

OVERVIEW

People with special medical needs, including individuals with hearing, visual, or cognitive impairments; those who are medically dependent on electricity; and those who will need special assistance to maintain health due to disability can be more vulnerable to disasters.

Individuals with special medical needs may be less mobile than the general population and, as a result, may face greater challenges evacuating or sheltering-in-place during an emergency.

This promising practice is geared toward those who are well enough to live at home and do not require emergency or acute inpatient health care. Those with intensive medical needs are assumed to be located in a secure medical institution prior to or during an emergency and will not require additional assistance from emergency management officials.

REDUCING VULNERABILITY TO DISASTERS

Individuals with special medical needs should be notified of [evacuation](#) and [sheltering](#) options well in advance of an emergency through an aggressive communication and outreach campaign. These individuals should be informed about the elements of a successful evacuation plan, including arrangements for a relative or neighbor to check in, a medical alert system for use if immobilized, identification of the nearest special medical needs shelter, and preregistration or prior contact with a shelter.¹

PREPAREDNESS

Individuals with special medical needs should prepare a disaster supply kit. This kit should include first aid supplies, non-perishable food and water, and medical supplies necessary to manage medical issues including at least a five day supply of all necessary medications, with the name, dose, frequency, and prescribing doctor clearly labeled. It should also include copies of vital medical papers such as insurance cards and power of attorney.^{1, 2, 3} Communities should establish a voluntary and confidential registry for people who have special medical needs or disabilities who will require additional assistance from EMS during emergencies. This registry should inform emergency response efforts specifically for physical assistance with evacuation for those in need, transportation to a shelter or other secure place, and assistance to people who are sheltering-in-place.



Shelters should prepare to address a range of special medical needs.

Source: Center for Disaster Preparedness

The community should provide enough special medical needs shelters to support the local population in the event of an emergency. This will require a periodic assessment of the special needs population. Shelters should be equipped with enough staff, equipment, and medication to accommodate a population with a wide

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array of medical conditions. The registry can be used to help determine the supplies, equipment, and personnel that shelters need to respond.

RESPONSE

At the onset of an emergency, it is essential that swift and deliberate action be taken to secure the safety of those who have special medical needs.

The majority of emergency shelters are not equipped to address medical needs beyond simple first aid.

Special medical needs shelters should have a triage unit staffed by a nurse or doctor who can evaluate the capacity of the shelter to accommodate incoming evacuees.³ Shelters should be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.⁴ The shelters should be able to accommodate caregivers and service animals. Communities should consider partnering with medical institutions and aid organizations, such as the Red Cross, to broaden the capacity of medical needs shelter.



Special medical needs shelters will require additional disaster planning.

Source: City of Port Saint Lucie

RECOVERY

After an emergency, many individuals with medical needs face challenges that must be addressed in order to make the transition from shelter to personal residence safe and efficient. Some suggestions follow:

- α Provide options for long- term special needs sheltering.
- α Coordinate with volunteer organization and local public transportation systems to safely transport individuals back to their homes.
- α Enlist volunteer organizations to help individuals unable to clean up their damaged properties after a disaster.
- α Provide additional and extended assistance using community organizations and local government after the emergency, as those with medical needs may require assistance with basic daily activities.



PROFILE: PREPARING A NEEDS REGISTRY

Program:	Voluntary Registry for Populations with Special Medical Needs
Organization:	Duval County, Florida Emergency management
Keywords:	Emergency preparedness , special medical needs, registry
Source:	Duval County Emergency Response http://www.coj.net/Departments/Fire+and+Rescue/Emergency+Preparedness/Get+Ready/Special+Needs+Registration
Brief Summary:	Duval County maintains a voluntary registry that identifies those who have special medical needs and links evacuation and sheltering assistance to them.

Duval County, Florida developed a registry to help emergency management officials identify individuals with special medical needs within the county, directly notify them of impending emergencies, and offer assistance with evacuation and sheltering. To be eligible for the registry a person must be medically dependent on electricity. Health care professionals make the determination of eligibility of each applicant and categorize their needs for assistance during an emergency. Once on the registry, each person is assigned a special medical needs shelter and transportation service.

Registry participation is voluntary and registration must be renewed every year to remain in the system. Interested individuals can sign up by phone, mail, online, or in person. Along with basic contact information, specifics about an individual's medical condition and ability to evacuate or shelter-in-place are collected.

In the event of a disaster, people on the registry are contacted and their needs are assessed. The registry is directly linked to other county emergency management services including an emergency transportation system and medical needs sheltering system. These services are offered to those on the registry that are in need.

