PREP FOR IT

Australian household emergency book

Complete household emergency guide

Read the guide from start to finish or jump to a section from the contents. Household answers and local listings are filled in separately on the website.

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Your household

Why a household plan works

In an emergency, people tend to do what they've already talked about. A plan that lives in one person's head is fragile. If that person is at work, in hospital or simply asleep when the warning comes, everyone else is left guessing.

A written plan that the whole household has helped make does three things. It gives everyone a job, so nobody freezes. It means decisions such as when to leave or where to meet are already made. And it gives the people who might help you - a neighbour, a relative, a support worker - the information they need.

The best plans are short, specific and talked about out loud at least once.

Make the plan together

Sit down for half an hour with everyone who lives with you. Include anyone who stays regularly, such as a partner who works away, a grandparent who visits each week or children who split time between two homes.

Talk through four questions:

1. **What could happen here?** Use the Hazards pages and your council's maps.
2. **How would we hear about it?** Agree which warning service and radio station you'll use.
3. **What would we do?** Stay or go, where to meet, who does what.
4. **Who would we tell?** Your out-of-area contact and anyone who relies on you.

Write the answers in the "Your plan" fields as you go. Don't aim for perfect. You can add detail later.

Give everyone a job

People cope better when they have something useful to do. Match jobs to what each person can manage:

- **Plan keeper** - keeps the book up to date and reminds everyone of review dates.
- **Driver and backup driver** - and a third option if neither can drive.
- **Warnings** - checks the warning service and radio, and tells everyone what it says.
- **Animals** - carriers, leads, food and medicines for pets.
- **Medicines and equipment** - grabs medicines, chargers and any powered equipment.
- **Check-ins** - texts the out-of-area contact and checks on a named neighbour.
- **Children** - even young children can have a job, such as carrying their own small bag or looking after the torch.

If you live alone, all these jobs are yours. That's fine. The Older people and people living alone page has ideas for sharing some of them with a neighbour or friend.

Involving children

Children handle emergencies better when they've been included in the planning. Keep it calm and practical, and pitch it to their age.

- **Under five:** practise the meeting place as a game. Teach them their full name, your name and how to call Triple Zero (000) on a phone.
- **Primary school:** let them help pack their own small bag with a torch, a snack, a favourite toy and a card with family phone numbers.
- **Teenagers:** give them real responsibility, such as checking warnings or being the pet person. Talk about what to do if they're home alone when something happens.

The Children and teens page has much more on this.

What to record for each person

The plan works best when it holds the details someone else might need if you can't speak for yourself. For each person, consider recording:

- full name and mobile number
- any medicines, with doses and the prescriber's name
- allergies and medical conditions that matter in an emergency
- mobility, hearing, vision or communication needs
- equipment they rely on, and how long its battery lasts
- who they'd go to if they were separated from the household
- school, workplace or day service, with a contact number

Keep the detail at the level you're comfortable sharing. The site lets you mark fields as private so they're left off shared copies.

What to record for each animal

- name, type and description (a photo helps)
- microchip number and registration details
- vet's name and phone number
- medicines and special food
- carrier, lead or float needs
- where they'd go if you had to leave, and who could collect them

Meeting places and contacts

Meeting place near home. Somewhere you'd meet if you had to leave the house suddenly, such as a fire. Choose a spot everyone can reach on foot: the letterbox, a neighbour's driveway or a street corner.

Meeting place outside the area. Somewhere you'd meet if the whole neighbourhood was affected, such as a relative's home, a library or a shopping centre in another suburb. Check it

isn't exposed to the same hazard.

Out-of-area contact. Someone who lives far enough away that they're unlikely to be affected by the same event. During a big emergency, local phone lines get busy, but a text to someone interstate often gets through. Everyone in the household checks in with that person, who passes messages on.

Backup if you miss a check-in. Agree what happens if someone doesn't answer: who tries next, how long you wait and who to call.

Households that change shape

Many households aren't the same every day. Plan for the ones you have:

- **Shift workers and people who travel:** what happens if the warning comes when they're away?
- **Children in two homes:** share the meeting places and check-in plan with both households.
- **Visitors and boarders:** show them the plan and the meeting place when they arrive.
- **Holiday homes and caravans:** keep a short plan there too.

Where to keep the plan

Your printed book is your real backup. Phones go flat and websites go offline.

- Keep one copy at home where everyone knows to look, such as on a kitchen shelf or in a drawer near the door.
- Keep a second copy with a trusted person, or somewhere secure you can reach without this device.
- Put the fridge sheet on the fridge.
- Save a backup file from Print and keep current, in case you change devices.

Leave passwords, PINs, spare key locations and account recovery codes out of the book.

If English isn't your main language

You can fill in the plan in any language. If you need help with a call to emergency services, the Triple Zero operator can arrange an interpreter. For other calls, such as to your council or insurer, TIS National provides free interpreting on 131 450. Red Cross has Easy English planning resources, and NEMA has preparedness information in many languages.

Common mistakes

- **Only one person knows the plan.** Talk it through with everyone, even briefly.
- **The meeting place is in the hazard zone.** Check your outside-the-area meeting place on the council's maps.
- **The out-of-area contact doesn't know they're the contact.** Tell them, and give them a copy of the key numbers.
- **The plan is only on a phone.** Print it.

Name for the book Use a household nickname or a generic title. This appears on shared copies.

Suburb or postcode (optional) Try Thornlands 4164, Melbourne 3000 or Mount Gambier 5290.

State or territory

Meeting place near home

Meeting place outside our area

Out-of-area contact and phone

Our backup person if we miss a check-in

Who is covered?

Add each person or pet separately. Tick the person who keeps the plan current. Names, phone numbers and support needs are for the household copy.

Your earlier plan is still saved on this device. Open your earlier plan to review or export any details you want to bring across.

People

Pets and animals

Your plan

Who we've shared the plan with

From your plan: Last checked

Your answers stay in this browser. They are not sent to Prep For It, encrypted or synced. Clearing browser data or changing devices can remove your plan. Keep passwords, PINs, access codes, spare key locations and recovery codes out of the book. Shared copies omit fields and contacts marked private. Print or back up your plan.

Want to know more?

Draw a simple map of your meeting places and give each person one concrete job. The Red Cross tools can help you walk through that discussion.

- Australian Red Cross - Get organised - a step-by-step guide to talking through your plan.
- Australian Red Cross - Get Prepared app - keep contacts and plans on your phone as a second copy.
- Red Cross Easy English emergency plan (PDF) - a simple, accessible plan you can print.
- Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness workbook (PDF) - for people with disability or chronic illness and their supporters.
- TIS National - free interpreting on 131 450.
- ABC Radio reception - find your local ABC frequency to write on the plan.

Sources · Version 3.1 · 21 November 2026 · All sources

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Add each person’s name and phone number. Mark support needs and name the person who keeps the plan current. For animals, record the name, type, vet or carer phone number and any transport needs.

Your warnings

Two kinds of information

Australia uses two different systems that people often mix up.

Ratings and forecasts tell you how dangerous conditions could be, before anything has started. The Fire Danger Rating and the Bureau of Meteorology's weather forecasts are examples. They help you decide whether to change your plans for the day.

Incident warnings tell you about something that's happening now - a fire that's burning, a river that's rising, a storm that's already formed - and what you should do about it. These use the Australian Warning System's three levels.

You need both. The rating helps you get ready. The warning tells you when to act.

The three warning levels

The Australian Warning System is used across the country for bushfire, flood, storm, cyclone, extreme heat and some other hazards. Each warning has a level, a hazard icon and an action statement.

Advice (yellow). An incident has started. There's no immediate danger, but stay up to date in case things change.

Example: "Advice - Grass fire near Smithtown. Stay up to date. Monitor conditions."

What this means for you: check your plan, keep the radio on and tell your household.

Watch and Act (orange). Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect yourself and your family.

Example: "Watch and Act - Flooding expected in Riverside. Prepare to leave."

What this means for you: get your bags, medicines and animals ready. Move valuables up high. Check your route. If you need extra time to leave, go now.

Emergency Warning (red). The highest level. You may be in danger and need to take action immediately. Any delay puts your life at risk.

Example: "Emergency Warning - Bushfire at Hilltop. Leave now if the path is clear." or "Shelter now. It is too late to leave."

What this means for you: do exactly what the warning says, straight away.

The words in the action statement matter more than the colour. Read them carefully. "Prepare to leave", "Leave now" and "Shelter now" ask for very different things.

Warnings can skip levels

Warnings don't always start at Advice and climb. A fast-moving fire or a flash flood can go straight to an Emergency Warning. Some events, such as a severe storm or a flash flood in a small creek, may move faster than any warning can.

That's why your own plan needs its own triggers - things you can see or hear that tell you to act, without waiting for a message. Examples:

- water reaching a certain point on your street or a gauge you can see
- smoke or embers in your area on a high fire danger day
- the creek behind the house rising quickly in heavy rain
- your power going out during a heatwave when someone at home relies on cooling

Fire Danger Ratings

The Australian Fire Danger Rating System has four levels, plus "No rating" on days when there's minimal risk.

- **Moderate (green):** plan and prepare. Most fires can be controlled.
- **High (yellow):** be ready to act. Fires can be dangerous.
- **Extreme (orange):** take action now to protect life and property. Fires will spread quickly and be extremely dangerous.
- **Catastrophic (red):** for your survival, leave bushfire risk areas. These are the most dangerous conditions for a fire.

Ratings are set for fire weather districts and published daily during the fire season. Check them the evening before and the morning of any day you plan to travel, work outdoors or stay in a bushfire-prone area.

How warnings reach you

No single channel reaches everyone, every time. Use at least two.

State or territory warning website or app. The official source of incident warnings, with maps and action advice. Set your location in the app and turn on notifications. Needs internet.

AusAlert. In service since October 2026, AusAlert sends emergency messages to compatible phones in the affected area. You don't need an app or to sign up. It can still reach phones when networks are busy, but your phone needs coverage and a compatible operating system. Devices do not need an active SIM card to receive an alert. NEMA explains how AusAlert works.

Emergency Alert texts and landline calls. You may still receive a text, or a recorded call to a landline, about an emergency in your area. Treat any unexpected message carefully: a real alert will never ask you for money or personal details.

ABC Local Radio. ABC is the official emergency broadcaster in most of Australia. Its local stations interrupt programmes with warnings and updates. A battery or hand-crank radio keeps working when power and phones are out. Write your local ABC frequency on the fridge sheet.

Bureau of Meteorology. The source of weather, flood, tsunami and heatwave warnings, and cyclone forecast tracks.

Council disaster dashboards. Many councils run a local dashboard that gathers road closures, sandbag locations, evacuation centres and local warnings in one place.

People around you. Neighbours, community groups and local social media can be fast, but they can also be wrong. Check what you hear against an official source before you act on it or share it.

When warnings may not reach you

Plan for the times when you won't hear a warning:

- **Power cuts** can stop TVs, NBN internet and cordless home phones.
- **Phone network outages** can stop texts, calls and app alerts. In November 2023 an Optus outage left millions of people without phone or internet for most of a day.
- **Sleep.** Many fires and floods happen at night. Set your phone so emergency alerts can sound even on silent, and keep it charged.
- **Being away from home.** Set the warning app to watch your home address as well as where you are.
- **Hearing, vision or language barriers.** See Warnings in a format you can use.

Spotting fake warnings

Scammers sometimes copy the look of emergency messages. Be cautious if a message:

- asks you to click a link to "confirm" your details
- asks for payment, a bank login or identification
- threatens a fine or penalty
- arrives from an unexpected number or email address

Check anything unexpected by going directly to your state warning service, not by using a link in the message.

Warnings when you're travelling

Use the warning service for the state you're in, not the one you live in. Before a road trip in fire or storm season, save that state's warning site and check the Fire Danger Rating along your route. Caravan parks and campgrounds should have an emergency plan; ask about it when you arrive.

Warnings and fire services by state or territory

State or territory	Warnings and incidents	Fire service and planning
Queensland	Queensland Disaster Management	Queensland Fire Department
New South Wales	Hazards Near Me NSW	NSW Rural Fire Service
Victoria	VicEmergency	Country Fire Authority
South Australia	Alert SA	SA Country Fire Service
Western Australia	Emergency WA	Department of Fire and Emergency Services
Tasmania	TasALERT	Tasmania Fire Service
Australian Capital Territory	ACT Emergency Services Agency	ACT ESA survival plan
Northern Territory	SecureNT	NT Fire and Rescue Service

Your plan

Our state or territory warning service

Our ABC station and frequency

Our council disaster dashboard

A trigger we'll act on without waiting for a warning

Want to know more?

