

Frequently Asked Questions

Questions:

How safe is it to use candles indoors during an emergency?

Candles pose a fire hazard and must never be burned unattended. For safety reasons, battery powered flashlights may be a better option. That said, candles are an inexpensive light source and are often readily accessible. If you decide to use candles, be sure to follow the necessary fire safety precautions. Keep lit candles in sturdy containers on level surfaces. If possible, place a glass shade over them.

Candles can be easily knocked over, so keep them out of the reach of children and pets, and away from anything that can burn. Extinguish candles before leaving the room or going to bed.

How much water should I have for an emergency and how should I store it safely?

Water quantity

You should have at least four litres of water per person per day - for drinking, food preparation, personal hygiene and dishwashing. So for example, if you have three family members, you should have 12 litres a day for at least a three-day period, i.e. 36 litres of bottled water in a cool, dark place, in washed and disinfected plastic bottles that are easy to carry.

Record the date that you bottled or stored the water on the label. Replace stored water every six months and store-bought bottled water every year.

If you have pets or a service animal, don't forget to store approximately 30 millilitres of water per kilogram of the animal's weight per day. For example an average cat or small dog would require at least 1/5 of a litre (or half a cup) of water per day.

Water storage

If your local water is treated commercially by a water treatment utility, you do not have to treat the water before storing it. If your water comes from a public well or other public, non-treated system, follow instructions about water storage provided by your public health agency or water provider. Likewise, if your local water comes from a private well or other private source, consult with your local public health agency about recommendations regarding storage of water. Only your local public health agency should make recommendations about whether your local water can be safely stored, for how long, and how to treat it. In all cases, it is important to change and replace stored water at least every six months.

Water treatment

You should treat all water of uncertain purity before using it for drinking, food preparation or hygiene. Treatment can vary depending on the nature of the contamination, but when in doubt, do not drink water you suspect may be contaminated. There are many ways to treat water and none are perfect. Often the best solution is a combination of methods. Boiling and disinfection will kill most microbes but only distillation will remove other contaminants such as heavy metals, salts and most other chemicals. Before treating, let any suspended particles settle to the bottom, or strain them through layers of paper towel or clean cloth.

- **Boiling Water:** Boiling is the safest method of treating water. Bring water to a rolling boil for 10 minutes, keeping in mind that some water will evaporate. Let the water cool before drinking.
- **Disinfection:** You can use household liquid bleach to kill micro-organisms. Use only regular household liquid bleach that contains 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite as the active ingredient. Do not use scented bleaches, colour-safe bleaches or bleaches with added cleaners. Add one to two drops of bleach per litre of clear water. If the water is cloudy, treat with three to four drops of bleach per litre. Stir and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water does not have a slight bleach odour, repeat the dosage and let stand another 15 minutes.
- **Distillation:** Distillation involves boiling water and then collecting the vapour that condenses back to water. The condensed vapour will not include salt and other impurities. To distil, fill a pot halfway with water. Tie a cup to the handle on the pot's lid so that the cup will hang right-side-up when the lid is upside-down. Make sure the cup is not hanging into the water and boil the water for 20 minutes. The water that drips from the lid into the cup is distilled.

For more information on drinking water safety, visit

<http://www.redcross.ca/article.asp?id=291&tid=025> and/or check with your municipality.

What stations should an emergency radio be able to pickup, i.e. AM/FM and SW or Weather Alert?

A good emergency radio will include: AM (530-1710 kHz), FM 88-108 MHz, TV VHF channels and "Weather Alert". SHORTWAVE (SW) (3-12 MHz) could be useful but not found on most emergency radios as it usually requires an optional antenna.

Can I use my camping gas stove indoors in case of an emergency?

