Prepared, not panicked.

The B.O.L.D. America emergency preparedness guide

Practical steps for power outages and disrupted services. Prepare at your own pace, protect the people who depend on you, and help neighbors where it is safe. This is an all-hazards guide, not a forecast of an event.

General U.S. household guidance, not individualized medical or electrical advice. Follow local emergency, utility, and public-health instructions. Call 911 for immediate danger. Do not wait for a checklist or a restoration estimate if your home is unsafe.

How to use this guide

Start with immediate outage actions if your power is already out. Otherwise, build a plan gradually and mark checklist items you have addressed for your household. Completion is not a safety certification. This saved copy contains the guidance without an internet connection; external source links still require internet.

Contents

Immediate outage actions • Planning horizons • Household checklist • Private household worksheet • Sources

Checklist sections: Water & safe drinking • Food & refrigeration • Backup power, light & fire safety • Heat, cold & safe shelter • Medicines & powered medical devices • Hygiene, toilets & waste • Communication & trusted information • Children, accessibility & pets • Go-bags, transport & documents • Neighbors & long-term continuity

Downloads are blank guides and do not contain online checkmarks. Keep a paper copy in case batteries run out. Local instructions can change after this guide is downloaded.

The power is out. Start here.

1. Check for immediate danger

If you smell gas, hear a carbon monoxide alarm, or see fire, leave immediately. Do not operate switches or use a phone inside a suspected gas leak; call 911 or the gas utility from a safe location. For a CO alarm or symptoms such as headache, dizziness, or nausea, get everyone into fresh air and call 911. Stay away from fallen wires and anything touching them; report them to the utility. Never drive through floodwater.

2. Put medical and temperature needs first

Check anyone using powered medical equipment, oxygen equipment, or refrigerated medicines. Activate their clinician-approved backup and transport plan now; do not wait until a battery is nearly empty. Call 911 for a medical emergency. Move to a confirmed safe, accessible location if heat, cold, or medical needs cannot be managed at home. Never use a gas oven, grill, or camp stove to heat a home.

3. Use safe light and backup power

Use flashlights or battery lanterns instead of candles. Fuel-burning generators belong outdoors only, at least 20 feet from doors, windows, and vents, with exhaust directed away from buildings. Never run one in a garage, even with the door open, or on an enclosed balcony. Use battery-backed CO alarms. Never plug a generator into a wall outlet. Keep it dry, follow its manual, and shut it off and let it cool before refueling.

4. Protect food and record when power failed

Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed. With doors closed, food stays safe up to 4 hours in a refrigerator, 48 hours in a full freezer, or 24 hours in a half-full freezer. Move perishable refrigerated food to a cooler with ice by 4 hours, maintaining 40°F or below. Discard perishables after 4 hours without power or a cold source. Never taste food to test safety. Frozen food may be refrozen if it still has ice crystals or is 40°F or below.

5. Check water safety before using the tap

Use safe bottled water if the supply is uncertain, including for drinking, brushing teeth, and food preparation. Follow your water utility's exact advisory. For germs, bring clear water to a rolling boil for 1 minute, or 3 minutes above 6,500 feet; let it cool safely. Boiling does not remove fuel, toxic chemicals, or radioactive contamination. A do-not-use order is not a boil-water order. Do not assume a household filter makes contaminated water safe.

6. Get reliable information and conserve batteries

Report the outage through your utility's official channel if available. Listen to a battery radio and official local alerts. Send brief texts where possible, enable battery-saving mode, and agree on check-in times. Internet, mobile networks, home phones, maps, and card payments may also fail. Use printed contacts and prearranged meeting places. Treat restoration estimates as estimates, not guarantees.

7. Decide whether to stay or leave

Follow evacuation orders promptly. Leave sooner if you cannot safely maintain medical care, drinking water, sanitation, or a safe temperature. Confirm a destination, accessible transport, and pet arrangements when possible; bring medicines, mobility aids, documents, and a go-bag. Check on neighbors by agreement without entering unsafe buildings. Do not assume a listed organization is an open shelter.

8. Restore safely, not all at once

When power returns, check official water and re-entry notices. Do not touch wet electrical equipment or enter a flooded area to reach a breaker. Have damaged wiring assessed by a qualified professional. Reconnect appliances

gradually. Check food temperatures and medication storage with a pharmacist; power returning does not make spoiled food or damaged medicine safe again. Restock used supplies and update your plan.

Build your plan gradually

Start today

No-cost first steps

Choose meeting places, write contacts on paper, find flashlights, charge existing power banks, learn your utility's outage reporting method, and discuss who needs help. Inventory what you already own before buying anything.

