



Ready.gov

## INTRODUCTION

### What is Ready.gov all about?

Terrorists are working to obtain biological, chemical, nuclear and radiological weapons, and the threat of an attack is very real. Here at the Department of Homeland Security, throughout the federal government, and at organizations across America we are working hard to strengthen our Nation's security. Whenever possible, we want to stop terrorist attacks before they happen. All Americans should begin a process of learning about potential threats so we are better prepared to react during an attack. While there is no way to predict what will happen, or what your personal circumstances will be, there are simple things you can do now to prepare yourself and your loved ones.

Some of the things you can do to prepare for the unexpected, such as assembling a supply kit and developing a family communications plan, are the same for both a natural or man-made emergency. However, as you will see throughout the pages of **Ready.gov**, there are important differences among potential terrorist threats that will impact the decisions you make and the actions you take. With a little planning and common sense, you can be better prepared for the unexpected.

## STEP 1

### Make a Kit of Emergency Supplies

Be prepared to improvise and use what you have on hand to make it on your own for at least three days, maybe longer.

While there are many things that might make you more comfortable, think first about fresh *water*, *food* and *clean air*. Consider putting together two kits. In one, put everything needed to stay where you are and make it on your own. The other should be a lightweight, smaller version you can take with you if you have to get away.

You'll need a gallon of water per person per day. Include in the kits canned and dried foods that are easy to store and prepare. If you live in a cold weather climate, include *warm clothes* and a sleeping bag for each member of the family.

Start now by gathering basic *emergency supplies* – a flashlight, a battery-powered radio, extra batteries, a first aid kit, toilet articles, prescription medicines and other special things your family may need. Many potential terrorist attacks could send tiny microscopic "junk" into the air. Many of these materials can only hurt you if they get into your body, so think about creating a barrier between yourself and any contamination. It's smart to have something for each member of the family that *covers their mouth and nose*.

Plan to use two to three layers of a cotton t-shirt, handkerchief or towel. Or, consider filter masks, readily available in hardware stores, which are rated based on how small a particle they filter. It is very important that the mask or other material fit your face snugly so that most of the air you breathe comes through the mask, not around it. Do whatever you can to make the best fit possible for children.

Also, include duct tape and heavy-weight garbage bags or plastic sheeting that can be used to seal windows and doors if you need

## STEP 2

### Make a Plan for What You Will Do in an Emergency

Be prepared to assess the situation, use common sense and whatever you have on hand to take care of yourself and your loved ones. Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the attack, the first important decision is *deciding whether to stay or go*. You should understand and plan for both possibilities.

*Develop a Family Communications Plan:* Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another and review what you will do in different situations. Consider a plan where each family member calls, or e-mails, the same friend or relative in the event of an emergency. It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-state contact may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members. You may have trouble getting through, or the phone system may be down altogether, but be patient.

*Staying Put:* There are circumstances when staying put and creating a barrier between yourself and potentially contaminated air outside, a process known as "shelter-in-place," can be a matter of survival. Choose an interior room or one with as few windows and doors as possible. Consider precutting plastic sheeting to seal windows, doors and air vents. Each piece should be several inches larger than the space you want to cover so that you can duct tape it flat against the wall. Label each piece with the location of where it fits. ▶

If you see large amounts of debris in the air, or if local authorities say the air is badly contaminated, you may want to “shelter-in-place.” Quickly bring your family and pets inside, lock doors, and close windows, air vents and fireplace dampers. Immediately turn off air conditioning, forced air heating systems, exhaust fans and clothes dryers. Take your emergency supplies and go into the room you have designated. Seal all windows, doors and vents. Watch TV, listen to the radio or check the Internet for instructions.

*Getting Away:* Plan in advance how you will assemble your family and anticipate where you will go. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency. If you have a car, keep at least a half tank of gas in it at all times. Become familiar with alternate routes as well as other means of transportation out of your area. If you do not have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to. Take your emergency supply kit and lock the door behind you. If you believe the air may be contaminated, drive with your windows and vents closed and keep the air conditioning and heater turned off. Listen to the radio for instructions.

*At Work and School:* Think about the places where your family spends time: school, work and other places you frequent. Talk to your children’s schools and your employer about emergency plans. Find out how they will communicate with families during an emergency. If you are an employer, be sure you have an emergency preparedness plan. Review and practice it with your employees. A community working together during an emergency also makes sense. Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together to *create a barrier* between yourself and any potential contamination outside.

### STEP 3

#### Be Informed about what might happen

Some of the things you can do to prepare for the unexpected, such as assembling a supply kit and developing a family communications plan, are the same for

both a natural or man-made emergency. However there are important differences among potential terrorist threats that will impact the decisions you make and the actions you take.

### SPECIFIC TERRORIST THREATS

**A biological attack** is the deliberate release of germs or other substances that can make you sick. Many agents must be inhaled, enter through a cut in the skin or eaten to make you sick.