The Australian Warning System marks hazards with named icons. A siren sound called the Standard Emergency Warning Signal may accompany urgent warnings. Listen or read for the action you need to take.

- Australian Warning System - the three levels, the icons and the action statements.
- AIDR - Australian Warning System - the national framework behind the warnings.
- About AusAlert - how emergency messages reach compatible phones.
- AFAC - Australian Fire Danger Rating System - what each rating means.
- Get Ready Queensland - What is an emergency alert - Emergency Alert texts and calls explained.
- Bureau of Meteorology - Severe weather knowledge centre - how weather warnings work.
- ABC Emergency - live coverage during emergencies.
- ABC Radio reception - find your local frequency.

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Stay or go

The decision, made in advance

Whether to stay or go is the biggest decision most households face in an emergency. It's also the one people most often leave too late. When smoke is building or water is rising, it's hard to think clearly, roads fill up and options disappear.

The answer is to decide in advance, in calm weather, what will make you leave - and then stick to it.

Staying can be the right choice

For many emergencies, home is the safest place. During a severe storm, a heatwave with working power or a short power outage, staying put is usually best. Moving through a storm or on flooded roads is often more dangerous than staying inside.

Stay when:

- the warning tells you to shelter
- roads are already flooded, blocked or closed
- the event will pass quickly and your home is safe
- leaving would put someone at greater risk

If you stay, pick the safest place for the hazard, keep the radio on and keep checking for updates. Ask for help early if you're cut off and running short of anything essential.

Leaving early is usually the safest choice

For bushfire, river flooding, storm tide and some cyclones, leaving early is often the safest option. "Early" means before the threat reaches you, while roads are open and you can drive in good visibility.

Go when:

- a warning tells you to leave
- your own trigger is reached
- the Fire Danger Rating is Catastrophic and you live in a bushfire risk area
- you're likely to lose safe water, a working toilet, cooling, heating or power for medical equipment
- someone in the household needs extra time or help to move

Set your own trigger

A trigger is something you can see, hear or check that tells you it's time to go. It turns a vague worry into a clear decision. Good triggers are specific, early and easy to check. Examples:

- "When the Bureau issues a flood warning for our river."

- "When the creek reaches the second fence post."
- "When the Fire Danger Rating for tomorrow is Extreme or Catastrophic."
- "When the power has been out for 12 hours and the heat is over 35 degrees."
- "When the council says our evacuation zone should prepare to leave."

Set your trigger early enough to allow for the slowest person in your household, plus animals.

Where to go

Friends or family outside the affected area. Usually the most comfortable option, especially with children or pets. Ask them in advance, and agree what you'd bring.

Motel, hotel or holiday rental. Useful if you can afford it and book early. Check whether they take pets.

Evacuation centre. Opened by councils and emergency services when needed. Offers basic shelter, information and support. Check whether one is open, whether it takes animals and whether it's accessible for anyone who needs it.

Neighbourhood safer places and places of last resort. Some fire-prone areas have places that may give some protection from a bushfire if all other plans fail. They're a last resort, not a plan.

Always have a first choice and a backup, in different directions if you can.

Getting there

- Plan two routes, and check that they don't both cross the same floodplain, bridge or bushland.
- Keep the car fuelled or charged during storm, cyclone and fire seasons.
- If you don't drive, arrange a lift now. Ask a neighbour, friend or family member, and name a backup.
- If someone uses a wheelchair or mobility aid, check that the transport and the destination can take it.
- Leave in daylight if you can.
- Never drive through floodwater or into smoke.

Leaving with animals

Pets are part of the family, and people sometimes delay leaving or go back for them. Avoid that by planning ahead:

- Keep carriers, leads and a pet kit ready to grab.
- Know where your pets can go: friends, a boarding kennel or a pet-friendly evacuation option.
- If you have horses or livestock, move them early to a safe paddock or property. Don't leave it until the day of the threat.
- If you truly can't take an animal, leave it inside with water and food in a safe room. Never tie animals up.

The Pets and livestock page has more detail.

Before you walk out the door

If there's time:

- Take people and animals first.
- Grab medicines, your go bag, phone and charger.
- Lock up.
- Turn off gas, water or power only if authorities tell you to and you can do it safely.
- Leave a note on the door or table saying where you've gone, if it's safe to do so.
- Tell your out-of-area contact where you're going.

If there isn't time, just go.

If you've left it too late

Sometimes a warning says it's too late to leave. Don't try to drive through fire or floodwater. Instead:

- **Bushfire:** shelter in a room with two ways out, away from the fire front, with water nearby. Close windows and doors. Stay low if there's smoke. Follow the warning's advice.
- **Flood:** move to the highest part of the building. Take a phone, torch, water and warm clothing. Call Triple Zero (000) if your life is in danger.
- **Storm or cyclone:** stay in the strongest, most inside room, away from windows.

Coming home

Don't go back until authorities say it's safe. Damaged roads, fallen trees and power lines, unstable buildings and contaminated water can be just as dangerous as the event itself. The After it's over pages walk through returning home safely.

If you're away from home

If an emergency happens while you're at work, on holiday or out for the day:

- Follow the warnings for where you are.
- Ask your hotel, campground or workplace about their plan.
- Don't drive into a closed area to check on your house.
- Ask a trusted neighbour to check on pets when it's safe.

Our plan

What will make us leave? Write down a trigger that gives you enough time to move safely.

Where will we go first? Name or address

Where's our backup? Name or address

First destination phone

Backup destination phone

How will we get there? Write both routes or travel options.

Who's driving or helping? Where will the animals go? Include a backup driver and pet transport.

If we're split up, where will we meet? Say who'll check everyone is safe.

What do we grab? Only what's close by and won't delay you.

Want to know more?

Confirm your route, destination, pets and accessible transport before conditions deteriorate. If you're travelling, use the warning service for where you are.

- NSW Government - Be ready for an emergency evacuation - what to pack and how to leave safely.
- Queensland Fire Department - Stay and defend - the realities of staying during a bushfire.
- NSW Government - Pets and livestock - planning for animals.
- Get Ready Queensland - Pets - pet emergency kits and evacuation.
- Australian Red Cross - Register.Find.Reunite - let people know you're safe.
- ABC News - Mallacoota evacuations - how one town left by sea during Black Summer.

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Supplies

Start with what you already have

Most households already own half of a good emergency kit. It's just spread around the house: torches in a drawer, tins in the pantry, a first aid kit in the car. The first step isn't shopping. It's gathering, checking and writing down what you have, then filling the gaps a little at a time.

The checklists below are the full list. This guide explains how to think about each part, so you can adjust it for your own household.

Two kits, not one

It helps to think about two different sets of supplies.

A stay-at-home kit keeps your household going if you're stuck at home without power, water or shops for several days. It can be bulky: water containers, pantry food, a radio, lighting, toilet supplies.

A go bag is what you grab if you have to leave quickly. It needs to be light enough for the person carrying it. One bag per person, or one per adult with children's things shared out, works for most households.

A good go bag holds:

- medicines for at least a few days, and a current medication list
- phone charger and power bank
- copies of important documents (on a USB stick or in a waterproof pouch)
- a change of clothes, sturdy shoes and a warm layer
- a torch, water bottle and snacks
- glasses, hearing aid batteries or other personal aids
- toiletries, and period products or nappies if needed
- a comfort item for each child
- some cash in small notes

Keep go bags somewhere you can grab them on the way out, such as near the door or in a cupboard by the car.

How long to plan for

Three days is a sensible start. Five days is a good planning target for most households. If a single road, bridge or ferry can cut you off, or you live in an area that's often isolated by floods or cyclones, build towards 14 days.

The longer periods don't mean buying a mountain of extra supplies. Most of it comes from keeping a slightly fuller pantry than usual and using it in rotation.

Water

Water matters more than anything else on the list. People can go weeks without much food but only a few days without water.

Drinking and basic cooking. Get Ready Queensland's emergency kit checklist specifies a minimum of 10 litres of drinking water per person for three days. Our planning figure is 3 litres per person per day, so 15 litres for five days. The table below uses that daily figure. Allow extra for hot weather, health needs, pets, cooking that needs more water, and washing. Get Ready Queensland emergency kit checklist (PDF).

Add more for:

- hot weather or physical work
- babies who need formula made up
- people who are pregnant, breastfeeding, unwell or older
- pets (a medium dog may need a litre or more a day) Agriculture Victoria - dog drinking-water needs

Washing and flushing. Keep this water separate from drinking water and label it clearly. A filled bath, laundry tub or clean bins can hold water for flushing if you know a storm or cyclone is coming.

Storing water. Use clean, food-grade containers with tight lids, or sealed bottled water. Label each container with the date filled. Store it in a cool, dark place away from chemicals. Replace stored tap water every six months, or follow the guidance from your water provider. Choose container sizes that the person who'll lift them can manage.

Worked example. A household of two adults, one child and a dog, planning for five days:

- people: 3 people x 3 L x 5 days = 45 L
- dog: about 1 L x 5 days = 5 L
- extra for a hot week: about 10 L
- total drinking water: about 60 L - roughly six 10 L containers

Plus separate water for washing and flushing.

Food

Choose food your household already eats and likes. Emergencies aren't the time to discover that nobody likes tinned stew.

Good choices keep without refrigeration, need little or no cooking and don't make you thirsty:

- tinned fish, meat, beans, lentils, fruit and vegetables
- long-life milk or plant milk
- crackers, wraps, rice cakes and breakfast cereal
- nut butters (if nobody is allergic), muesli bars and dried fruit
- instant noodles, couscous and pasta if you can boil water safely
- tea, coffee and something comforting

Remember a manual can opener.

The rolling pantry. Add one or two extra items to each shop. Put new items at the back and use the oldest first. Within a couple of months you'll have a few days' spare food without a single big spend.

Special diets. Plan carefully for infant formula, allergies, coeliac disease, diabetes or cultural and religious needs. Shops in an affected area may run out of specialist items first.

Medicines

Ask your pharmacist or doctor about keeping a small reserve of essential medicines - often about a week. Don't change how you take a medicine without advice. Keep a printed list of every medicine, dose and prescriber. If a medicine needs refrigeration, ask your pharmacist how long it can safely stay out of the fridge and what to do in a power outage.

Light, power and communication

- a torch or headlamp for each person, with spare batteries
- a battery or hand-crank radio - test it on your local ABC station
- a charged power bank, and car chargers
- printed contacts and directions, in case your phone fails

Avoid candles. They're a common cause of house fires during power outages.

First aid

A good first aid kit and the knowledge to use it is one of the best investments you can make. A first aid course takes a day and gives you skills for everyday accidents, not only emergencies. Check your kit's contents every review, replace anything used or out of date, and keep a first aid booklet with it.

Documents

If you had to leave and couldn't go back, what would be hard to replace? Usually:

- identification: passports, driver's licences, birth certificates
- Medicare, concession and health fund cards
- insurance policies and the claims phone number
- property papers, lease or a recent bill showing your address
- wills, powers of attorney and guardianship papers
- prescriptions and medical summaries
- photos of your home and contents

Keep originals somewhere safe and keep copies in your go bag or on an encrypted USB stick. A protected digital copy you can open offline is a good second backup.

Cash

When power or networks fail, card payments and ATMs can stop. Keep enough cash in small notes for a few days of essentials: food, fuel and medicines. Keep it separate from your documents.

Pets

Your pet kit needs food, water, bowls, medicines, a lead or carrier, waste bags or litter, vaccination records and a recent photo. The Pets and livestock page has more.

Insurance

Insurance is part of your supplies too. It's what lets you rebuild. Set aside half an hour to read your policy and the Key Facts Sheet. Check:

- which hazards are covered, including flood, storm tide and actions of the sea
- your sum insured, and whether it would cover rebuilding at today's costs
- your excess
- temporary accommodation limits
- whether contents cover includes items outside the home

The Insurance Council's online calculators give you a starting figure for rebuild and contents costs.

Building it on a budget

You don't need to spend much to be well prepared.

- **Free:** gather what you already own into one place. Fill clean containers with tap water. Print contacts. Photograph your belongings.
- **This month:** a manual can opener, spare batteries and a few extra pantry items.
- **Next few months:** a battery radio, a power bank and a first aid kit.
- **When you can:** water containers, a pet carrier, a portable power station if someone relies on powered equipment.

Keep it fresh

Twice a year, check dates, eat and replace food that's close to expiry, refill water, test torches and radios, and recharge power banks. The Keep your plan current page has a checklist.

How much do I need?

