

# Preparing for Extreme Heat and Hurricane Season

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It is still getting hotter. According to the World Health Organization, heat causes approximately 489,000 heat-related deaths globally each year. And in the United States, extreme heat is the leading cause of climate related deaths, killing more people than hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes combined in most years. Climate change is consistently increasing air, water, and ground temperatures and this is only projected to increase. In response, climate change adaptation plans are being developed around the world, and in the US resilience hubs are emerging as part of the solution but plans and hubs rarely account for people with disabilities.

We know that people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted and disproportionately represented in the fatalities of every disaster, and heat is no exception. In fact, the dangers of increasing heat indices for people with disabilities are exponentially higher.

In addition to being on the front lines of climate justice, many people with disabilities experience additional risks and hazards from extreme heat. Many medical conditions, physical, and mobility disabilities impact a person's ability to regulate their body temperature and experience even higher individual heat indices. Many physical and mental health maintenance medications are at higher risk of heatstroke and dehydration and others have increased pain experiences which are exacerbated as the temperature rises. People living in housing without effective cooling systems, who take public transportation, who have clothing option limitations, or who use durable medical equipment, often have fewer opportunities to find relief from the heat. People with disabilities are up to four times more likely to be injured or die in any natural disaster, but according to Harvard researchers, people with pre-existing psychosocial disabilities - such as schizophrenia or depression appear to have triple the risk of death during heatwaves.

These realities for people with disabilities are generally not considered in government agency or organizational planning. While disability-led organizations and disability advocates continue to advocate for disability inclusion in plans and processes, people with disabilities must also be prepared.

## Preparing for extreme heat events:

1. Know where to get early and accurate information that can help you make decisions
2. Know where cooling centers are in relation to the places you spend your time
3. Know how accessible the local cooling centers are and if they can meet your needs
4. Always have access to a supply of water
5. If your place of residence is not able to stay cool, identify places that you can go such as public libraries, recreation or community centers, shopping malls, or other public places
6. Avoid plans to spending time outside or participating in vigorous activities
7. Talk to your medical providers about your medications and how they can be affected by heat - both before and after you take them

## In an extreme heat event:

1. Stay connected to accurate information that is useful to help you make decisions
2. Keep track of your water supply and plan ahead
3. If your place of residence is not able to stay cool, identify places that you can go that are such as cooling centers, public libraries, recreation or community centers, shopping malls, or other accessible public places
4. Avoid spending time outside or participating in vigorous activities
5. Be careful not to let durable medical equipment, supplies, or medications get too hot as they can cause burn risks, melt, or lose their effectiveness in extreme heat
6. Let someone know if you think you need help

## **KNOW WHERE TO GET INFORMATION, KNOW WHERE TO GO, ASK FOR HELP IF YOU NEED IT, PREPARE TO STAY COOL**

It is official, the Atlantic hurricane season is upon us. Starting June 1 to November 30th, with peak season in September for North America. Now is the time to prepare.

Along with the rest of the world, the earth's oceans have been experiencing the heating effects of climate change. For over a year, the Atlantic Ocean surface temperatures experienced a prolonged and uninterrupted heat wave with many days setting new temperature records. Although researchers don't have all the answers to why this is happening, they do know that hurricanes need warm water, moist air, and converging winds, and that the conditions are set for a significant hurricane season in 2024.

According to the US Weather Channel, 2024 will likely be one the most active hurricane seasons on record due to the high-pressure system that lingers near Bermuda and the Azores in the heart of hurricane seas will be stronger. This may steer more systems west while also trapping them in the tropics with no safe escape route. In fact, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) predicts an 85% chance that this will be an "above average season" with 17 to 25 named storms.

## **What should you do to prepare?**

1. Know your hurricane risk and evacuation zone - use local resources and accessible technology to identify your specific risks
2. Make an emergency plan - create a plan that includes what you will do, who you will contact and what you need
3. Review and practice your plan regularly
4. Have several ways to receive real-time alerts and information that is useful and meaningful to you receive alerts in the language you speak, using words you understand flashlights, nebulizers, or other devices that need power
5. Review and have copies of important documents, including medical documents, wills, passports, and personal identification, lists of medications, mortgages, bank accounts, leases, vehicle titles, and other documents
6. Have a fire extinguisher
7. Collect things you might need, including an emergency food and water supply, items to help you stay calm, your medication, and helpful aids if you have trouble telling others what you need (pictures of family, pictograms, a short biography,) and other important items

## What to do during a hurricane?

1. Evacuate immediately if you live in a mandatory evacuation zone and local officials tell you to evacuate.
2. Take refuge in a designated shelter if you can safely get to one, or an interior room with no windows
3. Listen to a radio or tv for updates
4. Stay inside, even if it looks calm, until you are told that it is all clear
5. Watch for loosened unstable or dangerous debris
6. Do not walk, swim or drive through flood waters
7. Stay calm

## What to do after a hurricane?

1. Watch for downed power lines or loose debris
2. Stay out of standing or flowing water
3. Avoid moving back into your water damaged home to minimize exposure to mold and other bacteria
4. Find a disaster recovery center, or resilience hub to get assistance and information by using an app, watching the news, calling a trusted provider, following your disaster plan
5. Find trustworthy public safety information and additional resources
6. Stay calm and be patient, supply chains may be disrupted, causing delays in availability of goods and services and other essentials for daily living, and you may need to rely on your preparedness resources for a while.

**YOU ARE THE EXPERT IN YOUR NEEDS, MAKE A PLAN TO MEET THOSE NEEDS BEFORE A HURRICANE BEGINS TO FORM.**