

Children's Emergency Preparedness: Why CDC Makes It a Priority

The Problem

A public health emergency—such as a natural disaster, disease outbreak, or terrorist attack—can happen anywhere and at any time. Because children are more vulnerable than adults during disasters, CDC's Children's Preparedness Unit and its partners work to protect children before and during an emergency.



Why This Is Important

- Children with disabilities or other special needs are especially vulnerable during disasters.
- Limited emergency resources could be quickly overwhelmed with a surge in the number of patients who are children.
- Communities may face additional challenges protecting children during emergencies because of economic, geographic, or racial/ethnic disparities. For instance, rural communities may have fewer emergency responders, shelters, health facilities or equipment.

How States and Communities Can Include Children's Health Needs in Emergency Planning



Include children's needs in emergency exercises and planning. Children require special attention in all areas of public health response planning for emergencies, including evacuation, safe sheltering, and clean-up of dangerous and toxic substances.



Train emergency responders to understand children's needs and vulnerabilities. Emergency responders who are trained to focus on children will be better able to make sure children's needs are not overlooked in an emergency.



Establish connections between emergency response planners and medical professionals. Emergency response planners may not know the roles that children's hospitals and healthcare providers are prepared to play in a health emergency. It is critical that they work together with families to successfully protect children in emergencies.

CDC is committed to addressing the needs of children in a disaster by including children's needs in federal, state, and local levels of planning for public health emergencies.

Future Opportunities for CDC to Protect Children

- Leading practice exercises that focus on children's needs. Through exercises to prepare for emergency responses, CDC can help to establish connections and strengthen communications within and across communities.
- Sharing recommendations with medical providers to improve treatment for children during and after emergencies. CDC can work with others to develop guidance for healthcare professionals on treating children in many types of emergencies.
- Developing messages to help children and those who care for them understand what they can do to stay safe in an emergency.

Protecting children is key to a successful emergency response

Because they **breathe in more air for their size** than adults, children **absorb harmful materials from the air** more readily.



Children
are more
vulnerable in
emergencies

Because they **spend more time outside**, are **lower to the ground**, and they **put their hands in their mouths** more often than do adults.



Because they **may not be able to communicate their symptoms or feelings**.



Because they **need vaccines, medicines, and specially designed equipment for emergency situations** that are **different from adults**.