What to set aside	3 days to start	5-day planning target	14 days if easily cut off
Drinking and basic cooking water[1]	At least 10 L per person	15 L per person	42 L per person
Water for washing and toilets	Separate containers	Separate containers	Plan for larger storage or a safe supply
Food and animal supplies	Food for 3 days	Food for 5 days	Food for 14 days. Rotate it.
Medicines	Ask about a 7-day reserve	Ask about a 7-day reserve	Ask whether 14 days is safe and possible
Torches, radio and phones	Spare batteries and a charged power bank	Include enough battery time for 5 days	Test a longer-running radio or charging option
Cash	3 days of essentials in small notes	5 days of essentials	About a week of essentials
Fuel or EV charge	About half a tank in storm or fire season, or a suitable EV reserve	Same, with a route to refuel or recharge	Make a backup refuelling or charging plan

[1] Our planning allowance is 3 L per person per day for drinking and basic cooking: 15 L for five days, or 45 L for three people over five days. The three-day starter is rounded up to the official 10 L minimum. Get Ready Queensland’s checklist specifies at least 10 L of drinking water per person for three days. Add extra for heat, babies, health needs, animals and other water uses.

Water and food

- ☐ Safe drinking water for each person
- ☐ Extra water for pets and specific health needs
- ☐ Clean food-grade water containers
- ☐ Shelf-stable meals and snacks
- ☐ Special diet and allergy-safe food
- ☐ Manual can opener and utensils
- ☐ Cooler and ice packs
- ☐ Fridge thermometer
- ☐ Infant formula and clean feeding equipment if needed
- ☐ Milk or a shelf-stable alternative
- ☐ Tinned legumes, fruit and vegetables
- ☐ Long-life crackers or wraps
- ☐ Familiar snacks and comfort food
- ☐ Check cooking water and fuel needs

- ☐ Rotate opened and short-life stock safely

Lighting, power and communications

- ☐ Torch or headlamp per household member
- ☐ Spare batteries
- ☐ Battery or hand-crank radio
- ☐ Charged power bank and cables
- ☐ Offline maps or printed directions
- ☐ Paper list of contacts and radio frequencies
- ☐ Whistle or other simple signalling aid
- ☐ Battery lantern and correct-size spare batteries
- ☐ Car phone charger and leads
- ☐ Compatible V2L adaptor or cable if your EV supports it
- ☐ Suitable leads and instructions for tested backup equipment

First aid, medicines and accessibility

- ☐ First aid kit
  - ☐ Bandages, adhesive dressings and medical tape
  - ☐ Sterile gauze pads and wound dressings
  - ☐ Antiseptic supplies; antibiotic ointment only if recommended by your pharmacist or clinician
  - ☐ Scissors and tweezers
  - ☐ Disposable gloves and a first aid manual
- ☐ Personal medical supplies you use
  - ☐ Thermometer
  - ☐ Blood pressure monitor if used in your care
  - ☐ CPAP machine, mask and its power backup if prescribed
  - ☐ Blood glucose meter, test strips, lancets and insulin with your usual administration supplies if prescribed
- ☐ Essential medicines and current medication list
- ☐ Prescriptions and pharmacy phone number
- ☐ Approved backup for powered medical equipment
- ☐ Glasses, hearing aid batteries and mobility aids
- ☐ Personal hygiene and continence supplies
- ☐ Spare aids or communication cards if needed
- ☐ Sunscreen and insect repellent
- ☐ Suitable smoke protection based on health advice
- ☐ Maternity, hospital or after-hours numbers if needed

Clothing, sanitation and comfort

- ☐ Sturdy closed shoes
- ☐ Warm layers, rainwear and spare clothes
- ☐ Blankets or sleeping bags
- ☐ Soap, sanitiser and toilet paper
- ☐ Waste bags and disposable gloves
- ☐ Period products, nappies and wipes
- ☐ Comfort item for each child who needs one
- ☐ Sturdy lidded bucket if council advises a temporary toilet
- ☐ Heavy-duty bags and absorbent material
- ☐ Toothbrush and toothpaste
- ☐ Disinfectant and cleaning supplies used as labelled
- ☐ Hat, spare towel and sturdy work gloves

Pets and animal supplies

- ☐ Recent photo of each pet with identifying marks
- ☐ Leash, harness and collar with identification
- ☐ Secure carrier or crate
- ☐ Microchip, registration and vaccination details
- ☐ Pet food and extra drinking water
- ☐ Bowls, waste bags or litter supplies
- ☐ Pet medicines and dosing instructions
- ☐ Vet, after-hours vet and backup carer contacts
- ☐ Bedding and familiar comfort item
- ☐ Livestock transport and destination arrangements if needed

Documents, insurance and money

- ☐ Keep protected copies of identification, Medicare and concession cards, and birth, marriage or citizenship records as relevant
- ☐ Keep current prescriptions, medical summaries and essential care information
- ☐ Keep lease or property papers, a recent bill, and relevant wills, powers of attorney or guardianship documents
- ☐ Keep insurance policies, policy numbers and the insurer’s claims contact details
- ☐ Check cover and exclusions for your local hazards, including flood, fire, storm and actions of the sea
- ☐ Check excesses, temporary accommodation limits and sums insured against current rebuilding and replacement costs
- ☐ Photograph your home and contents; keep receipts and serial numbers for valuable items

- ☐ Keep waterproof paper copies, your printed household plan and contact list, and a protected digital backup that opens offline
- ☐ Set aside emergency cash, stored separately from shared documents
- ☐ Tell a trusted person how to access essential records; keep PINs, passwords, full card numbers and recovery codes out of the book

Grab bags and kits away from home

- ☐ Pack one manageable bag per person who needs one
- ☐ Add weather protection, water and snacks
- ☐ Include essential health items and chargers
- ☐ Prepare child, work and vehicle kits where useful
- ☐ Label kit locations and review dates
- ☐ Check expiry dates, battery charge and fit
- ☐ Add spare clothes, toiletries and sturdy shoes
- ☐ Consider a whistle, torch, power bank and paper contacts
- ☐ Prepare a secure waterproof document pouch
- ☐ Secure roadside equipment and print roadside assistance details
- ☐ List medicines, devices and heat-sensitive items to grab when leaving

Tools and storage

- ☐ Manual opener and easy-to-clean cooking utensils
- ☐ Outdoor-only camp cooking equipment if appropriate
- ☐ Tape, cable ties, tarp and basic hand tools
- ☐ Waterproof bags, marker, notepad and pen
- ☐ Fire safety equipment selected and maintained according to official guidance
- ☐ Fire blanket suited to your home
- ☐ Fire extinguisher suited to your home

Home kit location

Grab bags and pet kit location

Car, school or work kit

Next check date

Your plan

Water we're storing (litres)

Want to know more?

Use the kit checklist as a starting point. Pack for how long you may be cut off, including a safe medicine reserve agreed with your pharmacist.

- Get Ready Queensland - Emergency kit checklist (PDF) - a printable list to tick off.

- Get Ready Queensland - Emergency kit - what to pack and why.
- Australian Red Cross - Get packing - go bags and keepsakes.
- healthdirect - First aid kits - what to keep at home and in the car.
- Queensland Health - Emergency kit, plain English (PDF) - health items for your kit.
- Insurance Council - Calculators - estimate rebuild and contents costs.
- Moneysmart - Storm, flood and fire insurance - what to check in your policy.
- Agriculture Victoria - dog drinking-water needs - source for the factual example above.

Online sources · 21 November 2026 · Guide version 3.1
Open the online sources for all sections

Prepare your home

Small jobs, big difference

Much of the damage in storms, floods and fires starts with something small: a blocked gutter, a loose sheet of iron, a branch overhanging the roof, a woodpile against the wall. Most of these are cheap to fix in calm weather and expensive or impossible to fix once the event has started.

Work through your home room by room and outside, with the people who live there. Note what you can do yourself, what needs a licensed tradesperson and, if you rent, what needs your landlord or strata manager.

Outside the house

Roof and gutters. Clear gutters and downpipes before storm and fire season - blocked gutters overflow into the roof in heavy rain and hold dry leaves that catch embers. Check for loose or rusted roof sheets, cracked tiles and damaged flashing. Use a licensed roofer for anything above ground level; falls from roofs and ladders are a common cause of serious injury.

Trees. Look for dead branches, trees leaning towards the house and limbs overhanging the roof or power lines. Ask a qualified arborist to assess them. Check council rules before removing trees. Never prune near power lines yourself.

Loose items. Trampolines, outdoor furniture, pot plants, bins and sheets of building material can become dangerous in strong winds. Know where you'd put them, or how you'd tie them down, when a storm or cyclone warning is issued.

Drainage. Keep stormwater drains, grates and pits clear. Make sure water from downpipes is directed away from the house and away from slopes.

Garden and fire. In bushfire-prone areas, keep the area closest to the house clear of fine fuel: dry leaves, bark mulch, long grass and overhanging branches. Move woodpiles, gas bottles and flammable items away from the walls. Your state fire service has detailed advice for your area.

Access. Make sure your house number is clear from the street, day and night, so emergency services can find you. Keep the driveway clear enough for a vehicle.

Windows, doors and the inside

- Check that windows and doors close and lock properly.
- In cyclone areas, ask about window protection suitable for your home, such as screens or shutters. Taping windows doesn't stop them breaking.
- Choose your safe room: an inside room with no or few windows, such as a bathroom, hallway or internal laundry.
- Secure tall furniture, bookcases and TVs to walls, especially if you have young children or live in an earthquake-prone area.
- Store heavy items on lower shelves.

Flood-ready choices

If your home could flood, think about where things are kept:

- Keep important papers, photos and electronics above the likely water level.
- Know how you'd lift furniture onto benches or move it upstairs.
- When renovating, consider water-resistant materials, raised power points and appliances on higher shelves or plinths.
- Know where sandbags are available and how to lay them. Sandbags reduce water entry but don't stop it completely.

Utilities

Everyone in the household who's old enough should know where these are:

- **Electricity:** the main switch on your switchboard.
- **Gas:** the meter valve, or the bottle valves if you use bottled gas.
- **Water:** the main stopcock, usually near the meter at the front boundary.

Ask your providers or a licensed tradesperson how and when to use them safely. Turn them off only when it's safe, or when authorities tell you to. Never touch a wet switchboard or damaged electrical equipment. If gas has been turned off, have it reconnected by your supplier or a licensed gasfitter.

Power-dependent features

Think about what in your home stops working without power:

- electric garage doors and gates - practise the manual release
- lifts in apartment buildings - know the stairs and who might need help
- water pumps for tanks or bores
- security systems and intercoms
- medical equipment - see Medicines, equipment and care, and Backup power
- solar systems - many switch off in a blackout unless they're set up to supply the home

Fire safety at home

- Working smoke alarms save lives. Test them monthly and replace them when they reach the age on the label (usually 10 years). Queensland requires interconnected photoelectric smoke alarms in all homes from 1 January 2027; other states have their own rules. Queensland Fire Department - smoke alarm requirements
- Keep a fire blanket and a fire extinguisher in the kitchen, and learn how to use them.
- Plan two ways out of each room where possible, and practise your escape.
- Charge lithium-ion batteries (e-bikes, scooters, tools) on a hard surface, away from exits, using the charger that came with them.

The Home fire and escape page has more detail.

Apartments, units and townhouses

- Find out your building's emergency plan and evacuation points.
- Know where the fire stairs are, and practise using them.
- Ask your body corporate or strata manager about generators, lift rescue and who checks on residents who need help.
- Keep balconies clear of loose items in storm season.

If you rent

You can't make changes to the building, but you can:

- report repairs (leaks, loose roofing, faulty smoke alarms) in writing, with photos and the date
- ask which repairs your landlord will arrange before storm season
- get contents insurance - your landlord's policy won't cover your belongings
- prepare inside: kits, plans, furniture and loose items

The Renters and apartments page has more.

Doing it within your budget

Start with free and cheap jobs: clearing gutters you can safely reach, tying down loose items, testing smoke alarms, printing contacts, finding shut-offs. Then get quotes for bigger work in calm weather, when tradespeople are available. Prioritise anything that protects lives first, such as smoke alarms and safe exits, then anything that protects the roof and structure.

Insurance and records

Before storm and fire season:

- Photograph or video each room, including inside cupboards.
- Keep receipts or serial numbers for valuable items.
- Store policy details and the claims number where you can reach them without your phone.
- Check that your sum insured reflects current rebuilding costs, including demolition, debris removal and professional fees.

