



SURVIVING THE STORM

IT'S EVERYONE'S **RESPONSIBILITY**

CARING FOR OUR MOST VULNERABLE CITIZENS

Residents with special needs, the elderly, the homeless and those without transportation require extra attention in order to stay protected in weather emergencies.

Though Pinellas County government has education programs in place to help these citizens prepare and find safe shelter, the responsibility for storm preparation rests with individuals and their families or caregivers. That planning needs to happen early. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE STORM IS RAGING.** Emergency personnel may not be able to respond when high winds make road travel hazardous. Plan for safe shelter now.

Even if you don't have special needs, you can help others who do. Look around your neighborhood, workplace or place of worship and reach out to offer a hand. Serve as a host home, help to answer questions or pick up a few extra survival kit items for someone else.

RESIDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS SHOULD REGISTER

Residents with certain medical conditions can get help during an evacuation. Three special needs shelters will open for those requiring MINIMAL medical assistance.

Information you need to know

- Register now. Contact either Pinellas County Emergency Management, your local fire department or your home healthcare provider.
- Once registered, you will be contacted for more information. After a medical needs review, your eligibility will be assessed. If you don't qualify for a special needs shelter, other options will be discussed with you. If you are registered and need transportation to a shelter, your local fire department will contact you before an evacuation.
- If you have your own transportation to a special needs shelter, preregistration is not required but it is strongly recommended.
- You may bring your caregiver and/or family with you to a special needs shelter.
- You are not obligated to go to a special needs shelter once registered, if you have made other safe and secure arrangements.
- Service animals may go with you, but other pets need to be cared for by making prior arrangements. If you are registered and eligible to go to a special needs shelter, call Pinellas County Animal Services at (727) 582-2600 to register your pet. Animal Services will make arrangements for your pet to be taken to a host home.

REGISTER FOR SPECIAL NEEDS NOW

To register for special needs shelter and/or transportation, do one of the following:

Submit a form online at

www.pinellascounty.org/emergency

Call Pinellas County Emergency Management

at (727) 464-3800.

Call your nearest fire department or home health care provider.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A SPECIAL NEEDS SHELTER

The Pinellas County Health Department and School Board staff these shelters with nurses and other medical personnel. Oxygen is available, but air conditioning may not be available if power is interrupted.

Before going to a shelter, arrange to bring at least a two-week supply of any medications you need along with any needed portable equipment. If you have special diet requirements, be sure to pack your own special nonperishable snacks. For your own comfort, bring items such as bedding, sheets, pillows and blankets. Cots are available only on a limited basis and are not guaranteed.

Special needs shelters do not have hospital beds and cannot assist those with acute medical problems.

ADVICE FOR ALL RESIDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Whether you go to a special needs shelter or not, here's some good advice to keep in mind when preparing for hurricane season:

- Start a personal support network of people you can count on during an emergency.
- Create an emergency health information card that is customized to you.
- Complete an emergency contact list with names and phone numbers of family members, friends, doctors, insurance information and hospital preferences.
- Conduct an ability self-assessment. Know what you can and cannot do. Talk with your health care provider about a realistic plan.
- Maintain at least a two-week supply and a current list of medications.
- Keep important equipment and assistive devices in a consistent, convenient and secured place.

YOUR DOCTOR CAN HELP

Assistance at a special needs shelter is limited to basic medical monitoring and back-up electricity for lighting. The shelter will be inside a school and will likely be crowded and noisy. Cots may not be available for everyone. While this is a safe location to ride out a storm, it is not for everyone. Many citizens require more comfortable accommodations as mobility restrictions make it impossible to sleep on the floor or a cot. In these cases, the Host Homes program is an excellent alternative.

(See story on page 10)

For others, a stay in a nursing home or hospital is necessary. If a person's condition warrants this level of care, then your physician can make arrangements ahead of time. A pre-admission letter needs to be written by the physician and accepted in advance by the facility of choice. At the time of evacuation, emergency workers must see a copy of this letter in order to transport the patient to that facility. The facility must also see this letter. Another reason you need to pre-arrange your stay is that Medicare will only pay for visits that are medically necessary. If any costs arise from your stay, you may be responsible to pay for them out of pocket.

SPECIAL NEEDS SHELTERS

Dunedin Middle School
70 Patricia Ave.
Dunedin

Oak Grove Middle School
1370 S. Belcher Rd.
Clearwater

John Hopkins Middle School
701 16th St. S.
St. Petersburg

DID YOU KNOW?

