

September 12, 2020

Preparing to shelter during 2020 hurricane season

MOBILE, Alabama — Planning for the potential landfall of a hurricane can be stressful, and because the 2020 season comes during the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be especially so.

Public health and emergency response professionals have recommendations to help you safely prepare, evacuate and shelter while protecting yourself and others from COVID-19. During this difficult time of COVID-19 and hurricane season, please consider making alternate safe locations as your evacuation plan. Please make every effort to stay with family, travel further inland or shelter in place if it is safe to do so.

Should a shelter be your last resort, below are some tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for COVID-19 safety in the shelter.

Prepare to shelter

- Everyone is encouraged to use shelters as a last resort.
- Know a safe place to shelter and have several ways to receive weather alerts, including cell phones, weather radios and the local news if possible.
- Local officials will make the determination to open shelters with enough notice for individuals to make a safe decision. While shelters remain high risk during COVID-19, safety of our citizens is a priority.
- Follow guidance from local officials on when and where to shelter.
- If you need to evacuate, prepare a “go kit” with personal items you cannot go without during an emergency. Include items that can help protect you and others from COVID-19, such as hand sanitizer, bar or liquid soap, and two cloth face coverings per person. Face covers should not be used by children under the age of 2. They also should not be used by people having trouble breathing, or who are unconscious, incapacitated, or unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- Make a plan and prepare a disaster kit for your pets, as pet shelter space is very limited. If possible, make alternate plans to shelter you pets at the veterinarian’s office or with family members.

Protect yourself and others while in a public shelter

- Be prepared to be screened and answer questions regarding COVID-19 before entering the shelter, wash your hands or use hand sanitizer upon entry and to have your temperature checked.
- Practice social distancing. Stay at least 6 feet from other people outside of your household.
- Follow CDC COVID-19 preventive actions -- wash hands often or use hand sanitizer, cover coughs and sneezes, and follow shelter policies for wearing cloth face coverings. Avoid sharing food and drink with anyone.
- Follow disaster shelter policies and procedures designed to protect everyone in the shelter, particularly older adults (65 and older) and people who have serious underlying medical conditions. These people are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- Avoid touching high-touch surfaces, such as handrails, as much as possible. If not possible, wash hands or use hand sanitizers containing 60 percent alcohol immediately after.
- Keep your living area clean and disinfect frequently touched items such as toys, cellphones, and other electronics frequently.
- If you feel sick when you arrive at the shelter or start to feel sick while sheltering, tell shelter staff immediately.