Other examples of Special medical needs Registries

- 1) Pitt County, North Carolina Special Medical Needs Registry
http://www.co.pitt.nc.us/formslib/emergserv/disaster_plan_special_needs.pdf
- 2) Polk County, Wisconsin Special Medical Needs Registry http://www.co.polk.wi.us/emergency-mgmt/special_needs.asp
- 3) Polk County, Florida Special Medical Needs Registry
http://www.polk-county.net/subpage.aspx?id=852&menu_id=20&nav=res

- 4) Fairfax County, Virginia Special Medical Needs Registry
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/specialneeds/medicalneedsregistry.htm>
- 5) Miami-Dade, Florida Special Needs Registry
http://www.miamidade.gov/oem/special_needs.asp



PROFILE: MEDICAL NEEDS SHELTER SYSTEM

Program:	Special Medical Needs Sheltering
Organization:	Pitt County, NC
Keywords:	Special medical needs, Sheltering
Source:	Pitt County Disaster Plan for People with Special Medical Needs (pg.63-104) http://www.co.pitt.nc.us/formslib/emergserv/disaster_plan_special_needs.pdf
Brief Summary:	Pitt County, NC has two emergency medical needs shelters for people who have medical, psychological, or developmental conditions that do not require critical care, but require more assistance than a standard shelter can provide.

Pitt County has two special medical needs (SMN) emergency shelters that can be activated on short notice in the event of a disaster. The county has the capacity to activate and staff one shelter at a time and determines which one to use depending on the type of disaster and the logistical strengths of each shelter.

The shelters are for temporary use by individuals with noncritical medical special needs. Evacuees who meet the admissions criteria are sheltered; those who do not meet the criteria must shelter elsewhere.

Evacuees with special medical needs are encouraged to preregister with the shelter, but are accepted without doing so. These individuals must be accompanied by a caregiver, who has primary responsibility for the care of the evacuee. Shelter medical staff will assist SMN evacuees with additional care when appropriate.

SMN shelters are staffed with several medical professionals including a medical director, a nursing director with team of nurses, a pharmacist, and a psychologist.

Other examples of special medical needs sheltering systems

- 1) Broward County, Florida Special Medical Needs Shelter System
Website: www.broward.org/hurricane/hm_special_needs.htm

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- 2) Mobile County, Alabama Special Medical Needs Shelter System
Website: www.mobilecountyhealth.org/PDF/medicalneeds.pdf
- 3) Seminole County, Florida Special Medical Needs Shelter System
Website: www.prepareseminole.org/prepare/special_needs.asp
- 4) Pinellas County, Florida Special Needs Shelter System
Website: www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/specialneeds.htm
- 5) Louisiana Special Medical Needs Shelter System
Website: www.stayhealthyla.org/home/issues/view/228/sub/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- 1) Emergency Preparedness for Children with Special Needs
Center for Children with Special Needs
<http://www.cshcn.org/resources/emergencypreparedness.cfm>
- 2) “Emergency Preparedness: Addressing the Needs of People with Disabilities”
Center for Disaster Preparedness
<http://www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu/files/DISABILITIES.pdf>
- 3) Online special medical needs registry
ARC of MS and Tippah County, MS
<http://www.arcms.org/community-resources/spec-needs-reg.php>
- 4) Information about emergency preparedness for people with special needs
Pennsylvania Department of Health
<http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/cwp/view.asp?a=333&q=233957>
- 5) Example of special needs shelter information bulletin
Port Saint Lucie, FL and Fairfax County, VA
http://www.cityofpsl.com/em/pdf/special_needs.pdf
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/specialneeds/pdf/MedicalNeedsbrochure.pdf>
- 6) Article on emergency preparedness for people with special medical needs
<https://www.acep.org/ACEPmembership.aspx?id=38594>
- 7) Brochure that includes a checklist and voluntary registry form to help people with special medical needs be prepared for disasters.
Dare County, North Carolina
<http://www.darenc.com/Forms/SSMedNeeds.pdf>
- 8) Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 301 – A tool for state, territorial, tribal, and local emergency managers to use in the development of emergency operations plans (EOPs) that are inclusive of the entire population of a jurisdiction of any size. It specifically provides recommendations for planning for special needs populations

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Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Homeland Security.
<http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=45436>

REFERENCES

¹ Comprehensive emergency preparedness guide for people with medical needs:
www.cms.hhs.gov/SurveyCertEmergPrep/downloads/S&C_EPChecklist_PersonsMedicalNeedsLivingatHome.pdf

² Preparedness guide for people with special medical needs with example of medical shelter registration form at:
<http://www.co.dare.nc.us/Forms/SSMedNeeds.pdf>

³ Recommendations on medical needs sheltering (pg 24-29) from the Nation Center for Disaster Preparedness at:
<http://www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu/files/DISABILITIES.pdf>

⁴ ADA checklist for Emergency shelters at:
<http://www.ada.gov/pcatoolkit/chap7shelterchk.pdf>