Build a several-day kit

A practical starting point

Build toward a 3-day starter supply of essentials, then extend it as your resources and local risks allow. Ready.gov recommends several days of supplies; this is not a promise that services will return within 3 days. Start with water, no-cook food, medicine planning, light, and a radio.

Extend to 1–2 weeks

A planning option, not a guarantee

Review safe storage space, medication access, hygiene, battery charging, and how to replenish supplies. Learn where verified water distribution, cooling or warming centers, and accessible transport information will be announced. Prioritize essentials over expensive equipment.

Plan for prolonged disruption

30–90-day continuity scenario

This is an optional scenario, not a forecast or a universal stockpiling target. Plan resupply, continuing treatment, income and document access, alternate housing, transport, and community support. Do not multiply a short-term shopping list and assume it solves a long outage. A generator's fuel, medicines, sanitation, and safe indoor temperatures may become limiting factors long before stored food runs out. Set clear triggers for relocating.

Water & safe drinking

Plan for water loss even when the outage starts as an electrical problem.

Small-space option: distribute manageable containers in cool, accessible storage rather than relying on one heavy container you cannot move.

☐ Store a baseline water supply

Plan at least 1 gallon per person per day for drinking and sanitation for several days. Allow more for heat, pregnancy or nursing, illness, and individual needs; add pets' needs separately. This is a storage baseline, not a drinking limit.

☐ Choose safe containers

Use sealed bottled water or clean, sanitized food-grade containers with tight lids. Never reuse containers that held chemicals. Label and rotate stored water according to public-health guidance and product dates.

☐ Know your water utility's advisory channel

Write its contact information down. Distinguish boil-water, do-not-drink, and do-not-use notices; follow the specific notice rather than assuming boiling fixes everything.

☐ Keep treatment instructions with supplies

For germs: boil clear water for 1 minute, or 3 minutes above 6,500 feet, then cool. If boiling is unavailable, use a drinking-water treatment product exactly as labeled. Do not improvise bleach dosages: concentration and water condition matter.

☐ Plan an alternative to contaminated water

Boiling and ordinary disinfection do not make fuel-, toxic-chemical-, or radioactively contaminated water safe. Use a confirmed safe source. Follow do-not-use notices for washing as well as drinking.

☐ Account for wells and building pumps

A private well or high-rise water system may stop without power. Plan stored water and a verified resupply option. After flooding or system damage, obtain local testing and safety advice before use.

Guidance: Ready.gov — Build a kit; CDC — Make water safe in an emergency; CDC — Drinking water advisories

Food & refrigeration

Choose familiar food you can safely eat without electricity.

Budget option: add shelf-stable food you already eat gradually, rotate it into everyday meals, and keep a manual can opener.

☐ Build a no-cook food supply

Store several days of shelf-stable food suited to allergies, dietary needs, and household preferences. Include a manual can opener, utensils, and foods that require little or no water.

☐ Use appliance thermometers

Keep the refrigerator at 40°F or below and freezer at 0°F or below before an outage. Have a food thermometer and record the outage start time.

☐ Plan a cooler and cold source

Have a cooler and frozen gel packs where feasible. Move refrigerated perishables to ice by 4 hours of power loss and maintain 40°F or below. Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed.

☐ Know when to discard food

Without power or a cold source, discard refrigerated perishables after 4 hours. A closed full freezer holds food safely up to 48 hours; half-full, 24 hours. Check ice crystals or temperature before refreezing. Never taste-test questionable food.

☐ Use cooking equipment only where safe

Never bring charcoal grills or camp stoves indoors or into garages. Follow the equipment's outdoor clearance rules and local fire restrictions. Apartment households without a safe outdoor area should plan no-cook meals instead.

☐ Protect food from contamination

Keep food away from floodwater, pests, and chemicals. Discard food touched by floodwater unless official guidance specifically permits safe salvage. Keep handwashing supplies with food-preparation supplies.

Guidance: CDC — Power outage safety; Ready.gov — Build a kit; CDC — Food safety after an emergency

Backup power, light & fire safety

Safe power matters more than maximum power.

Apartment option: prioritize flashlights and charged battery packs. A balcony is not automatically a safe generator location.

☐ Place flashlights where people can reach them

Keep flashlights or battery lanterns and matching spare batteries near beds and exits. Choose battery lighting over candles. Include a light usable by each household member.

☐ Test smoke and CO alarms

Install and maintain smoke alarms and battery-powered or battery-backup carbon monoxide alarms. Know their alert patterns, replace batteries as directed, and keep exits clear.

