

PREPARING FOR A HURRICANE OR TROPICAL STORM

About Hurricanes and Tropical Storms

Hurricanes and tropical storms are both tropical cyclones that form in the warm, moist air over the waters in the region known as the tropics. This includes areas like the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean.

- A hurricane is a tropical cyclone with steady winds of 74 miles per hour or higher. Hurricanes, which can have wind greater than 155 miles per hour, can cause catastrophic damage from heavy rains, flooding, very strong winds and even tornadoes. Hurricanes have caused major damage in Pennsylvania in the past.
- A tropical storm is a tropical cyclone with steady winds between 39 and 73 miles per hour. Tropical storms bring heavy rains and flooding and cause severe damage. Pennsylvania has experienced widespread flooding and damage from tropical storms.

What does it mean when a Tropical Storm/Hurricane Watch or Warning is Issued?

The National Weather Service issues severe weather watches or warnings. A watch means severe weather is possible during the next few hours, while a warning means that severe weather has been observed or is expected soon.

What you should do to get ready

If the area where you live is under a hurricane or tropical storm watch or warning, you should:

- Learn about your community's emergency plans, warning signals, evacuation routes and the locations of emergency shelters.
- Identify potential dangers in your home and know what to do before the severe weather arrives. For example:
 - Be prepared to turn off electrical power when there is standing water, fallen power lines or before you evacuate (leave).
 - Turn off gas and water supplies before you evacuate.
 - Secure outdoor items like trash cans, lawn chairs, etc. that might pose a danger if they get thrown around by high winds.
- Check your family's emergency plan to make sure it is up to date. If you don't have an emergency plan, get one [here](#).
- Post emergency phone numbers at every phone in your home or add them to your cellular phone's address book.
- Let local authorities know if you or any of your loved ones have special needs and require help evacuating during an emergency. You should also tell them if you rely on medical equipment – like

an oxygen machine – that could stop working if the power goes out. Learn more about [special needs preparedness](#).

- Make plans to ensure the safety of your service animal, pet(s) or livestock before severe weather strikes. **Never leave animals behind.**

Emergency supplies you will need

During a major disaster, it can take emergency personnel (like EMS, firefighters or police) several hours or possibly even days to reach you. That means you must be ready to be on your own for at least three days or longer by stocking up on important items you and your loved ones will need.

If you already have an emergency kit, check it now to make sure you don't have any expired items. If you need to [make a kit](#), below are some examples of things you should have:

- Bottled water (each person in your family needs at least one gallon every day for drinking and bathing)
- At least a three-day supply of foods that won't spoil and don't need to be heated (tuna, peanut butter, granola bars, etc.) and a manual (non-electric) can opener
- Battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Items for babies or children (formula, diapers, extra clothes, games, etc.)
- Items for pets – like extra food, water, collars/leashes, vet records, toys, etc.
- Items for adults and those with special needs (extra pair of glasses or contacts, hearing aid and medical device batteries, extra prescription medicine, etc.)
- Important documents in a waterproof sandwich bag – like copies of health insurance cards, homeowner and car insurance policies, local and state maps, etc. Visit www.ReadyPA.org to get complete emergency kit checklists.

Preparing to Evacuate

When a hurricane or tropical storm is expected to strike your area, be ready to evacuate if you are told to do so. The National Weather Service will issue a hurricane or tropical storm watch between 24 and 36 hours before hurricane conditions are expected to hit your area.

- When a hurricane or tropical storm watch is issued, you should:
 - Fill your vehicle's gas tank
 - If you don't have a vehicle, ask friends, family or a trusted neighbor to give you a ride if needed during evacuations
 - Stay tuned to the radio or television for weather updates

- Listen for disaster sirens and warning signals
- Prepare an emergency kit for your car with food, flares, booster cables, maps, tools, a first aid kit, fire extinguisher, sleeping bags, etc.
- Fill sinks and bathtubs with water as an extra supply for washing

If you are Ordered to Evacuate

Because of the destructive power of a hurricane and the flooding risk from tropical storms, you should never ignore an evacuation order. Authorities will be most likely to tell you to leave if you are in a low-lying, flood-prone area or within the greatest potential path of the storm. If a warning is issued for your area or you are directed by authorities to evacuate the area:

- Take only essential items with you (like your emergency kit)
- If you have time, turn off the gas, electricity and water
- Disconnect appliances to reduce the likelihood of electrical shock when power is restored
- Make sure your automobile's emergency kit is ready
- Follow the designated evacuation routes – others may be blocked – and expect heavy traffic

If you are Ordered Not to Evacuate (Shelter in Place)

Sometimes, authorities will tell you not to leave your home and shelter in place (stay inside). Most injuries during a hurricane are cuts caused by flying glass or other items. Another common injury is puncture wounds (injuries caused by a pointed object that pierces or penetrates the skin) resulting from exposed nails, metal or glass and bone fractures (breaks).

- To get through a hurricane in the safest possible manner:
 - Stay tuned to the radio or television for weather conditions, if possible
 - Stay indoors until authorities say the storm is over
 - Do not go outside, even if the weather appears to have calmed – the calm "eye" of the storm can pass quickly, leaving you unprotected outside when strong winds resume
 - Stay away from all windows and doors leading to the outside – take shelter in a bathroom or basement
 - Bathtubs can provide some shelter if you cover yourself with plywood or other materials (like a mattress)
 - Prepare to evacuate to a shelter or to a neighbor's home if your home is damaged, or if you are told to do so by emergency personnel

For more information on hurricanes and hurricane preparedness, visit the following:

- National Hurricane Center – www.nhc.noaa.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.emergency.cdc.gov
- ReadyPA – www.ReadyPA.org