

[marinhhs.org](https://www.marinhhs.org)

Managing Health Conditions and Food Safety During a Power Outage

8-10 minutes

Health Conditions

Many Marin County residents take medications that need refrigeration (e.g., insulin) or use home medical devices that require electricity or batteries, including breathing machines (e.g., CPAP, BiPAP), oxygen concentrators, power wheelchairs, scooters, and electric beds, among others.

Emergency Medical Contact Information

Keep a contact list handy of local family members, health care provider and other support agencies.

For medical supplies, call your health care provider.

In a life-threatening emergency, call 911.

Prepare for home medical needs and devices during power outages

Along with emergency supplies, such as water and dried or nonperishable food, we encourage you to organize a plan to meet your medical needs during a power outage.

Refrigerated Medications

Medications that require refrigerator should be kept cold during a power outage. In the event of a power outage:

- A closed refrigerator will maintain a cool temperature for 2-3 hours.
- To prepare for longer periods without power, remove the refrigerated medications from the refrigerator as soon as possible.
- Place medications into an ice chest or small cooler packed with ice, cooling bricks or cold packs.
- Use a thermometer to monitor medication temperatures to ensure they're safe to use.
- Avoid freezing the medication by making sure it does not directly touch the ice.

INSULIN

For up to 4 weeks, you can use insulin in opened or unopened vials that have been stored at room temperature (between 59°F and 86°F). Learn more about managing insulin in an emergency at <https://Centers for Disease Control and Prevention>(link is external).

Medication and Medical Supplies

- Have easy access to an updated list of medications
- Keep at least a one-week supply of essential medications
- Call your health care provider if you need more medication or other supplies
- Spare pair of eyeglasses
- Extra medical insurance cards
- Extra batteries for hearing aids

Medical Devices

- Notify authorities of your needs before an emergency: Call non-emergency lines of local police and fire departments, ambulance services and/or paramedics.
- You may wish to sign up for [PG&E's Medical Baseline Program](#)(link is external), which offers extra notifications in advance of planned power shut offs.
- Inventory medical devices that rely on electricity. Read your user instructions or call your distributor or device manufacturer to find out if your device can be used with batteries or a generator.
- Stock extra back-up batteries for each device.
- Have a week's worth of supplies for use and cleaning of devices.
- See the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) publication, which includes a form to help you collect information needed in an emergency: <https://www.fda.gov/media/80782/download>(link is external)
- The FDA also offers tips in English and Spanish for use of medical devices during disasters: <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/emergency-situations-medical-devices/fda-offers-tips-about-medical-devices-and-hurricane-disasters>(link is external)
- Learn more about preparing home medical devices for a power outage at <https://adata.org/factsheet/emergency-power> (link is external)

Use of medical devices during a power outage

- Some medical devices require safe water in their use, cleaning, and maintenance. Use only bottled, boiled or treated (chlorine tablets,

iodine tablets, or diluted unscented household chlorine bleach)
water until your local supply is safe.

- Check to be sure your power cord and device is dry before plugging it in. Do not plug in a power cord if the cord or the device is wet.
- Do not reuse a medical device intended for single use.
- When the power is restored, check to make sure the settings on your medical device have not changed (often medical devices reset to a default mode when power is interrupted).
- Consider generator use. Generators can be extremely hazardous and even life-threatening. It's critical to follow safety guidelines to prevent toxic carbon monoxide in your home. Even if doors and windows are open, don't run them inside any enclosed structure, such as a basement or garage, or outside near an open window.

Information for CPAP and BiPAP Users (for Sleep Apnea)

For CPAP and BiPAP users, a power outage may impact your ability to use CPAP or BIPAP to treat your sleep apnea.

Remember that regular usage of CPAP/BiPAP has carry over benefits for a night or two, by increasing muscle tone in your mouth and throat. Your sleep apnea may not be as severe on a single night without CPAP/BIPAP as it was before you started treatment.

There are a few things you can do to reduce your sleep apnea severity if you find yourself without CPAP/BiPAP:

- Sleep on your side or stomach, but NOT on your back
- Sleep semi-upright (e.g., in a recliner)
- Sleep semi-upright (e.g., in a recliner)
- Do not drink alcohol
- Do not smoke tobacco or marijuana
- Do not use narcotic pain medicines or other sedatives
- Backup power options in the event of a power outage include:
- A rechargeable CPAP battery. Available options can be found online, e.g. from [http://www.cpap.com/\(link is external\)](http://www.cpap.com/(link is external)).

*If you use CPAP, BiPAP or an oxygen concentrator for chronic respiratory failure and not just CPAP/BiPAP for sleep apnea, please review your emergency plan for power outages with your primary care provider and/or pulmonologist (lung specialist).

Health and Safety

Be Food Safe: Avoid Food Borne Illness

Refrigerated food needs to remain between 0-40 degrees

Try to keep your refrigerator doors closed. Use the most perishable items first.

Items which fully thaw (above 40 degrees) must be used within 4 hours or thrown out.

Food Wise is Food Safe –When in Doubt Throw it Out

Hydrate and Relocate

During a heat event, keep hydrated. If you cannot cool your residence, contact your nearest cooling center to confirm they have power and are open.

If you have relatives or friends in other areas that still have power, take this opportunity to visit them.

Conserving Water

In the event of a power outage, most of Marin County's water and sewer systems are supported by back-up power. In the event of an outage that lasts 24 hours or longer, residents are encouraged to conserve water indoors and outdoors, this includes using water efficiently, eliminating outdoor watering, and turning off irrigation systems.

Emergency Planning Resources (Links to printable PDFs)

General Preparedness Plans

- [Red Cross Family Preparedness Plan\(link is external\)](#)
- [Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults and People with Disabilities\(link is external\)](#)
- [Important Medical Information\(link is external\)](#)
- [Medical Information Wallet Card - Rx\(link is external\)](#)
- [Ready Marin Checklists\(link is external\)](#)
- [Print-ready Marin HHS Extended Power Outage Information\(link is external\)](#)

Medical Condition Specific Preparedness Plans

- [Emergency Information: AFN Communication\(link is external\)](#)
- [How to Prepare for and Handle Power Outages\(link is external\)](#)
- [Emergency Power Planning for People Who Use Electricity and Battery-Dependent Assistive Technology and Medical Devices\(link is external\)](#)
- [Diabetes Disaster Response Plan\(link is external\)](#)
- [How to Prepare for an Emergency or Disaster When You Have](#)

[Lung Disease\(link is external\)](#)

- [Oxygen Users Disaster Evacuation Planning Guide\(link is external\)](#)
- [Ventilator Respiratory Disaster Planning Guide\(link is external\)](#)
- [A Guide for People on Dialysis\(link is external\)](#)

Additional Resources

- BC Association for Individualized Technology and Supports for People with Disabilities (BCITS). [Self-Help Guide\(link is external\)](#) • [Back-up Power for Ventilators\(link is external\)](#).
- California Office of Emergency Services (OES). [Office of Access & Functional Needs Library\(link is external\)](#).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). [Power Outages\(link is external\)](#).
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. [Medicare coverage in disasters and emergencies\(link is external\)](#).
- FEMA. [https://www.ready.gov/disability\(link is external\)](https://www.ready.gov/disability(link is external))
- FEMA Brochure - [Preparing Makes Sense For People With Disabilities,Others with Access and Functional Needs and the Whole Community\(link is external\)](#).
- [Marin Center for Independent Living\(link is external\)](#)