Underinsurance can leave a large gap between an insurance payout and the cost of rebuilding or replacing your belongings. Review your sums insured against current costs, especially after renovations or major purchases. Moneysmart explains how to check for underinsurance. If cover is hard to afford, a free financial counsellor at the National Debt Helpline can help on 1800 007 007.

Fire detection and escape

☐ Test your smoke alarms

☐ Identify two ways out where practical

☐ Agree an outdoor meeting point

- ☐ Check keys and exits are accessible to household members
- ☐ Practise escape with anyone who may need help
- ☐ Confirm apartment or building evacuation arrangements

Storm, flood and bushfire readiness

- ☐ Check official hazard maps for home and access routes
- ☐ Book gutter and roof maintenance before storm season
- ☐ Secure outdoor furniture and loose equipment before storms
- ☐ Pick a room away from windows and a way to higher ground
- ☐ Check local bushfire property preparation guidance
- ☐ Ask your landlord or strata manager which repairs they'll arrange
- ☐ Arrange roof, window and door repairs in calm weather
- ☐ Check unsafe branches with an arborist
- ☐ Check driveway access and safe storage of fuel and gas bottles
- ☐ Complete the relevant bushfire survival plan

Utilities and backup equipment

- ☐ Write down who supplies your power, water, sewerage and gas
- ☐ Find your shut-offs and ask the providers when and how to use them
- ☐ Test household lighting and device charging
- ☐ Confirm back-up arrangements for medical equipment
- ☐ Keep outdoor fuel-burning equipment away from doors and openings
- ☐ Check how you'd manage five days without power or tap water
- ☐ Check which circuits solar or batteries support in an outage
- ☐ If the switchboard gets wet, stay clear and call your distributor or a licensed electrician
- ☐ Keep printed operating instructions and labelled parts with backup equipment

Property upkeep and access

- ☐ Identify repairs needing licensed trades
- ☐ Clear access for household members and responders
- ☐ Practise opening gates and garage doors manually. Plan a way out if lifts stop
- ☐ Check storage for water, kits and essential equipment
- ☐ Record emergency maintenance and building contact numbers
- ☐ Record the home type, whether you rent or own, and any strata arrangements
- ☐ Keep building manager, landlord and licensed trade contacts with the plan
- ☐ List the most important work first and get qualified advice or quotes for larger jobs
- ☐ Start with low-cost improvements such as printing contacts and routes or testing existing equipment

Record your home arrangements

Home type or tenure

Strata, landlord or utility contact

Improvement to arrange

Your plan

Jobs that need a tradesperson, landlord or strata

Where our power, gas and water shut-offs are

Our safe room

Want to know more?

Ask whether your rebuild estimate includes clean-up, demolition, asbestos removal, fees and current building costs. Check accommodation limits separately. Calculators give you a starting figure. Discuss the result with your insurer.

- Electrical Safety Office - Electrical safety during storms - power, water and storm damage.
- Fire and Rescue NSW - Home escape plans - planning two ways out.
- Queensland Fire Department - Indoor fire safety - heaters, candles and cooking.
- Get Ready Queensland - Sandbags - where to get them and how to lay them.
- Insurance Council - Underinsurance - checking your sum insured.
- Insurance Council - Calculators - rebuild and contents estimates.
- National Debt Helpline - free financial counselling on 1800 007 007.
- Queensland Fire Department - smoke alarm requirements - source for the factual example above.

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Neighbours and support

Neighbours are the first responders

In almost every Australian disaster, the first people to help are the ones already there: neighbours, friends, workmates and passers-by. In the 2022 Lismore floods, locals in their own boats rescued people from rooftops while emergency services were stretched across the region. After storms and cyclones, it's usually neighbours who clear the first fallen tree, check on the older couple down the road and share a generator to keep someone's medicines cold.

A support network is simply a few people who've agreed to look out for each other. It doesn't need meetings or an app. It just needs to exist before it's needed.

Your household

Before reaching out, agree the roles at home:

- a plan keeper and a backup
- who looks after children, pets and anyone with extra needs
- your meeting point and what happens if someone misses a check-in
- who's authorised to collect children from school or childcare

The Your household page covers this in detail.

Then look next door

Many of us don't know our neighbours well. That's fine - it's never too late, and an emergency plan is a good reason to knock.

How to start the conversation:

"Hi, I'm putting together an emergency plan for our place. Would you be happy to swap numbers, so we can check on each other if the power's out or there's a storm?"

Most people say yes. Some will be relieved you asked.

What to agree with a neighbour:

- how you'll check on each other (a text, a knock, a call)
- when you'll check, such as after a warning or if the power has been out for a few hours
- whether either of you has a spare key
- who could look after pets if one of you is away
- anything the other person should know, such as medical equipment, a person who can't hear warnings or a car that needs moving

Keep it two-way. People are more comfortable accepting help when they can offer something too.

People who might be missed

In every street there are people who are easy to overlook:

- people living alone, especially older people
- people with disability or chronic illness
- new arrivals and people who don't speak much English
- people without a car
- new parents with young babies
- people who are unwell or recently out of hospital

You don't need to know their private details. A friendly introduction and a phone number is enough.

A street contact list

A simple printed list of names and numbers for the people on your street can be extremely useful when phones are patchy and you're trying to check on everyone.

Do it respectfully:

- Only include people who've agreed to be on it.
- Ask what they're comfortable sharing - a mobile number may be all they want.
- Give everyone on the list a copy, and nobody else.
- Keep it on paper as well as on phones.
- Update it once a year.

Street groups and group chats

A private group chat or message group can help neighbours share updates quickly. A few tips:

- Choose two trusted people to run it.
- Agree that the group shares official updates and offers of help, not rumours.
- Ask people to include the source when they share a warning ("from the Bureau" or "from the council dashboard").
- Have a plan that works without it. Group chats stop when phones and internet fail. That's why the paper list and agreed check-in times matter.

Skills on your street

Your neighbours have skills you may not know about. Someone might be a nurse, an electrician, a builder or good with a chainsaw. Someone might have a generator, a boat, a ute, a ham radio or a spare room.

You don't need to keep a register. But asking "is there anything you'd be able to help with in an emergency?" when you swap numbers often brings out useful answers. Practical skills and ways to practise them are covered below.

Beyond your street

- **Family and friends outside the area** can be your out-of-area contact, a place to stay and the person who checks on you if you go quiet.
- **Community groups, clubs and places of worship** often organise help quickly after an emergency.
- **Your workplace** may have its own emergency plan and leave arrangements.
- **Volunteering.** If you'd like to do more, groups such as the SES, rural fire services and Red Cross train volunteers. Spontaneous help after a disaster is welcome, but registering with an organisation first means your effort goes where it's needed most.

When phones stop working

Agree with your neighbours what you'll do if phones and internet go down:

- a set time to check in, such as 8 am and 6 pm
- a visible signal, such as a card in the window (green for "OK", red for "need help")
- a meeting point on the street, such as a particular letterbox or corner

Practise together

Walk your routes, test your radios and practise your check-in plan once a year - perhaps at the start of storm or fire season. If your street is keen, a short get-together over a barbecue is a good way to share plans and meet people.

A first aid course is one of the most useful things a neighbour can do. It helps in everyday accidents as well as emergencies.

Skills and practical support

Skills matter as much as supplies

A well-stocked kit is useful. People who know how to use it - and how to help each other - are more useful still. In most emergencies, the first help comes from the people already there, and a few practical skills spread across a household or a street make a big difference.

Skills worth learning

You don't need to be an expert. Even a basic level of these is valuable:

- **First aid and CPR.** The single most useful skill. A one-day course covers CPR, bleeding, burns, choking, fractures and more. Refresh CPR every year.
- **Using your radio.** Find your local ABC station, and practise tuning it in the dark.
- **Turning off power, gas and water.** Know where your shut-offs are and when it's safe to use them.
- **Reading warnings.** Understand the warning levels and Fire Danger Ratings.

- **Basic home maintenance.** Clearing gutters safely, tying down loose items, putting a tarp over a broken window.
- **Using your backup equipment.** Starting a generator safely outdoors, using a power station, fitting snow chains.
- **Navigating without GPS.** Reading a paper map.
- **Cooking without power.** Using a camp stove safely outdoors.
- **Looking after animals in stressful situations.** Getting pets into carriers, handling frightened animals.
- **Psychological first aid.** Simple ways to support someone who's distressed. Some organisations run short courses.

Practise together

Practice turns knowledge into confidence:

- Take turns finding the radio and getting a weather update.
- Do a short first aid refresher as a household.
- Run a power-outage evening: lights off, torches on, dinner without power.
- Walk your escape route at night.
- Let older children lead part of a drill.

Who can help, and with what?

Think about the people around you and what they could offer - and what you could offer them. It might be:

- someone with medical or nursing training
- an electrician, plumber or builder
- someone with a chainsaw licence
- someone with a 4WD, ute, boat or trailer
- someone with a generator or power station
- someone who speaks another language
- someone who's good with animals
- someone who's calm and good at organising

Ask neighbours what help they'd like and what they could safely offer. Keep it informal and voluntary - people join by choice. Be careful about asking people to do things they're not trained or licensed for, especially electrical work, tree felling or roof work.

Volunteering

If you'd like to do more, emergency services and community organisations train volunteers:

- **State Emergency Service (SES)** - storm and flood response, rescue and community education.

- **Rural fire services and CFA/CFS brigades** - firefighting and community safety.
- **Australian Red Cross** - evacuation centres, Register.Find.Reunite and recovery support.
- **Local community and recovery groups** - often very active after a disaster.

Registering and training before an emergency means your help goes where it's needed most. Spontaneous volunteering after a disaster is welcome, but working through an organisation keeps you and others safe.

Household responsibilities

☐ Nominate a plan keeper and backup
☐ Agree who supports children, pets and anyone with extra needs
☐ Arrange a meeting point and missed-check-in action
☐ Confirm authorised school or childcare pickup

Neighbours and support

☐ Ask trusted neighbours about a two-way check-in
☐ Agree an out-of-area contact
☐ Confirm an alternate driver or carer
☐ Check access or communication needs before relying on an arrangement
☐ Use consenting contact details only and keep them secure
☐ Nominate trusted admins for a private street group
☐ Agree to share brief, sourced official updates

Practice and community support

☐ Practise the routes and check-in plan
☐ Test radio reception and offline navigation
☐ Arrange first aid training or refresher where relevant
☐ Find official local volunteering and support channels

Your plan

Neighbours we've agreed to check on

Our check-in times if phones are down

People on our street who may need help

Skills or equipment we can offer

Skills and support details

Neighbour or support contact

Practical skill to practise

Carer or pet backup

First aid course booked or completed

What we've checked

☐ Discussed check-ins

☐ Arranged first aid refresher

Want to know more?

Agree what help each person can offer and how you will check in if phones stop working.

- Australian Red Cross - Get organised - planning with the people around you.
- Australian Red Cross - Get Prepared app - keep your support contacts together.
- Telecommunications in emergencies - why phones fail and how to plan around it.
- ABC News - Lismore community rescues - how neighbours helped in the 2022 floods.
- ACNC - Supporting disaster relief - how to give and volunteer safely.

Australian Red Cross - Prepare

- skills and planning.

healthdirect - How to perform CPR

- a refresher.

Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness workbook (PDF)

- mapping support networks.

Online sources · 21 November 2026 · Guide version 3.1
Open the online sources for all sections

Contacts

Keep your key contacts, local services and trusted suppliers together. Enter your suburb or postcode to see more specific contacts, then select those you want in your book or add your own.

Why paper contacts matter. When phones go flat or networks fail, the numbers saved in your phone are out of reach. A printed list means anyone in the household - or a neighbour helping you - can make the call.

How to build your list.

1. Confirm your council in Your household. Local contacts for your area will appear.
2. Tick the services you want in your book: your warning service, council, SES, electricity distributor, water provider, gas distributor, hospital and after-hours doctor or pharmacy.
3. Add your own contacts: family, your out-of-area contact, neighbours, your GP, vet, school, workplace, landlord or strata manager, insurer and any support workers.
4. Mark any contact as private if it shouldn't appear on shared copies.

A good contact list includes:

- Emergency: Triple Zero (000) for life-threatening emergencies
- Storm and flood help: SES 132 500 where available
- Non-urgent police: 131 444 where available
- Health advice: healthdirect 1800 022 222 (13 HEALTH 13 43 25 84 in Queensland; NURSE-ON-CALL 1300 60 60 24 in Victoria)
- Poisons Information Centre: 13 11 26
- Interpreting: TIS National 131 450
- Your electricity distributor's faults line (not your retailer)
- Your water provider and gas distributor
- Your insurer's claims line and policy number
- Lifeline 13 11 14

Example. A filled-in contact list for a fictional household might read: "Mum (out-of-area contact) - Toowoomba - 04xx xxx xxx. Jan next door - 04xx xxx xxx - has our spare key. Dr Lee, Cleveland Medical - 07 xxxx xxxx. Bayside Vets - 07 xxxx xxxx."

