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Hurricane Preparedness During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A Statement of the American Meteorological Society

(Adopted by the AMS Council on 30 July 2020)

Call to Action

Your response to hurricanes and tropical storms will need to change as a result of COVID-19. Identify whether you are in a hurricane evacuation zone, understand your risk and vulnerability, and plan for the unique needs of your household so you are prepared and ready to respond to the advice of state and local emergency managers.

Motivation

The 2020 hurricane season is here and the time to prepare is now. The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic further raise the potential for any one storm to create additional complexities for public safety. Emergency managers and state and local officials have carefully adapted their respective hurricane plans to address many of these challenges. This statement seeks to highlight specific preparedness actions that the public is strongly encouraged to take before flooding, damaging winds, and storm surge threatens their community.

Audience

The guidelines below are recommended by the American Meteorological Society for use by the media, emergency managers, weather forecasters, and the public as they prepare for hurricane threats during a pandemic.

How to Prepare Now

The way your community evacuates for hurricanes may be different this year, including availability of shelters, evacuation routes, and who will be asked to evacuate. Residents may need to use different shelter sites than in previous years, as the capacity of disaster shelters has been reduced due to COVID-19. Take time now to identify your evacuation zone and destination, and determine the sources from which you would receive evacuation orders. Prepare an evacuation kit that includes personal safety supplies to protect yourself from COVID-19. If you are not in an evacuation zone, evaluate your ability to safely shelter in place. Residents without internet access should contact their local government's non-emergency phone line for more information about hurricane evacuation zones, sheltering, and preparedness actions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Public Health Precautions within Community Shelters

It is very likely that shelters in your community will take precautions to help mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission. However, if you evacuate to a shelter, you are responsible for your



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health and should bring necessary medical, sanitary, and safety supplies with you and your family. Safety supplies should include face coverings, hand sanitizer, and other personal hygiene items. Be mindful to follow guidelines set by the CDC and policies set by state and local officials.

Preparedness Kit Guidance

The American Red Cross (ARC), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and several states encourage families to be prepared with enough supplies to stay at home for at least 72 hours. The ARC and some states additionally recommend a 3–7 day evacuation “go kit.” If you already have a kit, take a moment to refresh supplies, ensure they meet your family’s specific needs, and ensure that they include necessary items to protect your family from COVID-19. You must be prepared for the threat posed by both the hurricane and COVID-19. Check the links below, or your state or local emergency management office website, for guidance on building your kits.

Use Trusted Information Sources

Become familiar with the websites and social media pages of your local emergency management agency, the National Hurricane Center (NHC), and trusted weather forecast providers. Be sure to check them frequently, as forecasts can change. These will provide you and your community with the most accurate information about evacuation orders, shelter locations, and the development of hurricanes and their hazards. Be cautious of what pages you follow and share on social media, as many accounts may not be reliable sources. Most trusted sources on social media have a verified status or official checkmark.

Additional Resources:

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/covid-19/prepare-for-hurricane.html>
- FEMA Disaster Supplies Kit: <https://www.ready.gov/kit>
- National Hurricane Center: <https://www.hurricanes.gov>
- National Weather Service: <https://www.weather.gov/>
- Ready.gov: <https://www.ready.gov/hurricanes>
- Red Cross Personal and Family Preparedness: <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/coronavirus-safety/preparing-for-disaster-during-covid-19.html>
- State Emergency Management Agencies: <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-management-agencies>