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Staying put in a disaster: How to shelter in place

During some emergencies, local officials may tell you to “shelter in place.” If those words don’t ring a bell for you, now is the time to get informed and start preparing to stay safe.

What is sheltering in place?

Sheltering in place means taking immediate shelter wherever you are, whether it’s at home, work, school or in transit. The phrase is often heard during a disaster in which chemical or radiological contaminants have been released into the air, but also goes along with other emergencies and natural disasters. A call to shelter in place may come with little notice and require that you act fast, which means that preparing to shelter in place ahead of time can be critical to your safety.



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Listen and act



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Warning systems may vary from community to community, so learn about the kind of warning signals to listen for in your area. During an emergency, it’s very important to listen to instructions from emergency officials. Officials will instruct you on how to stay safe, such as whether you should stay indoors, begin taking more precautionary steps to prevent contaminants from entering or evacuate. Make sure your emergency stockpile kit includes a battery-operated or hand-crank radio so you can keep informed during the emergency.

If you receive a call to shelter in place while at home, take immediate action. Bring all household members and pets indoors. Close and lock all windows and doors. Turn off heating, air conditioning systems and fans. Unless instructed to do so, do not attempt to

pick your children up from school – school officials will keep them safe. As part of your preparedness activities, learn about the school’s shelter in place and emergency plans ahead of time.

It’s also important to learn about shelter in place plans at your workplace. If your workplace does not have such a plan, consider offering to create one.

If you’re driving when you hear instructions to shelter in place, go to the closest safe space, whether it be your home, work-place, or a public or retail building.

How to prepare

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Make sure all of your household members are involved in preparing to shelter in place at home. Consider practicing household drills so you’ll know if everyone knows what to do.

Pick a room in your home to shelter in. A good room to choose is one with as few windows and doors as possible and ideally one that is connected to a bathroom. Make plans for allowing your pets to go to the bathroom indoors as well.

It’s critical that your shelter location have an emergency stockpile kit. Your kit should include at least a three-day supply of water and non-perishable food as well as pet supplies. You’ll also need a first aid kit, flashlight, batteries, a telephone, and a battery-operated or hand-crank radio, some of which come with cellphone chargers. Don’t forget to regularly check and update your stockpile and switch out expired items.

Your emergency stockpile kit should also include scissors, duct tape, towels and plastic sheeting in case officials instruct you to seal off your shelter from contaminants. If this happens, seal windows, doors, vents, electrical outlets and any other opening to the outside.

Stay inside your shelter location until officials say it’s safe to come out again.



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See our website for extensive information under the Emergency Preparedness link.



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