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September is National Preparedness Month

Prepare Your Family for a Disaster

Oklahomans are all too familiar with the damage often caused by disasters. In a short amount of time, disasters can alter a family's normal routine. Neighborhood streets can be closed because of large debris or downed power lines. Suddenly, an area that is a familiar part of a normal daily routine is now unrecognizable. In times like this, it is crucial for a family to have a plan to reunite and meet at a safe location.

In observance of National Preparedness Month this September, the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) encourages families to create a plan for both adults and children to follow. A family may not be together when a disaster strikes so it is important to plan in advance: how to get to a safe place; how to contact one another; how to get back together; and what to do in different situations. During a disaster, roads are often blocked or closed and alternate routes must be used. Knowing multiple routes of travel in advance can save time and frustration when trying to reach loved ones.

OSDH also encourages families to have a basic emergency kit consisting of water, snacks, first-aid kit, flashlight, batteries, prescription medicine and important paperwork. Parents can help reduce the effect of disasters on children by adding a few simple kid-friendly supplies such as books, games, a favorite toy or comfort item and medical items such as infant/child fever reducer to the kit. Those with babies should consider a three-day supply of formula, diapers, antibacterial wipes, non-perishable baby food and sealable plastic bags for soiled items.

Scott Sproat, director of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Service at OSDH, reminds families who have members with medical conditions and disabilities to consider any unique needs during and after a disaster.

"If you have, or care for someone, with a disability or access and functional needs, it's important to include needed supplies, equipment and medications as part of your planning efforts," said Sproat. "If evacuating from the home is necessary, it is important to take medication and specialty equipment such as hearing aids, oxygen, a wheelchair, diabetic supplies, food for a special diet, and supplies for a service animal."

OSDH and The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offer the additional following tips for families preparing for disasters:

- Teach each family member how to use the fire extinguisher, and show them where it's kept.
- Practice your plan by quizzing your kids periodically and conduct fire and other emergency drills.
- Check emergency supplies throughout the year to replace batteries, food and water as needed.
- Plan alternate ways to charge communication and assistive technology devices if there is loss of power.
- Plan for medication requiring refrigeration.
- Check with your mobile carrier for options on wireless emergency alerts being delivered to your cell phone or other device.

OSDH released videos in English, Spanish and American Sign Language to ensure the message of preparedness is available to various populations. To access these videos, visit the OSDH YouTube channel and select the Preparedness playlist.

Families may begin preparing for disasters by downloading, printing and completing a family plan by visiting www.ready.gov. For more tips and information, like the OSDH Emergency Preparedness Response Service page on Facebook.

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