Check it twice a year. Call one or two numbers to make sure they still work.

Enter your suburb or postcode for local contacts

Key contacts

Local suppliers and community organisations

Find suppliers and community organisations that serve your area.

Search by name or category

Browse the full supplier directory

Official directory suggestions

Suggested contacts

Australia-wide resources

Add your own contact

Contact type

Contact name

Organisation

Phone number

Website or email

Repeat in section

Notes

Private contact

Saved contacts in your book

Print and keep current your book

Want to know more?

Bookmark reliable sources for the services you use. Check unfamiliar messages against a number or site you already trust.

Sources · Version 3.1 · 21 November 2026 · All sources

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National contacts

Triple Zero 000 · Police, fire or ambulance when life is threatened

Bureau of Meteorology https://www.bom.gov.au/

SES storm and flood assistance 132 500 · Where available in your jurisdiction

healthdirect 1800 022 222

National Relay Service
https://www.accesshub.gov.au/about-the-nrs/how-to-make-an-emergency-call-using-the-nrs

TIS National 131 450

Australian Cyber Security Hotline 1300 292 371 · https://www.cyber.gov.au/contact-us

IDCARE 1800 595 160

Lifeline 13 11 14

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

Services Australia Emergency Information Line 180 22 66

National Security Hotline 1800 123 400

Police Assistance Line 131 444 · Where available

National Debt Helpline 1800 007 007

13YARN 13 92 76

1800RESPECT 1800 737 732

RSPCA state and territory contacts https://www.rspca.org.au/about/contact/

Scamwatch https://www.scamwatch.gov.au/

ABC Emergency https://www.abc.net.au/emergency/

Australian Red Cross Register.Find.Reunite
https://www.redcross.org.au/emergencies/about-register-find-reunite/

Council and state contacts appear after you enter a location. Your chosen contacts and supplier listings can be included using the Contacts checkbox in Review and print.

Print and keep current

Choose your sections below, then print your book. Set a review date and practise your arrangements in Keep your plan current.

This is where your plan becomes a book you can hold.

1. **Choose your pages.** Tick the sections you want. Most households need Your household, Your warnings, The first 24 hours, Stay or go, the hazards that apply where you live, Supplies, Contacts and the fridge sheet.
2. **Check your details.** Read through your answers and contacts before printing.
3. **Print or save as PDF.** Print two copies: one for home and one for a trusted person or a safe place away from home.
4. **Save a backup file.** If you change devices or clear your browser, you can load the backup and pick up where you left off.

Keep the printed book in a plastic sleeve or folder near the door, in the kitchen or wherever everyone knows to look.

Manage contacts in Contacts

Open Keep your plan current

Who will use this copy?

☐ Household copy

☐ Limited share copy

A limited share copy leaves out fields and contacts marked private.

☐ Use large print

For a PDF, choose Save as PDF in your browser’s print window. A PDF is a copy you can read and share. To move your editable plan to another browser, use a backup file.

Download the complete guide with blank planning fields (PDF)

Back up your editable plan

Your backup includes any private answers you entered. Keep it somewhere secure and only load a backup you trust. Loading a backup replaces what’s in this browser.

Load a backup file

Want to know more?

Print the sections you need and check that the contacts and household details are current before putting the book away.

Sources · Version 3.1 · 21 November 2026 · All sources

Online sources · 21 November 2026 · Guide version 3.1
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Sections and subsections

The checklist follows the sections in this document. The Contacts checkbox includes the official contacts and the contacts already saved in Contacts and suppliers.

Keep your plan current

Why plans go stale

A plan is only useful if it's right on the day you need it. Phone numbers change. Children grow up and change schools. Someone starts a new medicine. Torch batteries go flat in the drawer. Water stored two years ago tastes of plastic. The neighbour who agreed to check on you moves away.

None of this is a failure. It just means a plan needs a short, regular check - the same way a smoke alarm needs testing.

Pick two dates

Choose two dates a year that are easy to remember. Good options:

- **The start of your local storm or fire season** - often September or October in much of Australia.
- **A date you already notice** - New Year's Day, a birthday or the start of a school term.

The site can give you a calendar file with reminders for 1 October and New Year's Day. Import it into your own calendar - no email address needed.

Also review your plan whenever something big changes: a move, a new baby, a new pet, a new diagnosis or medicine, a new car (especially an electric one), a relationship change or a new job with different hours.

Three ways to do a review

The 15-minute check. Do this at least twice a year.

- Press the test button on every smoke alarm.
- Switch on every torch and the radio.
- Charge the power banks.
- Look at the dates on stored water, food and medicines.
- Read the contact list out loud. Is anyone missing or out of date?

The one-hour review. Do this once a year, before storm or fire season.

- Everything in the 15-minute check.
- Rotate stored water and pantry food: eat what's close to its date and replace it.
- Check first aid supplies and replace anything used or expired.
- Update the medication list for each person.
- Check pet food, medicines, carriers and vaccinations.
- Re-read your insurance policy and check the sum insured.
- Print a fresh copy of the plan and the fridge sheet.
- Restore one file from your backup to make sure it works.

The half-day practice. Do this every year or two, or when the household changes.

- Everything in the one-hour review.
- Walk your escape routes from the house.
- Drive your two routes out and to your destinations.
- Practise opening garage doors and gates by hand.
- Test backup power: how long does the power bank run the phone, the fan or the medical equipment?
- Run a short drill with children (see below).
- Check in with your neighbours and update the street contact list.
- Check roof, gutters, drains and trees from the ground, and book qualified people for any repairs.

Running a drill with children

Drills help children know what to do without frightening them, if you keep them short, calm and practical.

- Explain it first: "We're going to practise what we'd do if the smoke alarm went off, like a fire drill at school."
- Keep it short - five or ten minutes.
- Let them do the jobs they'd have on the day: grabbing their bag, holding the torch, walking to the meeting place.
- Praise what went well, and talk about one thing to do differently.
- Finish with something enjoyable.

For teenagers, ask them to lead part of it.

What to check, by part of the plan

People. Phone numbers, schools, workplaces, support workers, who has a key, who's authorised to collect children. Who keeps the plan current?

Health. Medication lists, doses, prescribers and pharmacy. Equipment batteries and how long they last. Arrangements for medicines that need refrigeration. Any new support needs.

Animals. Microchip details, vaccinations, food, medicines, carriers and where they'd go.

Supplies. Water, food, medicines, batteries, first aid, cash, documents.

Communications. Your phone plan's emergency calling and satellite features, the radio frequency, the warning app settings, and your out-of-area contact.

Home. Smoke alarms, shut-offs, gutters, trees, loose items, building contacts, insurance.

Routes and destinations. Are your destinations still available? Have roads changed?

Keep a record

At the bottom of the plan, write the date you last checked it and who did it. It helps you remember when the next check is due, and shows anyone else who picks up the book how current it is.

After an emergency

The best time to improve a plan is straight after you've used it, while you still remember what worked. The Restock and review page has a short household debrief.

This review

- ☐ Rotated supplies and checked expiry dates
- ☐ Tested backup equipment and communications
- ☐ Updated contacts, routes and destinations
- ☐ Checked medical and pet arrangements
- ☐ Restored a file from backup

Last checked

Checked by

Set your own reminders

Download an optional calendar file for 1 October and New Year’s Day each year. Import it into your own calendar to receive a reminder. No email address is needed.

Your plan

Our two review dates

Want to know more?

Review the plan after changes to your home, household or medicines as well as at your regular seasonal check.

- Queensland Health - Get ready - health checks to include in your review.
- Australian Red Cross - Resources - printable planning tools.
- Electrical Safety Office - Storms - pre-season electrical checks.
- Fire and Rescue NSW - Home escape plans - practising your escape.
- ABC Radio reception - check your local frequency hasn't changed.

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Welcome

Choose a guide

- The first 24 hours
- Hazards
- When services stop
- Outages, cyber and public safety
- People who need extra planning
- After it’s over

Why prepare at all?

Most of us will live through at least one emergency where we live. It might be a flood that cuts the road, a storm that takes the power out for a week or a phone network that drops out for a day. For most households the danger isn't the event itself. It's the hours or days afterwards, without power, water, phone signal or a way to get to the shops.

Emergency services do remarkable work, but during a big event they can't reach everyone at once. In the 2022 Lismore floods, neighbours with boats rescued people while crews were stretched. After Cyclone Alfred in 2025, some south-east Queensland homes were without power for more than a week. A small amount of preparation means your household can look after itself for those first few days, and has the energy left to help the people around you.

Preparing isn't about expecting the worst. It's about having a plan you've already thought through, so you're not making big decisions in a hurry.

Who this guide is for

This guide is written for every kind of household:

- families with young children or teenagers
- people living alone, including older people
- renters, apartment and unit owners, and people in strata buildings
- people with disability, chronic illness or who rely on powered equipment
- carers, including people caring for someone from a distance
- households with pets, horses or livestock
- people who speak a language other than English at home
- people living on islands, in the bush or in places that can be cut off

You don't need any special knowledge, equipment or budget to start. Most of the steps in this guide cost nothing.

Three ways to use this site

Read. Each page explains what could happen and the practical steps you can take. Start with the hazards that affect where you live.

Plan. Fill in the "Your plan" sections as you go. Your answers stay in this browser on this device. Nothing is sent to us.

Print. When you're ready, go to Print and keep current. Choose the pages you want and print your own household emergency book. Keep it somewhere everyone at home can find it, and make a second copy for someone you trust.

What a prepared household looks like

A prepared household doesn't have a bunker or a garage full of tins. It usually has:

- a printed plan that everyone knows about
- enough water and food for a few days, mostly things you already eat
- a torch, a battery radio and a way to charge phones
- medicines and important documents ready to grab
- a neighbour or two who'll check in
- a plan for pets
- an agreed meeting place and a contact outside the area

That's it. Everything else in this guide builds on those basics.

Reassurance worth holding on to

Most emergencies in Australia come with some warning. Cyclones are tracked for days. River floods are forecast. Fire danger is rated every day through the fire season. Even when power or phones fail, services are usually restored in hours or days.

The point of preparing is to make those hours and days easier, safer and calmer - for you and for the people who depend on you.

About the information here

The guidance in this book comes from Australian emergency services, health departments and government agencies, linked throughout so you can check the original. It's general information. It can't replace the warnings for your area, the directions of emergency services or advice from your own doctor, insurer or a qualified tradesperson.

If you notice something that's out of date, please use **Suggest an improvement**. Every correction helps the next household.

Want to know more?

Make a second copy and let a trusted person know where to find it. You can also use the Red Cross Get Prepared app or download a RediPlan.

- Get Ready Queensland - Emergency kit - a clear starting point for kits and plans, useful wherever you live.
- Australian Red Cross - Prepare - planning tools, the Get Prepared app and resources in Easy English and Auslan.
- Australian Warning System - what each warning level means and what it asks you to do.
- NEMA - Multi-language preparedness resources - preparedness information in many languages.
- Powerlink - Callide restoration report and Energex - Alfred restoration - how long two recent Queensland outages lasted.

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The first 24 hours

Why the first day matters

The first day of an emergency is when people are most likely to be hurt, and when help is hardest to get. Roads may be cut, phone lines busy and emergency services stretched. It's also when small, calm decisions make the biggest difference: leaving while the road is still open, keeping the freezer shut, sending one clear text instead of ten worried ones.

This page walks through the first day in stages. You won't need every step. Use the ones that fit what's happening.

The first 10 minutes

People first. Check that everyone at home is safe. Count heads, including animals. If someone is hurt or in danger, call Triple Zero (000).

If you're told to leave, leave. Take people and animals. Grab your go bag, medicines, phone and charger only if they're within reach. Everything else can be replaced.

If you're told to shelter, go to the safest room for the hazard: an inside room away from windows for a storm or cyclone, a higher floor for a flood if you can't get out, and, if a bushfire warning says it's too late to leave, a room with two ways out and water nearby. For a fire inside your home, get out and stay out.

Keep clear of danger. Stay away from floodwater, fallen power lines, smoke and damaged buildings. Treat every fallen line as live.

The first hour

Read the warning for your exact area. Find out what it asks you to do, and whether your route out is open. Check your state warning service and ABC Local Radio.