☐ Charge and test backup batteries

Keep phone power banks, cables, and necessary adapters together. Test essential loads with the manufacturer's instructions. Battery capacity and device startup loads vary; do not treat a generic runtime estimate as medical assurance.

☐ Confirm a safe generator location before buying

Fuel-burning generators must operate outdoors at least 20 feet from doors, windows, and vents, exhaust away from buildings. Never use indoors, in garages, or in enclosed spaces. If you cannot meet clearances, choose another plan.

☐ Avoid backfeeding and improvised wiring

Never connect a generator to a wall outlet. Have a qualified electrician design any building connection using code-compliant transfer equipment. Use correctly rated outdoor cords, keep equipment dry, and follow the manual.

☐ Handle fuel and batteries safely

Turn generators off and allow them to cool before refueling. Store fuel only in approved containers and locations permitted by local fire rules, never in living spaces. Do not use damaged, swollen, or overheated batteries; follow manufacturer disposal guidance.

☐ Reduce surge and fire risks

Unplug nonessential appliances during the outage and reconnect gradually afterward. Do not overload extension cords or power strips. Keep a suitable fire extinguisher only if you know how to use it safely; evacuation comes first.

Guidance: CDC — Power outage safety; Ready.gov — Power outages; Ready.gov — Build a kit

Heat, cold & safe shelter

A home can become unsafe before supplies run out.

Write down a safe destination and transport option before weather becomes dangerous. Confirm that a center is open and accessible before traveling when possible.

☐ Set household-specific relocation triggers

Discuss safe temperature needs with clinicians for people at higher risk. Do not rely on one universal indoor temperature threshold. Leave if you cannot keep people safely warm or cool.

☐ Prepare for cold without indoor combustion

Have dry layers, blankets, and sleeping bags. Never use an oven, grill, or outdoor heater to heat your home. Do not block ventilation or exits to conserve warmth.

☐ Plan cooling and hydration

Reduce activity, use shade, and drink safe water appropriate to your medical needs. Do not rely on a fan as the only protection during extreme heat. Seek a verified cooled location before symptoms develop.

☐ Recognize a medical emergency

Confusion, collapse, seizures, or severe temperature-related illness need emergency help. Call 911 and follow dispatcher instructions. Do not wait for electricity to return.

☐ Check alternate shelter requirements

Identify a friend, relative, or officially announced shelter. Confirm accessibility, medical support limits, pet arrangements, and transportation. A community directory listing is not proof of shelter availability.

Guidance: Ready.gov — Power outages; Ready.gov — People with disabilities; Ready.gov — Evacuation

Medicines & powered medical devices

Make an individualized plan before a battery or medicine supply runs low.

Ask clinicians, equipment suppliers, utilities, and local disability organizations about available assistance. Priority-restoration registration is not a guarantee of uninterrupted power.

☐ Create a clinician-approved outage plan

Discuss oxygen equipment, ventilators, dialysis, CPAP, refrigeration, and other needs with the relevant clinician or supplier. Record safe backup arrangements, transport, and when to seek emergency care.

☐ Confirm device backup limits

Use manufacturer-approved equipment and test as directed. Record actual supported runtime, charging requirements, and a conservative relocation trigger. Do not wait for complete battery depletion.

☐ Plan legal emergency refills

Ask your prescriber and pharmacist about an emergency supply and refill options. Do not skip doses, change treatment, or stockpile medication without their guidance.

☐ Get medicine-specific storage instructions

Keep label instructions, a thermometer, and an appropriate cooler if needed. Avoid freezing medicines or placing them directly against ice unless instructed. Contact a pharmacist promptly after a temperature excursion; do not assume all refrigerated medicines have the same limit or stop essential treatment without advice.

☐ Keep a private paper medical summary

List medicines, doses, allergies, clinician and pharmacy contacts, device models, and insurance information. Store securely with a go-bag and share only with trusted caregivers. Do not enter this information into a public directory.

☐ Prepare first aid and training

Keep a first-aid kit and household-specific supplies. Take recognized first-aid or CPR training when possible. A checklist is not a substitute for medical care; call 911 for an emergency.

Guidance: Ready.gov — Power outages; Ready.gov — People with disabilities

Hygiene, toilets & waste

Water and sewer services may fail together.

Keep hygiene supplies in a separate, clearly labeled container away from food and drinking water.

☐ Prepare hand hygiene supplies

Store soap, safe water, and hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Sanitizer is a fallback when soap and water are unavailable, not a way to remove chemicals or heavy dirt.