**A chemical attack** is the deliberate release of a toxic gas, liquid or solid that can poison people and the environment.

**A nuclear blast** is an explosion with intense light and heat, a damaging pressure wave and widespread radioactive material that can contaminate the air, water and ground surfaces for miles around.

**A radiation threat** or “Dirty Bomb” is the use of common explosives to spread radioactive materials over a targeted area.

Be prepared to adapt this information to your personal circumstances and make every effort to follow instructions received from authorities on the scene. Above all, stay calm, be patient and think before you act. With these simple preparations, you can be ready for the unexpected.



### OVERVIEW

A biological attack is the deliberate release of germs or other biological substances that can make you sick. Many agents must be inhaled, enter through a cut in the skin or be eaten to make you sick. Some biological agents, such as anthrax, do not cause contagious diseases. Others, like the smallpox virus, can result in diseases you can catch from other people.

### If There is a Biological Threat

Unlike an explosion, a biological attack may or may not be immediately obvious. While it is possible that you will see signs of a biological attack, as was sometimes the case with the anthrax mailings, it is perhaps more likely that local health care workers will report a pattern of unusual illness or there will be a wave of sick people seeking emergency medical attention. You will probably learn of the danger through an emergency radio or TV broadcast, or some other signal used in your community. You might get a telephone call or emergency response workers may come to your door.

In the event of a biological attack, public health officials may not immediately be able to provide information on what you should do. It will take time to determine exactly what the illness is, how it should be treated, and who is in danger. However, you should watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news including the following:

- Are you in the group or area authorities consider in danger?
- What are the signs and symptoms of the disease?
- Are medications or vaccines being distributed?
- Where? Who should get them?
- Where should you seek emergency medical care if you become sick?

#### **During a declared biological emergency:**

1. If a **family member becomes sick**, it is important to be **suspicious**.
2. **Do not assume**, however, that you should go to a hospital emergency room or that any illness is the **result of the biological attack**. Symptoms of many common illnesses may overlap.
3. Use common sense, practice good hygiene and cleanliness to **avoid spreading germs**, and **seek medical advice**.
4. Consider if you are in the group or area authorities believe to be in danger.
5. **If your symptoms match** those

described and you are in the group considered **at risk**, immediately seek **emergency medical attention**.

### If you are potentially exposed:

1. Follow instructions of doctors and other public health officials.
2. If the disease is **contagious** expect to receive **medical evaluation and treatment**. You may be advised to stay away from others or even deliberately **quarantined**.
3. For **non-contagious** diseases, expect to receive **medical evaluation and treatment**.

### If you become aware of an unusual and suspicious substance nearby:

1. **Quickly get away**.
2. **Protect yourself. Cover your mouth and nose** with layers of fabric that can filter the air but still allow breathing. Examples include two to three layers of cotton such as a t-shirt, handkerchief or towel. Otherwise, several layers of tissue or paper towels may help.
3. **Wash** with soap and water.
4. **Contact authorities**.
5. Watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for **official news and information** including what the signs and symptoms of the disease are, if medications or vaccinations are being distributed and where you should seek medical attention if you become sick.
6. **If you become sick seek emergency medical attention**.

A chemical attack is the deliberate release of a toxic gas, liquid or solid that can poison people and the environment.



### Possible Signs of Chemical Threat

- Many people suffering from watery eyes, twitching, choking, having trouble breathing or losing coordination.
- Many sick or dead birds, fish or small animals are also cause for suspicion.

### If You See Signs of Chemical Attack: Find Clean Air Quickly

- **Quickly try to define the impacted area** or where the chemical is coming from, if possible.
- Take immediate action to **get away**.
- If the chemical is inside a building where you are, get out of the building without passing through the contaminated area, if possible.
- If you can't get out of the building or find clean air without passing through the area where you see signs of a chemical attack, it may be better to move as far away as possible and "shelter-in-place."
- If you are outside, quickly decide what is the fastest way to find clean air. Consider if you can get out of the area or if you should go inside the closest building and "shelter-in-place."

### If You Think You Have Been Exposed to a Chemical

If your eyes are watering, your skin is stinging, and you are having trouble breathing, you may have been exposed to a chemical.

- If you think you may have been **exposed to a chemical, strip immediately and wash**.
- Look for a hose, fountain, or any source of **water**, and wash with **soap** if possible, being sure not to scrub the chemical into your skin.
- Seek emergency **medical attention**.

For more information, see "Are you Ready?" from Federal *Emergency Management Agency*.

### If There is an Explosion

- **Take shelter** against your desk or a sturdy table.



- **Exit** the building ASAP.
- **Do not** use elevators.
- **Check** for fire and other hazards.
- **Take** your emergency supply kit if time allows.