Send one clear message. Text your out-of-area contact. Keep it short and specific so it doesn't need a reply:

"All OK. At home. Power out. Will update at 6 pm."

Short texts often get through when calls don't.

If the power is out, note the time. That tells you how long food has been without refrigeration and when medicines need attention. Keep the fridge and freezer shut.

Switch to backups. Torches instead of candles. A battery radio. Powered medical equipment onto its backup battery - check how long it will last and when you'll need to act.

Check on anyone who relies on you. A neighbour who lives alone, an older relative, a person you support.

The first evening

Make a plan for the night. If you're staying, decide where everyone will sleep, who checks the warnings and when. Keep shoes, a torch and your phone by the bed.

Food and water. Eat food from the fridge first, then the freezer, then the pantry. Keep drinking water separate from water for washing and flushing.

Temperature. In heat, find the coolest room, close curtains on the sunny side and drink regularly. In cold, gather in one room, layer clothing and never use a BBQ, camp stove, heater or generator indoors or in a garage - carbon monoxide can kill without warning.

Phones. Turn on low-power mode, lower screen brightness and close apps you don't need. Use the car to charge if it's safe to run it outside.

Children. Keep routines where you can: dinner, a story, the same bedtime. Tell them what's happening in simple words and what the grown-ups are doing to keep everyone safe.

Overnight and the next morning

- Check warnings before you sleep and as soon as you wake.
- Keep the radio on low if conditions may change.
- In the morning, check water, food, medicines, phone battery, toilets and temperature.
- Send your out-of-area contact the update you promised.
- Check on neighbours when it's safe to go outside.

When to leave, even without a warning

Leave early if:

- someone needs cooling, heating or powered equipment and you're about to lose it
- you're running low on safe water or medicines
- your toilet isn't working and won't be soon
- your only road may close and someone in the household needs time or help to move

Never cross floodwater or drive on a closed road.

Calling for help

When you call Triple Zero (000), the operator will ask: police, fire or ambulance? Then:

- your address, nearest cross street or a landmark
- what's happened
- how many people are with you, and whether anyone is injured
- whether anyone needs mobility or medical help
- whether animals are with you

Stay on the line and follow instructions. If you can't talk, stay on the line and listen. For storm or flood damage that isn't life-threatening, call the SES on 132 500. For non-urgent police matters,

call 131 444 where available.

If someone is missing

If you can't reach someone, don't go looking in dangerous areas. Call Triple Zero (000) if you believe they're in danger. When Australian Red Cross opens Register.Find.Reunite for an event, you can register yourself as safe and search for others.

Evacuation centres

Evacuation centres are opened by councils and emergency services when people need a safe place to go. They offer basic shelter, information and support. They can be noisy and crowded, and you may need to sleep on a stretcher or mat.

If you go, take:

- medicines, scripts and medical equipment with chargers
- phone and charger
- identification, cash and cards
- a change of clothes, toiletries and a pillow or blanket
- food and items for babies or people with special diets
- comfort items for children

Check whether pets are accepted before you go. Some centres take pets or have arrangements nearby.

Looking after yourselves

Fear, shock and exhaustion are normal on the first day. Eat something, drink water and take turns resting. Keep children close. Check in with each other. Things that feel overwhelming now usually look clearer after a meal and some sleep.

Your plan

Our first text to the out-of-area contact

Where everyone sleeps if we're sheltering

Who checks the warnings overnight

Want to know more?

Jot down when the power went off, when any medicine needs attention, and when you next expect to hear from each person.

- Australian Red Cross - Register.Find.Reunite - let people know you're safe, and find others.
- NSW Government - Be ready for an emergency evacuation - practical evacuation guidance for any state.
- ACMA - Emergency calls - how Triple Zero calls work on different networks.
- healthdirect - Natural disasters - health advice during and after a disaster.

- Energex - Cyclone Alfred update, 9 March 2025 - what the early days of a major outage looked like.
- Australian Warning System - what each warning asks you to do.

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Hazards near you

Know your own risk

Every part of Australia has its own mix of hazards. A house on a Brisbane floodplain, a unit in Melbourne, a farm in the Darling Downs and a beach shack in Tasmania all need different plans. The quickest way to find out what matters for you is to look at your own address.

Step 1. Check the maps. Most councils publish flood, bushfire and storm tide maps. Look up your address, your street and the roads you use to get to work, school, the doctor and your backup destination.

Step 2. Ask about history. Long-term neighbours, your council and local historical societies can tell you what's happened before. Was the street cut off in 2011 or 2022? Did the power go out for days after a cyclone?

Step 3. Think about your dependencies. What's the one thing your household can't easily do without? A single bridge, a ferry, a lift, a water pump, a phone network, a carer who has to drive in? Plan a fallback for that first.

Step 4. Read the pages that apply. Start with the hazards most likely where you live. Read the less common ones later.

How the hazard pages work

Each hazard page has the same shape, so you know where to look:

- **What it is** - plain explanation and who is most affected
- **What it looked like** - real Australian events and what we can learn from them
- **Know your risk** - how to check your address
- **Your warning** - who warns you and what to do at each level
- **Before, during and after** - practical steps
- **Extra support** - children, older people, disability, pets and more
- **Common myths**
- **Your plan and Want to know more?**

- Storms, hail and damaging winds
- Flood and dam releases
- Bushfire and grassfire
- Heatwave, smoke and indoor heat
- Tropical cyclone and storm tide

- Earthquake
- Tsunami
- Landslide
- Dust storms and drought
- Extreme cold, snow and ice

- Public health emergency and animal disease
- Medical emergency at home
- Home fire and escape
- Rare but real

What we rely on locally For example, a ferry, lift or powered water pump.

What we can use instead Write down an alternative that doesn't rely on the same service.

Want to know more?

Check hazards for your route to school, work, medical care or your backup destination. Two roads across the same floodplain may close together.

- Get Ready Queensland - Know your risk - hazard-by-hazard guidance and how to find local maps.
- Get Ready Queensland - Find your local council - council maps and disaster dashboards.
- Australian Warning System - the warning levels used for most hazards.
- Bureau of Meteorology - Severe weather knowledge centre - how weather hazards develop.

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Storms, hail and damaging winds

If a cyclone is approaching, also read Tropical cyclone and storm tide for forecast timelines, evacuation zones and sheltering.

What a severe storm is

Storms are the most common natural hazard in Australia, and they cause more insured damage than any other kind of event in most years. A severe thunderstorm can form in an hour and pass in twenty minutes, but leave behind a damaged roof, fallen trees, flooded streets and days without power.

The Bureau of Meteorology calls a thunderstorm severe when it produces one or more of:

- hail 2 cm or more across
- wind gusts of 90 km/h or more
- heavy rain that may cause flash flooding
- tornadoes

Other storm systems matter too. **East Coast Lows** are intense low-pressure systems off the eastern seaboard that bring days of heavy rain, damaging winds and big seas. **Cold fronts** in southern Australia can bring damaging winds across a whole state.

What it looked like

Victoria, February 2024. Severe storms brought down six transmission towers near Anakie. AEMO reported about 530,000 customers without power at the peak. By 7.30 am the next day, that had fallen to about 285,500. Some homes waited days.

Brisbane, 31 October 2020. A hailstorm with very large hail hit Brisbane's southern and western suburbs on Halloween afternoon, damaging thousands of homes and cars. ABC - October 2020 hailstorm

Melbourne, 21 November 2016. A storm swept pollen across the city and triggered thunderstorm asthma. Thousands of people needed emergency care in a few hours, and ten people died. Many had never had asthma before.

South-east Queensland, Christmas 2023. Severe storms over the Gold Coast hinterland and Scenic Rim brought down trees and power lines, leaving many households without power over the holidays. ABC - Christmas 2023 storm restoration

The lesson from all four: a storm is usually short, but the after-effects can last for days. A torch, a radio, a plan for food and a neighbour who'll check in make that time easier.

Know your risk

Storms can happen anywhere, but some places see more of them. South-east Queensland and north-east New South Wales are among the most storm-prone areas in the country, especially from October to March.

Think about:

- large trees near your house, your car or your power line
- an older roof, or one that hasn't been checked for a few years
- loose items in the yard or on balconies
- whether your street floods in heavy rain
- whether anyone in your household has asthma or hay fever

Your warning

The Bureau issues **Severe Thunderstorm Warnings** with a map showing where storms are and where they're likely to move. Fast-growing storms can give very little notice, so check the radar on days when storms are forecast.

The Bureau also issues **Severe Weather Warnings** for larger systems such as East Coast Lows and damaging wind events.

In some states, thunderstorm asthma forecasts are published during pollen season. If someone in your home has asthma or hay fever, check them.

Before

Around the home

- Clear gutters and downpipes before storm season.
- Have a licensed roofer check the roof, and an arborist check large trees.
- Know where loose items will go when a warning is issued: trampolines, outdoor furniture, bins, pot plants.
- Choose your safe room: an inside room away from windows, such as a bathroom or hallway.

On storm days

- Charge phones and power banks.
- Park the car under cover, or away from trees.
- Bring pets inside.
- Know where the torch and radio are.

Health

- If anyone has asthma, make sure their action plan is current and their reliever is with them.
- People with hay fever should talk to their doctor about thunderstorm asthma.

During

- Go inside and stay inside. Move away from windows and glass doors.
- If the storm is severe, go to your safe room. Shelter under a strong table or mattress if the roof is damaged.
- **Lightning:** if you can hear thunder, you're close enough to be struck. Get inside a solid building or a hard-topped car. Avoid using a corded phone and stay out of the shower. Wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder before going back outside.
- **Driving:** if visibility drops or hail starts, pull over somewhere safe, away from trees, power lines and creeks. Stay inside the car.
- **At the beach, on a boat or at sport:** move to solid shelter as soon as you hear thunder.
- **Asthma:** if someone has trouble breathing, follow their asthma action plan and call Triple Zero (000) if they don't improve.

After

- **Fallen power lines:** stay at least 8 metres away and treat them as live. Call your electricity distributor, or Triple Zero (000) if anyone is in danger.
- **Damage:** photograph it from a safe spot before cleaning up. Contact your insurer.
- **Help:** for urgent storm damage that isn't life-threatening, such as a tree on the roof or a leak you can't control, call the SES on 132 500 where available. The SES can put a tarp over a damaged roof to stop more water getting in.
- **Roofs and trees:** leave these to trained workers. Many storm injuries happen during clean-up.
- **Food:** if the power has been out, check the Food and safe cooking page before eating from the fridge or freezer.
- **Neighbours:** check on people who live alone.

- **Scams:** be careful of door-knocking tradespeople offering cheap repairs. Use licensed tradespeople and check with your insurer first.

If you need extra support

- **People who rely on powered equipment** need a backup plan if the power goes out for days. See Backup power.
- **Older people and people living alone** should have someone who'll check on them after a storm.
- **Children** can be frightened by thunder. Stay calm, explain what's happening and keep them busy with a game or story in the safe room.
- **Pets** often bolt during storms. Keep them inside, and make sure their microchip details are up to date.

Common myths

- **"Lightning never strikes the same place twice."** It can and does, especially tall objects.
- **"Rubber tyres protect you in a car."** It's the metal body that protects you, not the tyres. Soft-top cars and motorbikes don't protect you.
- **"Taping windows stops them breaking."** It doesn't. Stay away from windows instead.
- **"It's only a storm, it'll be over soon."** The storm may be, but the clean-up and outages may not.

Your plan

Most sheltered room

Where we check storm warnings

Where loose items go in a storm

Our electricity distributor's faults number

Who checks on whom after a storm

What we've checked

☐ Identified safe shelter away from windows

Want to know more?

Park under cover before hail arrives. Ask a qualified installer about damaged solar panels or skylights and an arborist about unsafe branches. At the beach, on a boat or at sport, move to substantial shelter when you hear thunder.

- Bureau of Meteorology - Severe weather knowledge centre - how storms form and how warnings work.
- Get Ready Queensland - Storm - storm risk and preparation.
- NSW SES - Storm season - preparing your home and getting help.

- Get Ready Queensland - Downed power lines - what to do and who to call.
- Electrical Safety Office - Storms - electrical safety after storm damage.
- AEMO - Power system event in Victoria - the February 2024 storms and outages.
- ABC - October 2020 hailstorm - source for the factual example above.
- ABC - Christmas 2023 storm restoration - source for the factual example above.

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Flood and dam releases

Three kinds of flood

Flooding is one of Australia's most costly natural hazards, and it can happen almost anywhere. It helps to know which kind of flood you might face, because each gives a different amount of warning.