☐ Plan for toilets that cannot flush

Ask the local wastewater authority what to do if sewer service or pumps fail. Do not flush when officials warn against it or sewage is backing up. Keep an emergency toilet option and appropriate liners if needed, following local disposal instructions.

☐ Separate and secure waste

Have sturdy bags, ties, gloves, and a covered container. Keep human waste away from food, children, animals, and water sources. Never dump it into storm drains or waterways.

☐ Include personal care needs

Store diapers, menstrual products, incontinence supplies, wipes, and caregiver gloves as needed. Check supply sizes and skin-care requirements regularly.

☐ Keep cleaning chemicals safe

Follow labels and ventilate as directed. Never mix bleach with ammonia, acids, or other cleaners. Keep chemicals in original labeled containers away from children and pets.

Guidance: Ready.gov — Build a kit; CDC — Make water safe in an emergency; CDC — Drinking water advisories; CDC — Hand sanitizer safety

Communication & trusted information

Plan for no internet, not just no lights.

No-cost step: choose an out-of-area contact, write important numbers on paper, and agree on check-in times today.

☐ Keep a radio and batteries

Use a battery-powered or hand-crank radio; consider a NOAA Weather Radio with alerts. Learn your local emergency broadcast sources before an outage.

☐ Write down essential contacts

Include family, an out-of-area contact, utility, water provider, pharmacy, care team, and local emergency management. Keep copies at home and in go-bags.

☐ Agree on meeting places and check-ins

Choose a nearby and an out-of-neighborhood meeting place. Make a plan for children, caregivers, and people at work or school. Arrange what to do if messages do not get through.

☐ Conserve phone power

Use battery-saving mode and brief texts when networks permit. Download important maps and documents beforehand. Mobile service, home phones, and emergency calling may be disrupted; identify safe alternatives in advance.

☐ Enroll in official local alerts

Use city, county, tribal, utility, and weather channels. Verify rumors before sharing. Online outage maps cannot replace local safety instructions and will not work without connectivity.

Guidance: Ready.gov — Power outages; Ready.gov — Build a kit; Ready.gov — Evacuation

Children, accessibility & pets

A plan only works if every household member can use it.

Adapt supplies to real needs, not a generic shopping list. Include the person who needs assistance in planning decisions.

☐ Plan infant feeding safely

Ask the child's clinician about feeding during water or power loss. Include safe feeding supplies; ready-to-feed formula can avoid mixing with unsafe water when formula is used. Never dilute formula to stretch supplies.

☐ Make information and exits accessible

Use large print, easy-read instructions, communication cards, or other formats needed. Plan around stairs, nonworking elevators, mobility aids, hearing needs, and visual needs.

☐ Arrange backup caregivers

Identify trusted backup helpers and how they will enter safely with permission. Keep necessary supplies and written care instructions accessible to the people authorized to use them.

☐ Practice a calm family plan

Explain what to do in age-appropriate terms. Include familiar comfort items and quiet activities. Rehearse meeting places and who may collect children without creating fear.

☐ Prepare pets and service animals

Include food, water, medicines, waste supplies, leash, carrier, identification, and veterinary records. Confirm pet-friendly destinations and service-animal arrangements before evacuation.

☐ Plan if storage or housing is limited

Prioritize a portable kit, safe water, medicines, contact information, and transport to verified services. Ask local outreach or disability services about support rather than assuming you need a garage, car, or spare room.

Guidance: Ready.gov — Build a kit; Ready.gov — People with disabilities; Ready.gov — Prepare your pets; CDC — Infant feeding in emergencies

Go-bags, transport & documents

Know what you will take and where you can go.

Start with copies of existing documents, existing bags, and a transport agreement. Expensive survival gear is not a prerequisite.

☐ Pack a manageable go-bag

Include water, no-cook food, medicines, first aid, lights, radio, chargers, clothing, hygiene items, and copies of key documents. Keep it light enough for the person who will carry it.

☐ Choose destinations and alternate routes

Record nearby and farther-away options and a paper map. Follow official evacuation routes and closures. Never walk or drive through floodwater or enter closed areas.

☐ Arrange transport without assuming a car

Plan accessible rides, caregiver support, or official evacuation assistance. If you drive, maintain fuel or charge when possible; stations and chargers may be unavailable. Do not idle a vehicle in a garage.

☐ Protect essential documents

Keep copies of identification, insurance, prescriptions, emergency contacts, and relevant records in a portable waterproof pouch. Protect originals and sensitive information from theft.

