



Childcare Essentials for Emergency Preparedness

By Erika Bailey, MPC Ready Board Member

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/erikanbailey/>

March 23, 2024

Children – especially babies and toddlers – require special consideration when preparing for an emergency. Most emergency preparedness lists, such as FEMA and the Red Cross, focus on “all-ages” items like shelter or a toothbrush, and prompt you to pack “what you will need to care for children” without providing any specifics. This list is meant to expand the childcare category by including specific suggestions for the comfort, care, and safety of children while keeping budget, simplicity, and storage considerations in mind.

Sanitation

- Diapers and wipes, changing pad, disposal bags – Pack several sizes ahead or remember to swap when your baby sizes up.
- Diaper cream – Changes and bathing might be less frequent.
- Pull-ups/overnight diapers – Often forgotten for older kids still using them.
- Period products – For tweens and teens.
- Toilet kit – Little children struggle to use alternatives to a proper restroom. All kits require bags, toilet paper and/or wipes, and hand sanitizer. Consider a pop-up tent or hanging tarp for privacy with any set up. Options, in order of cost, include:
 - Keep your potty-training toilet
 - 5-gallon bucket with a pool noodle topper (cut a slit along the length of the pool noodle and set on the rim of the bucket for padding)
 - Commercially available emergency toilet bucket topper or full toilet

Health and Safety

- Well-fitting masks – Protection from germs and air quality issues.
- Prescriptions or medical equipment – Keep a list with your emergency kit of what to gather quickly if time allows (and an empty bag to gather items, if needed) or store duplicates in your kit.
- Children’s over-the-counter medications – Pain/fever reducers, allergy meds, etc. (ask your pediatrician for guidance) and don’t forget dosage charts and cups/droppers to administer.
- Communicate any allergies – Include a copy of each child’s allergy plan with their photo and any needed meds. Consider adding alert stickers for clothing or temporary medic alert bracelets in case of separation.

- Sunscreen, hat, and bug repellent – Protect delicate skin, as you might be spending long periods of time outdoors.
- Multivitamins – Boosts health and immunity in times of stress and a potentially unusual diet.
- Sidewalk chalk – Useful for defining areas for little ones, especially when caring for a group of children. Draw a line to stand on, a circle to sit within, or a line not to cross for safety.
- Emergency whistles – For older kids if they become separated or need attention.
- Visibility Gear – Child sized reflective vests, reflective tape added to clothing and gear, and/or glow sticks/bracelets.

General Care

- Safe sleeping surface – Consider different scenarios where you might need to put your baby to sleep and think about options. ***Do your own research on the best safe sleeping for your situation***, and here are some suggestions to get you started:
 - Baby wearing
 - Travel bassinet or pack-n-play style sleeper
 - Firm foam sleeping pads and some firm self-inflating sleeping pads can be safe
 - Strollers with a bassinet or a full recline
 - Blow-up mattresses are ***not safe*** for infants
 - A car seat is not always a safe sleeping place for an infant
- Blankets, swaddles, and sleep sacks – Caution: the plastic emergency blankets that come in most emergency kits can pose a suffocation risk.
 - Transportation – Options when roads are blocked or the ground covered in obstacles.
 - Wearable baby/toddler carriers are easy to store and can often be found inexpensively second hand
 - Bike seats or trailers
 - Jogging strollers or all-terrain folding wagons
- Clothing – Prepare for a variety of situations and update sizes regularly:
 - Try to include pieces for layering: hats, shoes, socks, underwear, long and short sleeves and a jacket
 - For wet weather, child-sized ponchos, or as a budget-friendly alternative, a plastic trash bag with precut arm and head holes
 - If working with limited space, prioritize long pants and sleeves as both can be easily shortened, even if just folded or cut with scissors
 - If space allows, pack several sizes ahead for babies who grow quickly
 - Consider using “play quality” hand me downs for emergency clothing supplies

Food and Water

- Formula with water and bottles – Important to include even for nursing babies as mom and baby can become separated. You can often obtain free samples by registering with formula companies or asking at the hospital, pediatrician, or OB offices.
- Printable formula and breast milk storage charts – Useful references in case of power outages.
- Baby and toddler food – Choose foods that your child can safely eat that are higher in calories such as canned ravioli, shelf stable toddler meals (such as Gerber), children’s meal replacement drinks (such as PediaSure), shelf stable individual milks and familiar snack foods
- Some emergency food options, like ration bars, are choking hazards
- Disposable or plastic wipeable bibs and placemats
- Water – For little ones, add sippy/straw cups to avoid spilling water and to encourage hydration (First Years brand Take and Toss are a budget friendly option). Powdered drink mixes such as Tang or Kool-aid and hot chocolate packets can be helpful to mask the unpleasant aftertaste of some water purification methods.

Comfort Items

- Pacifiers
- Stuffed animal or spare lovey
- Small toys and activities – Card games, activity/coloring pads and colored pencils (crayons might melt), tiny toys, books, etc.
- Flashlight, headlamp and/or lantern – Dark can be frightening.

Other Considerations

- Emergency alerts – Be sure that all family members and any caregivers with phones and smart watches are signed up for emergency alerts.
- Plan regular, developmentally-appropriate emergency drills and supply checks – Kids feel proud and safer when they are included – these should not be scary.
- Identification and family contact information – There are lots of free printable templates to use as a starting place.
 - Include a copy in your diaper bag, older children’s backpack and your vehicle in addition to with your emergency supplies
 - Include a family photo for comfort and for reunification if you become separated

X X X X