River (riverine) flooding happens when rain over a catchment fills creeks and rivers until they spill over their banks. It can take hours or days to arrive, and it can last for days or weeks. The rain that causes it may have fallen far upstream, under blue skies where you live.

Flash flooding happens when heavy rain falls faster than the ground and drains can take it. Water rises in minutes in streets, underpasses, gullies and small creeks. It's fast, often at night, and often gives little or no warning. Most flood deaths in Australia involve people driving or walking into floodwater, frequently in flash flooding.

Coastal flooding and storm tide happen when strong winds and low pressure push seawater onto low-lying land, especially when this coincides with a high tide. See Tropical cyclone and storm tide.

What it looked like

Brisbane, January 2011. After weeks of rain across south-east Queensland, the Brisbane River flooded large parts of the city. A few days earlier, a flash flood had swept through Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley with almost no warning. The two events showed both kinds of flooding within days of each other.

Townsville, February 2019. Days of extreme monsoon rain filled the Ross River Dam. Its spillway gates were opened to protect the dam, and water flowed into suburbs that hadn't flooded before. Many residents hadn't expected to be affected.

Lismore, February and March 2022. The Wilsons River reached 14.4 m at the Lismore gauge - well above previous records. Emergency services were stretched, and local boat owners helped rescue neighbours. ABC News reported that two friends in a small boat rescued 25 people. A second major flood followed about a month later, while people were still cleaning up.

The lessons: floods can exceed anything seen before, dams can't prevent every flood, and a dry house can still be cut off. Know your routes and leave while they're open.

Know your risk

- **Look up flood maps** for your address and the roads you use. Councils and state agencies publish them. They often show flooding at different likelihoods, such as a 1% chance each year. That doesn't mean it only happens once a century - it can happen in consecutive years.
- **Look beyond your house.** Your home may be on high ground while every road out goes through a dip. Check your access.
- **Find your river gauge.** If you live near a river, find the nearest Bureau river gauge and learn what different heights mean for your street. Long-term locals often know.
- **Know if you live below a dam.** Dam operators publish emergency information. Releases are planned to protect the dam, and they can raise water levels downstream.
- **Ask about history.** Did your street flood in 1974, 2011 or 2022? Your council or neighbours may know.

Your warning

- **Flood Watch** (Bureau): flooding is possible in the coming days. Start getting ready.
- **Flood Warning** (Bureau): flooding is happening or expected, usually with predicted river heights and times at gauges.
- **Emergency warnings** (state agencies and councils): tell you what to do, using the Advice, Watch and Act and Emergency Warning levels.
- **Your own triggers:** water reaching a marker you can see, heavy rain over your local creek, or a predicted river height for your gauge.

Flash floods can happen before any warning reaches you. If you see water rising fast, act.

Before

Plan

- Decide when you'll leave. Write down your trigger.
- Pick a destination on higher ground and two routes that don't cross low points.
- Allow extra time for children, animals, livestock and anyone who needs help to move.

Home

- Keep gutters and drains clear.
- Know how you'd lift furniture, electrical items and important papers up high.
- Know where to get sandbags and how to lay them. Sandbags slow water at doorways but don't stop it completely.
- Store chemicals, pesticides and fuel where floodwater can't reach them.

Insurance

- Check whether your home and contents policies cover flood, and how they define it. Flood cover isn't automatic everywhere, and storm tide may be treated differently.

During

- **Never walk, ride or drive through floodwater.** It only takes a small depth of moving water to sweep away a person or float a car. Water hides washed-out roads, open drains and debris. If it's flooded, forget it. Bureau of Meteorology - floodwater dangers
- **Leave early** if you're told to, or your trigger is reached.
- **Move cars and essentials** to higher ground early, but only if it won't delay leaving.
- **Turn off power and gas** only if it's safe and you're told to.
- **Tell your out-of-area contact** where you're going.
- **If you're trapped,** move to the highest part of the building. Take a phone, torch, drinking water and warm clothes. Call Triple Zero (000) if your life is in danger. Don't climb into a roof space unless you can get out through the roof.
- **Keep children away** from floodwater, drains and creeks. Floodwater looks like a playground, but it isn't.

After

Going back

- Wait until authorities say it's safe to return.
- Floodwater and mud can carry sewage, chemicals, dead animals and debris. Wear sturdy boots, gloves and long sleeves.
- Watch for snakes, spiders and other animals sheltering in your home.
- Don't use electrical items or switch on power until a licensed electrician has checked anything that got wet.

Health

- Don't drink tap or tank water until your water provider says it's safe.
- Throw out food that's been in contact with floodwater, and food from fridges that have been off too long.
- Wash hands often, especially before eating.
- Cover cuts and seek medical advice if a wound becomes red, swollen or painful.
- Mosquitoes breed after floods. Use repellent and cover up.

Cleaning up

- Photograph damage before cleaning, and contact your insurer before throwing out damaged items, unless they're a health risk.
- Dry the house as quickly as possible to limit mould.
- If your home was built before 1990, it may contain asbestos. Don't cut or break damaged sheeting.

The Return and clean up safely page has more.

If you need extra support

- **People with limited mobility** need early transport arrangements. Leave at the first warning.
- **Livestock and horses** should be moved to high ground well before flooding.
- **Renters** should talk to their property manager about repairs and rent during the clean-up.
- **Caravan and campground residents** are often in low-lying areas. Know the park's plan.

Common myths

- **"I know this road, I can get through."** Floodwater can wash away the road surface underneath.
- **"It's only a few centimetres."** Moving water is far stronger than it looks.
- **"A 1-in-100-year flood won't happen again soon."** It's a 1% chance every year, and it can happen two years running.
- **"The dam will stop the flood."** Dams reduce some floods but can't prevent them all, and releases can raise levels downstream.

Your plan

Higher ground or safe destination

Official flood map or warning source

Our nearest river gauge and the height that affects us

Where we get sandbags

What we've checked

☐ Checked official flood mapping

☐ Practised an alternate route

Want to know more?

Flash floods may rise too quickly for a warning. River floods can arrive long after rain upstream. Sandbags can slow shallow water at doorways. Follow SES instructions for building a sandbag wall and find local collection points before a warning.

- Bureau of Meteorology - Flood knowledge centre - flood watches, warnings and river gauges explained.
- Get Ready Queensland - Flood - understand your flood risk.
- NSW SES - Prepare for a flood - practical flood preparation.
- Get Ready Queensland - Sandbags - where to get them and how to lay them.
- Geoscience Australia - Flood - how and why floods happen.
- Australian CDC - Preventing disease after floods - staying healthy during the clean-up.
- healthdirect - Floods and cyclones - health advice.
- ABC News - Lismore community rescues - how neighbours helped in 2022.

- Bureau of Meteorology - floodwater dangers - source for the factual example above.

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Bushfire and grassfire

How fires threaten homes and people

Bushfires and grassfires are part of the Australian landscape. Most are small and quickly controlled. On hot, dry, windy days, though, fires can spread faster than people can run, jump roads and rivers, and reach towns and suburbs far from the bush.

Fires threaten people and homes in three main ways:

- **Embers** - burning twigs and bark carried ahead of the fire by the wind, sometimes several kilometres. Embers cause most house losses, often by landing in gutters, under decks or against doors and starting small fires that grow.
- **Radiant heat** - the intense heat given off by a fire, which can kill people in the open long before the flames reach them.
- **Direct flame** - the fire itself.

Grassfires need special mention. They start easily, spread very fast and can reach the edge of towns and cities. Many outer suburbs back onto grassland.

What it looked like

Black Saturday, Victoria, 7 February 2009. On a day of extreme heat and wind, fires across Victoria killed 173 people. It remains Australia's deadliest bushfire disaster. The Royal Commission that followed led to major changes in how fire danger is rated and how people are advised to leave early.

Black Summer, 2019-20. Fires burned across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, the ACT and other areas for months. More than 3,000 homes were destroyed, and smoke blanketed cities for weeks. In Mallacoota, about 4,000 people sheltered at the waterfront as fire reached the town on New Year's Eve. The Navy later evacuated 1,305 people and more than 150 pets.

The lessons: leave early on the worst days, have a plan for animals, and know that smoke can affect your health even far from the flames.

Know your risk

- Check your state fire service's bushfire-prone area maps for your home and the roads you use.
- Look at what surrounds you: bushland, grassland, parks, reserves or farmland within a few hundred metres.
- Think about your access: is there only one road out? Does it pass through bush?

- Think about the people in your home: who would need extra time or help to leave?

Even if your home isn't in a bushfire-prone area, smoke and travel disruptions can affect you, and you may be travelling through fire country on holiday.

Your warning

Fire Danger Ratings tell you how dangerous a fire could be if one starts:

- **Moderate:** plan and prepare.
- **High:** be ready to act.
- **Extreme:** take action now to protect life and property. If you and your home aren't prepared, leave early.
- **Catastrophic:** for your survival, leave bushfire risk areas. Plan where you'll go the night before, or leave early in the morning.

Incident warnings tell you about fires that are burning, using the Advice, Watch and Act and Emergency Warning levels. Your state fire service issues them.

Check the rating the night before and the morning of each day during the fire season. Use your state warning app, ABC Local Radio and your fire service website.

Your bushfire survival plan

Every state and territory fire service has a bushfire survival plan template. It asks you to decide, in advance:

- what will make you leave (your trigger)
- where you'll go and how you'll get there
- what you'll take, and who's responsible for what
- what you'll do with animals
- a backup plan if you can't leave

Fill one in for your household, and keep a copy with this book.

Leaving early

Fire services across Australia say leaving early is the safest option. Leaving early means going before a fire threatens you - often the night before or morning of a Catastrophic or Extreme day - not waiting to see smoke.

Leaving late is very dangerous. Roads can be blocked by smoke, fallen trees or traffic, visibility drops to almost nothing, and cars offer little protection from radiant heat.

Staying and defending

Staying to defend a home is only for people who are physically and mentally prepared, have a well-prepared property, the right equipment, a reliable water supply that doesn't depend on mains power, and protective clothing. Even then, fire services advise against it on Catastrophic days. Defending a home is hard, frightening and exhausting work. Many people who plan to stay change their minds when the fire arrives, which is the most dangerous time to leave.

If you're considering it, read your state fire service's guidance carefully and be honest about your capacity.

Before - prepare your property

- Clear gutters of leaves and twigs.
- Keep grass short and remove fine fuel (leaves, bark, small sticks) from around the house.
- Move woodpiles, mulch, gas bottles, fuel and outdoor furniture away from the walls.
- Prune branches overhanging the roof, using an arborist where needed.
- Seal gaps under eaves, doors and roofing where embers could enter.
- Make sure your house number is visible and the driveway is clear for fire trucks.
- Have hoses long enough to reach around the house, and know your water supply.

Check with your council and fire service before clearing vegetation; rules vary.

During

- **Follow the warning.** If it says leave, leave while the road is safe.
- **Never drive into smoke, flames or a closed road.**
- **If you're caught on the road,** pull over away from trees and long grass, turn headlights and hazard lights on, close windows and vents, get down below window level and cover yourself with a woollen blanket. Drink water. Stay in the car until the fire front passes.
- **If it's too late to leave,** follow the warning's shelter advice. Go inside, close doors and windows, and shelter in a room with two ways out and water nearby, away from the side facing the fire. Once the front passes, go outside to check for embers and spot fires if it's safe.
- **Smoke:** stay indoors with windows and doors closed. A well-fitted P2 mask can reduce smoke particles for some adults. It doesn't protect from heat or make an unsafe area safe.

After

- Wait until authorities say it's safe to return.
- Watch for hot spots, burning tree stumps, ash pits, falling branches and fallen power lines.
- Check tank water before using it - ash and firefighting chemicals can contaminate it.
- Wear protective clothing and a P2 mask when cleaning up ash, especially from older homes that may contain asbestos.
- Contact your insurer and photograph damage.
- Check on the people who were expecting to hear from you.

- Look after each other. Losing a home, a landscape or a community gathering place can be deeply upsetting.

Smoke and your health

Bushfire smoke can travel hundreds of kilometres. In early 2020, smoke made the air in Canberra and Sydney among the worst in the world for days at a time. Smoke is especially risky for people with heart or lung conditions, older people, pregnant people, babies and young children.

- Check air quality with your state environment agency or an app such as AirRater.
- Stay indoors and keep windows closed on smoky days.
- Use air conditioning on recirculate if you have it.
- Consider an air purifier with a HEPA filter for one room.
- Follow your asthma or heart action plan, and call Triple Zero (000) if someone has trouble breathing.