- Florida law requires that utility companies offer a “priority reconnection service” for people with disabilities who use power-dependent equipment. Contact your utility company to get placed on the list.
- Service animals are allowed in hotels, motels and public shelters. Don’t forget to pack their supplies, too.
- Wheelchair users need to have more than one exit from their residence that is wheelchair accessible. Practice how to escape from your home.
- Wear medical alert tags. Also write down special instructions for emergency personnel in a brief and direct format, such as, “I am deaf, please write down your instructions” or “Please take my medication from the refrigerator.”
- The National Weather Service has information on its website to help the hearing impaired utilize NOAA Weather Alert Radios for emergency weather notifications. Go to www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/special_need.htm.
- Keep cash on hand in case you need to buy special supplies.
- Be an advocate for yourself! Practice how to quickly explain your condition and your adaptive equipment to someone who is helping you.

ON TRACK WITH TRANSPORTATION

For those who need to evacuate, but don’t have their own transportation, a hurricane can cause anxiety. Pinellas County officials want to make sure that everyone can get to safe shelter.

If you sign up for the special needs registry, you will be asked about your transportation plans. If you need a ride to a shelter, your local fire department will be in contact with you to make arrangements when the time comes to evacuate.

If you don’t require special needs transport, PSTA buses will run nearly all their routes until it’s no longer safe to travel. During an evacuation, buses will also run from transfer stations to local shelters. All rides are free during an evacuation. Be prepared in advance by locating your nearest bus stop.

Some people may not qualify for special needs transport, cannot ride the bus and have no other means of transportation to evacuate. If you are in that situation, contact your local fire department or the Department of Emergency Management, in advance, for special assistance. Take advantage of the help that is there for you. Don’t stay in a dangerous situation just because you don’t have your own ride. Call the PSTA InfoLine (727) 540-1900. For current route information during a storm go to www.psta.net/hurricanerideralert.htm

HELPING THE ELDERLY

Older adults, especially those living alone, have unique concerns that should be addressed before a storm nears Pinellas County. Increased stress and anxiety can be a factor leading to more incidents of illness, particularly for those seniors with heart disease or respiratory troubles.

If you are an older adult who doesn’t require special needs assistance, you don’t have to ride out the storm alone. Many senior communities are in non-evacuation zones, so start a Hurricane Club with other people from your neighborhood, social group or place of worship. Meet to discuss preparations such as who might serve as a host home and make a list to divide up supplies to gather before a storm.

Sign up for the free community notification service to get up-to-date storm information. (See page 2) This news can be passed along through a phone tree to friends and neighbors. If a hurricane warning should be issued, the phone tree would then advise all members to meet at the host home and remind them to bring emergency supplies.

It bears repeating that, regardless of age, if you live in a mobile or manufactured home, you must leave when the evacuation order is given. A clubhouse is likely not a safe place to weather a storm. Get together with others in your neighborhood to find host homes.

If you are an older adult living in a nursing home, assisted living facility or boarding home, contact the administrator to learn about emergency preparations. Let your friends and family members know about the facility’s plans and give them important contact information before a hurricane threatens the area.

If you are homebound, discuss your plan with your caregiver.

SPECIAL NEEDS SUPPLY LIST

Some additional items to be considered:

Wheelchairs:

- A patch kit and extra inner tubes
- Gloves in case of broken glass or debris
- An extra battery and/or a converter for charging

Visual impairments:

- Talking or Braille clock
- An extra white cane, magnifier and glasses
- Mark your disaster supplies with fluorescent tape

Hearing or speech impairments:

- Extra batteries for hearing aids
- Pencil and paper for communicating emergency information
- Power converter for your laptop
- Preprinted key phrases you would use in an emergency

Personal supplies:

- Two-week supply of dressing materials, nasal cannulas or suction catheters
- Two-week supply of prescriptions
- Cooler for refrigerated medications
- Special dietary foods

THINGS TO KNOW AND DO

- Know how local authorities will warn you of a pending disaster.
- Build a support network of friends, family and neighbors. Let them know your needs in an emergency situation and how they can assist you with your plan.
- Connect with a local neighborhood group such as CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), neighborhood watch, neighborhood associations or a nearby place of worship.
- Make sure your local fire department knows your needs. Preregister if you need transportation or a spot in a special needs shelter.
- A NOAA Weather Alert Radio can wake you when severe weather is threatening.
- Be ready for local officials to come door-to-door to deliver emergency warnings and follow their instructions.
- If you are going to a public shelter, wear comfortable clothes and sturdy shoes. Have your “go bag” ready and let an out-of-town contact know where you are going.
- Take at least two-weeks worth of medication with you. (See page 5)
- Be sure to get your prescriptions refilled.
- Have a list of contact numbers and a copy of your personal medical information.
- If you stay home, never use candles when the electricity goes out. Stick to flashlights and lanterns.
- Help your friends and neighbors by sharing this information!