hand in case of emergency. Regularly check their gauges to ensure they're full. Make sure you know how long your oxygen supply will last.
- Consider investing in a **generator**, especially if you live in a remote area.
- Make sure family members or friends who will accompany you if you evacuate have your **oxygen prescription** and **know how to operate** your oxygen equipment.
- During an emergency, **limit your physical activity** to conserve oxygen.
- If you **run low on oxygen** during an emergency, reach out to your medical provider and oxygen supplier immediately. Running out of oxygen is a medical emergency—if this occurs, seek treatment in the nearest emergency room.
- Purchase a **portable charger or power bank** (available online and at electronics stores and some drugstores) to charge your phone and other devices. Make sure the device is fully charged and check it occasionally to see if it needs to be recharged.
- Keep several **flashlights and extra batteries** on hand.

## Fighting flooding

Mold can be especially problematic for people living with interstitial lung disease. If your home is in a flood zone or vulnerable to heavy rains, take precautions against moisture:

- Consider whether your basement gets standing water and occupied floors of your house may flood. Create a **plan for moving** furniture, medical equipment, and personal items to higher floors.
- Ensure your **sump pump** is working and **dehumidifiers** are on hand.
- Check your **insurance coverage** and determine local resources for flood **remediation**.
- If you've had water damage or know of other areas of mold in your home, consider having those areas **professionally cleaned** and make **modifications** to prevent additional mold. View the PFF's "**Mold Remediation**" fact sheet for more information.

## Wildfire smoke and PF

Wildfire smoke, once confined mostly to the western portion of the U.S., is now seen across the country during summer and fall, primarily due to climate change. Wildfire smoke contains small particulates that are especially hazardous to people with lung disease, causing inflammation, coughing, and wheezing. It can also increase your vulnerability to respiratory diseases like viral illnesses.

Use these tips to limit your exposure when air quality is poor:

- **Monitor.** Make regular use of an app or website that shows the current air quality index (AQI). **AirNow** displays current and forecasted AQIs in any zip code you type in. As a rule, anything above 100 (orange) is unsafe for people with PF. Discuss with your healthcare provider whether you can stay inside or need to relocate.
- **Protect.** Wear a well-fitting N95 mask when you have to be outside during smoky periods. N95 masks don't block out all particulates, but they can help to reduce your exposure. N95 masks don't block any gaseous pollutants. Cloth, surgical, and simple dust masks are not effective in filtering out smoke particulates.
- **Limit outdoor exercise.** Exercise increases breathing, which adds to smoke exposure. Consider indoor exercise, such as yoga or light cardio with hand weights, when smoke is present.
- **Recirculate.** At home and in your car, keep windows closed and set your air conditioner to recirculate instead of bringing in outside air. Change home and vehicle air conditioner filters frequently or as soon as they seem dirty—at least every three months during wildfire season. Higher-numbered filters do a better job of removing small particulates.

- **Purify.** If you use a **portable air cleaner**, choose a device that's appropriately sized for your room. Avoid machines that intentionally produce ozone, which can damage lungs even at low levels, and stick to portable air cleaners that have been **certified as safe and effective**. Choose air cleaners with **HEPA filters**, which reduce outdoor particulates but don't address gaseous pollutants.
- **Create a clean room.** To maximize the effectiveness of recirculating air and using a portable air cleaner, create a designated "clean room" in your home. Interior rooms with few doors work best.
- **Minimize other pollutants.** Avoid activities that increase indoor pollution: smoking, using a gas or wood stove, burning candles or incense, or frying food. Use a range hood vent when cooking.
- **Scour safely.** When cleaning your home, wet dusty areas before wiping to reduce the number of particles that become airborne. Avoid vacuuming unless your vacuum has a HEPA filter.
- **Hydrate.** Drink extra water if you're staying indoors in air-conditioned rooms, which can speed loss of fluids.
- **Consider changing venues.** If the AQI in your area is expected to remain poor and you have the ability to leave your area, consider temporarily relocating to a place that's experiencing less smoke.

### PREPARATION POINTERS



**Double-protect documents:** Fires and floods can destroy paper, so save scans or photos of your most important documents in a secure location on your computer and, if you use cloud storage, in the cloud. Store original copies of documents in a fire-safe lockbox.



**DIY air filter:** A safely created homemade filter fan is an easy-to-make, effective alternative to a potentially expensive portable air cleaner. Use it in a small room with doors and windows shut, and don't run it unattended.



## Important information to keep with you

Use this page to make a comprehensive list of names, phone numbers, and other information you may need in an emergency. Once it's complete, place a copy in your go-kit with your other important documents (see page 2) and share a copy with a member of your household. If possible, save an electronic copy and send a photo of it to a friend or family member outside your area. Review this information regularly to ensure it's up to date. To fill out this form digitally, download it and then add your information and save it to your computer.

**Personal contacts in case of emergency (family members or friends)**

**Oxygen provider**

**Oxygen prescription**

**List of oxygen equipment, including settings and type, model, and make of equipment**

**Healthcare providers**

**Other medical equipment provider(s)**

**Health and property insurance policy numbers and providers**

**List of other medical equipment, including settings and type, model and make of equipment**

**Pharmacy**

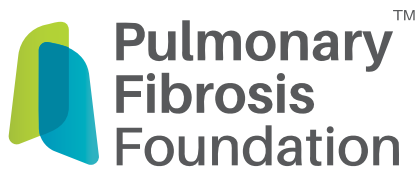
**Electric/utility companies**

**Alternative pharmacy**

**Local emergency authorities (police, fire department, and county emergency agency)**

**Up-to-date list of medications, including dosage and frequency**

**Bank or other financial institution**



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## Still have questions?

Contact the PFF Help Center at 844.TalkPFF  
(844.825.5733) or [help@pulmonaryfibrosis.org](mailto:help@pulmonaryfibrosis.org).

## RESOURCES

211.org

AirNow

American Lung Association

American Red Cross

American Thoracic Society

Disaster Assistance Improvement Program (DAIP)

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

[ready.gov](http://ready.gov)

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University of San Francisco

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[verywellhealth.com](http://verywellhealth.com)

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