☐ Plan for payment and access disruptions

Keep modest small-denomination cash if affordable, plus physical keys. ATMs, card terminals, electric gates, and garage doors may stop working. Learn manual releases from the manufacturer before an outage.

☐ Plan a safe return

Return only when officials permit. Avoid flood-damaged electrical systems and unstable structures. Request qualified inspection when needed and document damage only if it is safe.

Guidance: Ready.gov — Build a kit; Ready.gov — People with disabilities; Ready.gov — Prepare your pets; Ready.gov — Evacuation

Neighbors & long-term continuity

Preparation is shared care, not a promise to survive alone indefinitely.

Free first step: arrange a consent-based check-in with a neighbor. Never publish someone's medical needs, address, supplies, or absence from home.

☐ Arrange consent-based neighbor check-ins

Agree who will check on whom, when, and by what method. Respect privacy and boundaries. Do not enter dangerous structures or attempt electrical, floodwater, or medical rescues beyond your training.

☐ Identify how verified help will be announced

Write down official channels for water distribution, shelters, cooling or warming centers, accessible transport, and medical support. Confirm operating status; do not rely solely on an old listing or social post.

☐ Share resources safely

Coordinate meals, transport, charging, and translation with trusted people. Keep food safety, electrical limits, fuel rules, and accessibility in mind. Do not publish inventories of supplies or sensitive household details.

☐ Create an extended-disruption plan

For a 30–90-day scenario, map medicine refills, continuing care, safe water, sanitation, housing, transport, work, school, and finances. Identify what depends on deliveries or power and set alternatives and relocation triggers.

☐ Prepare gradually without panic buying

Inventory what you own. Prioritize essential needs and no-cost planning; add supplies within your budget. Ask trusted local organizations about assistance and do not assume a costly generator is necessary or usable.

☐ Practice and refresh the plan

Walk through your plan safely without interrupting medical equipment or turning off essential services. Review supplies, contact details, batteries, and care needs regularly and after any household change or actual outage.

Guidance: Ready.gov — Build a kit; Ready.gov — People with disabilities; Ready.gov — Evacuation

Household planning worksheet

Part 1 of 2 • Fill in by hand. Keep private with your emergency supplies.

Call 911 for immediate danger. Follow local instructions and your clinician-approved care plan.

Household members, accessibility needs, and who can help

_____

Nearby meeting place and out-of-neighborhood meeting place

_____

Out-of-area contact and agreed check-in times

_____

Utility outage number, water utility, and local emergency management

_____

Clinician, pharmacy, equipment supplier, and backup caregiver contacts

_____

Medicine storage instructions and refill plan (keep private)

_____

Medical device backup runtime and relocation trigger agreed with provider

_____

Household planning worksheet

Part 2 of 2 • Fill in by hand. Keep private with your emergency supplies.

Call 911 for immediate danger. Follow local instructions and your clinician-approved care plan.

Safe destination, alternative destination, and accessible transport

_____

Pet or service-animal supplies and destination arrangements

_____

Location of water, food, lights, radio, first aid, keys, and go-bags

_____

Water and food resupply plan; sanitation plan if toilets cannot flush

_____

Reasons we will leave rather than stay; who makes the check-in call

_____

Outage start time and refrigerator/freezer temperature notes

_____

Next supply review date and items to replace

_____

Sources & scope

Based on CDC and Ready.gov guidance. B.O.L.D. is not an emergency service and is not affiliated with these agencies. Planning horizons and organizing suggestions are practical adaptations, not official forecasts or survival guarantees. Ask clinicians, pharmacists, manufacturers, and local officials for situation-specific advice.

CDC — Power outage safety

https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/response/what-to-do-protect-yourself-during-a-power-outage.html

Ready.gov — Power outages

https://www.ready.gov/power-outages

Ready.gov — Build a kit

https://www.ready.gov/kit

CDC — Food safety after an emergency

https://www.cdc.gov/food-safety/foods/keep-food-safe-after-emergency.html

CDC — Make water safe in an emergency

https://www.cdc.gov/water-emergency/about/index.html

CDC — Drinking water advisories

https://www.cdc.gov/water-emergency/about/drinking-water-advisories-an-overview.html

Ready.gov — People with disabilities

https://www.ready.gov/disability

Ready.gov — Prepare your pets

https://www.ready.gov/pets

CDC — Hand sanitizer safety

https://www.cdc.gov/clean-hands/about/hand-sanitizer.html

CDC — Infant feeding in emergencies

https://www.cdc.gov/infant-feeding-emergencies-toolkit/php/facts.html

Ready.gov — Evacuation

https://www.ready.gov/evacuation