### If There is a Fire

- **Exit** the building ASAP.
- **Crawl** low if there is smoke
- Use a wet cloth, if possible, to **cover** your nose and mouth.
- Use the back of your hand to **feel** the upper, lower, and middle parts of closed doors.
- If the door **is not hot**, brace yourself against it and open slowly.
- If the door **is hot**, do not open it. Look for another way out.
- **Do not use** elevators
- If you catch fire, do not run. **Stop-drop-and-roll** to put out the fire.
- If you are at home, go to a previously designated **meeting place**.
- Account for your **family** members and carefully **supervise** small children.
- **Never** go back into a burning building.

### If You Are Trapped in Debris

- If possible, **use a flashlight** to signal your location to rescuers.
- **Avoid** unnecessary movement so that you don't kick up dust.
- **Cover your nose and mouth** with anything you have on hand. (Dense-weave cotton material can act as a good filter. Try to breathe through the material.)
- **Tap** on a **pipe or wall** so that rescuers can hear where you are.
- If possible, **use a whistle** to signal rescuers.
- Shout **only** as a last resort. ➤

**Shouting can cause a person to inhale dangerous amounts of dust.**



A nuclear blast is an explosion with intense light and heat, a damaging pressure wave and widespread radioactive material that can contaminate the air, water and ground surfaces for miles around. **During a nuclear incident, it is important to avoid radioactive material, if possible.** While experts may predict at this time that a nuclear attack is less likely than other types, terrorism by its nature is unpredictable.

**If There Is A Nuclear Blast**

**If there is advanced warning of an attack:**

Take cover immediately, as far below ground as possible, though any shield or shelter will help protect you from the immediate effects of the blast and the pressure wave.

**If there is no warning:**

1. Quickly assess the situation.
2. Consider if you can get out of the area or if it would be better to go inside a building to limit the amount of radioactive material you are exposed to.
3. If you take shelter go as far below ground as possible, close windows and doors, turn off air conditioners, heaters or other ventilation systems. Stay where you are, watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news as it becomes available.
4. To limit the amount of radiation you are exposed to, think about shielding, distance and time.
  - **Shielding:** If you have a thick shield between yourself and the radioac-

tive materials more of the radiation will be absorbed, and you will be exposed to less.

- **Distance:** The farther away you are from the blast and the fallout the lower your exposure.
- **Time:** Minimizing time spent exposed will also reduce your risk.

Use **available information to assess the situation.** If there is a significant radiation threat, health care authorities may or may not advise you to take **potassium iodide.** Potassium iodide is the same stuff added to your table salt to make it iodized. It may or may not protect your thyroid gland, which is particularly vulnerable, from radioactive iodine exposure. Consider keeping potassium iodide in your emergency kit, learn what the appropriate doses are for each of your family members. Plan to **speak with your health care provider in advance** about what makes sense for your family.

For more information, see *Potassium Iodide* from *Centers for Disease Control.*

For more general information, see *"Are you Ready?"* from *Federal Emergency Management Agency.*



A radiation threat, commonly referred to as a "dirty bomb" or "radiological dispersion device (RDD)", is the use of common explosives to spread radioactive materials over a targeted area. It is not a nuclear blast. The force of the explosion and radioactive contamination will be more localized. While the blast will be immediately obvious, the presence of radiation will not be clearly defined until trained personnel with specialized equipment are on the scene. As with any radiation, you want to try to **limit exposure.** It is important to avoid breathing radiological dust that may be released in the air.

**If There is a Radiation Threat or "Dirty Bomb"**

1. If you are outside and there is an explosion or authorities warn of a radiation release nearby, cover your nose and mouth and quickly go inside a building that has not been damaged. If you are already inside check to see if your building has been damaged. If your building is stable, stay where you are.
  - Close windows and doors; turn off air conditioners, heaters or other ventilation systems.
2. If you are inside and there is an explosion near where you are or you are warned of a radiation release inside, cover nose and mouth and go outside immediately. Look for a building or other shelter that has not been damaged and quickly get inside.
  - Once you are inside, close windows and doors; turn off air conditioners, heaters or other ventilation systems.
3. If you think you have been exposed to radiation, take off your clothes and wash as soon as possible.
4. Stay where you are, watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news as it becomes available.
5. Remember: To limit the amount of radiation you are exposed to, think about shielding, distance and time.

- **Shielding:** If you have a thick shield between yourself and the radioactive materials more of the radiation will be absorbed, and you will be exposed to less.
- **Distance:** The farther away you are from the blast and the fallout the lower your exposure.
- **Time:** Minimizing time spent exposed will also reduce your risk.

As with any emergency, local authorities may not be able to immediately provide information on what is happening and what you should do. However, you should watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet often for official news and information as it becomes available.

For more general information, see *"Are you Ready?"* from *Federal Emergency Management Agency.*