Never use unvented combustion appliances, such as barbecues, cook stoves, fondues, butane camping lantern, propane or kerosene heaters and lamps inside your house. They burn up available oxygen. They produce CO₂ (carbon dioxide) and other combustion gases and fumes. Some produce huge quantities of colourless, odourless and deadly carbon monoxide. Sterno cookers, fondues, and charcoal-burning devices are especially dangerous. Room ventilation won't get rid of fumes from unvented appliances. Use portable propane or naphtha cook stoves, heaters and lamps outside only. There is a very real risk of fire, explosion, asphyxiation or poisoning from fumes.

In the event of extended power outage, how can I safely heat my home?

You can only safely heat your home during a power outage if you already have a standby heating unit installed, such as a non-electric stove or heater, or a wood-burning fireplace. Unvented combustion appliances are not safe for indoor use.

When choosing a standby heating unit, pick one that is not dependent on an electric motor, electric fan or some other electrical device to function. It is also important to adequately vent the stove or heater with the type of chimney flue specified for it. Use only fuel-burning heaters certified by the [Canadian Standards Association](#)(CSA) or [Canadian Gas Association](#).

If you have a wood-burning fireplace, clean the flue every fall in preparation for its use for home heating (i.e. sustained use at high temperatures). The creosote in a flue can be ignited by sustained high temperatures and develop into a chimney fire.

If the standby heating unit will use the normal house oil or gas supply, have it connected with shut-off valves by a competent technician.

For more information, contact the [Canadian Gas Association](#).

In case of an emergency what should I do with my pets?

You should personalize your basic emergency kit items according to your needs. If you have pets include special items such as food, water and medication for your pets or service animal. Whether you decide to stay put in an emergency or evacuate to a safer location, you will need to have a plan ready for your pets. If you need to evacuate, take your pets with you if possible. However, if you are going to a public shelter, remember that animals may not be allowed inside (except for service animals). Plan in advance for shelter alternatives that will work for both you and your pets. Make a back-up emergency plan in case you can't care for your animals yourself. Develop a buddy system with neighbours, friends and relatives to make sure that someone is available to care for or evacuate your pets if you are unable to do so.

I know what an emergency kit is, but what is a grab-and-go emergency kit?

A grab-and-go kit is an emergency kit that you can easily take with you if you need to leave your home. Make sure your kit is easy to carry and everyone in the household knows where it is. Keep it in a backpack, duffel bag or suitcase with wheels, in an easy-to-reach place, such as your front hall closet. If you have a large household, your emergency kit could get heavy, so it's a good idea to separate some of these supplies in backpacks. That way, your kit will be more portable and each person can personalize their own grab-and-go emergency kit.

If I'm at work when an emergency occurs, what should I do?

Find out today about plans in place for emergency evacuation at your workplace and what you are meant to do. Have some basic supplies at work like water and food that won't spoil, in case you have to stay put for a while.

I need to take daily medications. The emergency kit suggestion is that a supply of prescription medication is stored for future need during an emergency. The problem is that you can't get additional medications dispensed. A pharmacist will only fill your prescription to meet current needs, so putting anything aside isn't permissible under their code of practice. What would you suggest?

The Public Health Agency of Canada advises that if it is not possible to keep additional medication on hand for emergency use, you should prepare and keep on you an accurate description of your health conditions, your prescriptions (including dose), treatment requirements, and name of your prescribing physician. Having this information readily available can assist emergency responders to address people's medical and health needs in the most timely and efficient way possible.

Do you have any ideas in terms of which non-perishable food I can put in my emergency kit?

- Canned food such as fruits, vegetables, meats, fish, chicken, stews, puddings (canned or ready to eat)
- Milk and juice, in boxes or cans
- Beans and lentils
- Dried sausages
- Dried fruit and vegetables, mixed nuts and seeds
- Granola bars
- Crackers
- Cookies
- Cereal
- Peanut butter, nut spreads, etc
- Dehydrated humus and other dips (rehydrate with water)

Try to choose foods that will meet your daily nutritional needs and that you and others in your household will like. Always check expiration dates, and if in doubt, restock it. Replace all food once a year.