If you need extra support

- **People who need help to leave** should leave first and earliest - the evening before a Catastrophic day is not too early.
- **Horses and livestock** need a destination arranged well before the season, and a float or truck that can get there.
- **Visitors and travellers** should check fire danger along their route and know where they'd go if a fire started.

Common myths

- **"I'll wait and see if the fire comes."** By the time you can see it, it may be too late to leave safely.
- **"My house is in town, so I'm safe."** Embers and grassfires reach suburbs.
- **"Shorts and a T-shirt will do if I'm just leaving."** Cover all skin in long, loose clothing made of natural fibres such as wool or cotton. Synthetic fabrics can melt.
- **"Fires only happen in summer."** Fire seasons vary across Australia - in northern Australia they often peak in winter and spring.

Fire Danger Rating	What you can do
Moderate	Plan and prepare. Check your plan, kit and routes.
High	Be ready to act. Check for fires and warnings in your area.
Extreme	Take action now to protect life and property. If you and your home are unprepared, leave early.

Fire Danger Rating	What you can do
Catastrophic	For your survival, leave bushfire risk areas early. Plan where you'll go the night before or early in the morning.

State or territory	Warnings and incidents	Fire service and planning
Queensland	Queensland Disaster Management	Queensland Fire Department
New South Wales	Hazards Near Me NSW	NSW Rural Fire Service
Victoria	VicEmergency	Country Fire Authority
South Australia	Alert SA	SA Country Fire Service
Western Australia	Emergency WA	Department of Fire and Emergency Services
Tasmania	TasALERT	Tasmania Fire Service
Australian Capital Territory	ACT Emergency Services Agency	ACT ESA survival plan
Northern Territory	SecureNT	NT Fire and Rescue Service

Your plan

When and where we will leave

Official fire warning source

Where our bushfire survival plan is kept

What we've checked

☐ Discussed leaving early

☐ Identified an alternate destination

Want to know more?

Leave early: confirm the destination and route, gather people and animals, take medicines and bags within reach, and tell your out-of-area contact. Use your state fire service's plan. AirRater can help you track smoke and air quality.

- Queensland Fire Department - Plan to survive - Queensland's bushfire survival plan.
- NSW RFS - Bush fire survival plan - for New South Wales.
- CFA - Bushfire plan - for Victoria.
- SA CFS - Make a plan - for South Australia.
- Emergency WA - Emergency plan - for Western Australia.
- ACT ESA - Survival plan - for the ACT.
- Tasmania Fire Service and NT Fire and Rescue Service - for Tasmania and the NT.

- AFAC - Fire Danger Ratings - what each rating means.
- healthdirect - Bushfires and your health - smoke, masks and health.
- AirRater - track smoke and air quality.

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Heatwave, smoke and indoor heat

The quiet hazard

Heatwaves don't knock down houses or cut roads, so they're easy to underestimate. But extreme heat is one of the most dangerous natural hazards in Australia for human health. It strains the heart and kidneys, worsens existing illness and can kill quickly when the body can't cool down. Bureau of Meteorology - extreme heat

A heatwave is three or more days in a row of unusually high maximum and minimum temperatures for that place. The hot nights matter as much as the hot days: if a home doesn't cool overnight, people never get a break.

What it looked like

Victoria, January 2009. In the week before Black Saturday, Melbourne recorded three days in a row above 43 degrees. Victoria's health department estimated 374 more deaths than usual during the heatwave, most of them older people. Power outages and transport failures made things worse.

The lesson: a cool place, regular drinks and a daily call or visit to someone who lives alone can make a real difference. Heat deaths often happen quietly, at home.

Who is most at risk

Anyone can be affected by heat, but some people are much more vulnerable:

- people over 65, especially those living alone
- babies and young children
- people who are pregnant
- people with heart, lung or kidney disease, diabetes or mental illness
- people taking some medicines, including some for blood pressure, mental health and allergies
- people with disability who may not notice or communicate that they're overheating
- outdoor workers and people who exercise in the heat
- people experiencing homelessness
- people in homes that hold heat, such as top-floor units, older weatherboard houses and caravans

Your warning

- The **Bureau of Meteorology** publishes a heatwave forecast showing low-intensity, severe and extreme heatwave conditions over the coming days.
- **State health departments** issue heat health warnings. In Queensland, Queensland Health issues its own heatwave warnings.
- Heatwave warnings in many states now use the Australian Warning System levels.

Check the forecast during summer, especially for overnight temperatures.

Before summer

Your home

- Check that fans and air conditioners work, and have air conditioners serviced.
- Fit external blinds, awnings or shade cloth on windows that get afternoon sun. External shading works much better than internal curtains.
- Find the coolest room in the house - usually on the lowest floor, away from the afternoon sun.
- Plan a cool place you can go if your home gets too hot or the power fails: a friend's home, a library, a shopping centre or a cinema.

Your health

- Ask your doctor or pharmacist whether any of your medicines affect how your body handles heat, and whether you should change anything during a heatwave. Don't change medicines without advice.
- If you've been told to limit fluids, ask your doctor what to do in hot weather.
- Ask how to store medicines that are damaged by heat.

Your people

- Agree a daily check-in with anyone who lives alone, is older or unwell.
- Plan how you'd get to a cool place if you don't drive.

During a heatwave

Keep cool

- Close curtains and blinds before the sun reaches the windows.
- Open windows at night if it's cooler outside and safe to do so, and close them in the morning.
- Use fans and air conditioning. Setting the air conditioner to around 24-26 degrees keeps it running efficiently.
- Take cool showers, use damp cloths and put your feet in cool water.
- Wear light, loose clothing.
- Spend the hottest part of the day in the coolest room, or somewhere air-conditioned.

Drink water

- Drink water regularly, even if you're not thirsty.

- Limit alcohol, and very sugary or caffeinated drinks.
- Pale urine is a good sign. Dark urine means you need more water.

Plan your day

- Do outdoor jobs and exercise in the early morning.
- Avoid the sun in the middle of the day and early afternoon.
- Never leave children, older people or pets in a parked car, even for a few minutes. The temperature inside rises very quickly.

Check on others

- Call or visit people who live alone at least once a day.
- Watch children, who may not tell you they're too hot.

Heat exhaustion and heatstroke

Heat exhaustion - heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting, fainting.

What to do: move to a cool place, lie down, loosen clothing, sip water, and use cool, wet cloths. Seek medical advice if symptoms get worse or don't improve.

Heatstroke - a medical emergency. Signs can include very high body temperature, confusion, slurred speech, dry skin or stopped sweating, seizures or collapse.

What to do: **call Triple Zero (000)**. While you wait, move the person somewhere cool, remove extra clothing, and cool them with cold water, wet sheets and fans. Put ice packs in the armpits, groin and neck if you have them. Don't give fluids if they're confused or unconscious.

Power outages during a heatwave

Heatwaves put the electricity network under strain, and outages can happen just when you need cooling most.

- Have a battery-powered fan.
- Know where you'll go if the power is out for more than a few hours.
- Keep medicines that need refrigeration in an insulated cooler with ice packs, following your pharmacist's advice.
- If someone relies on powered equipment, act early. See Backup power.

Smoke and poor air

Bushfire smoke, dust and hot weather often come together. On smoky days:

- Stay indoors with windows and doors closed.
- Use air conditioning on recirculate.
- A portable air purifier with a HEPA filter can clean the air in one room.
- Check air quality on your state environment agency's website or an app such as AirRater.

- People with asthma, heart or lung conditions should follow their action plan and keep medicines handy.

Pets in the heat

- Keep pets inside or in deep shade with plenty of water.
- Walk dogs early in the morning or late in the evening. Hot pavement burns paws.
- Watch for heavy panting, drooling or weakness, and call your vet if you're worried.

Common myths

- **"I'm used to the heat."** Even people who live in hot places can get heat illness, especially in a long heatwave or with hot nights.
- **"A fan is always enough."** In very high temperatures, fans alone may not stop the body overheating. Find somewhere cooler.
- **"I'll know if I'm getting too hot."** Older people and people on some medicines may not feel thirsty or notice the signs.

Signs that someone needs help

What you may see	What to do
Heat exhaustion: dizziness, headache, nausea, cramps or heavy sweating	Move them somewhere cool. Cool the skin and offer sips of water if they’re alert and can swallow. Get medical help if symptoms don’t improve.
Possible heatstroke: confusion, slurred speech, collapse or a seizure	Call Triple Zero (000). Start cooling straight away and follow the operator’s instructions.

Your plan

Cooler place we can reach

Who we check on

Our coolest room

What we’ve checked

☐ Made a heat plan for people and pets

Want to know more?

Watch for thirst, dark urine, dizziness, weakness and painful cramps. Ask a pharmacist how heat affects your medicines. Offer babies frequent feeds as advised and check older people daily. Keep pets in shade or a cool room with fresh water.

- Bureau of Meteorology - Heatwave knowledge centre - how heatwaves are forecast and rated.
- Get Ready Queensland - Heatwave - preparing your home and household.
- Queensland Health - Heatwave warnings - Queensland's heat health warnings.
- NSW Health - Hot weather and heatwaves - staying healthy in heat.
- Better Health Channel - Heat-related health problems - signs and first aid.
- healthdirect - Heatstroke and Dehydration - when to get help.
- Victorian Department of Health - Heat research and reports - including the 2009 heatwave.
- AirRater and EPA Victoria - Air quality - track smoke and air quality.
- Bureau of Meteorology - extreme heat - source for the factual example above.

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Tropical cyclone and storm tide

What a cyclone brings

A tropical cyclone is a large, intense low-pressure system that forms over warm tropical seas. In Australia the cyclone season runs from November to April. Cyclones mostly affect northern Australia, but they can track well south - Alfred reached south-east Queensland in 2025 and crossed the mainland coast near Brisbane as ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred, after being downgraded.

A cyclone brings four hazards, and the wind is only one of them:

- **Destructive winds** that can damage roofs, bring down trees and power lines and turn loose objects into missiles.
- **Heavy rain** that can cause flooding over large areas, often for days after the cyclone weakens.
- **Storm surge** - seawater pushed ashore by the wind and low pressure.
- **Storm tide** - the storm surge on top of the normal tide. If a cyclone crosses at high tide, the sea can flood low-lying coastal areas well above the highest normal tide.

Categories. The Bureau rates cyclones from Category 1 (weakest) to Category 5 (strongest) by their wind strength. Category 3 and above are called severe tropical cyclones. A lower-category cyclone can still bring dangerous flooding and storm tide, and a cyclone that weakens over land can keep dropping heavy rain.

What it looked like

Cyclone Tracy, Darwin, Christmas Day 1974. Tracy destroyed most of Darwin's homes and killed dozens of people. Most of the city's population was evacuated in the following days. The building rules that followed changed how homes are built in cyclone regions across Australia.

Cyclone Yasi, February 2011. A very large Category 5 system, Yasi crossed the north Queensland coast near Mission Beach. Many towns were badly damaged, but timely warnings and evacuations helped prevent the loss of life many people feared.

Cyclone Alfred, March 2025. Alfred was tracked for more than a fortnight before it weakened and crossed the coast in south-east Queensland as ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred. About 346,000 Energex customers lost power at the peak. Energex reported full restoration on Sunday 16 March, about eight days after the major outages.

The lessons: cyclones are usually tracked for days, giving time to prepare. Modern buildings stand up much better than older ones. And the days after - without power, water or shops - need as much planning as the cyclone itself.

Know your risk

- **Check your council's storm tide and evacuation maps.** Many coastal councils in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia publish evacuation zones. Know your zone.
- **Know your home.** Homes built to modern cyclone standards cope much better than older homes. If you're not sure how your home was built, ask a builder or your council. Check the roof, windows and doors.
- **Think about the days after.** Power, water and phones may be out for a week or more in severe events.

Your warning

The Bureau issues a series of cyclone products:

- **Tropical Cyclone Forecast Track Map** - shows where the cyclone is expected to go, with an area of uncertainty around the track. The cyclone could go anywhere within that area.
- **Cyclone Watch** - gales are expected to reach coastal communities within 48 hours, but not within 24 hours.
- **Cyclone Warning** - gales are expected, or already happening, within 24 hours.

State agencies and councils issue evacuation directions using the Australian Warning System. Follow them.

Before the season

- Have the roof, gutters, windows and doors checked.
- Trim trees and branches near the house.
- Know where you'll put or how you'll tie down outdoor furniture, trampolines and gas bottles.
- Check insurance, including storm tide and flood cover.
- Build up your supplies for at least five days, or longer if you're isolated.

When a cyclone is forecast

3 days out (track forecast shows your area)

- Check your evacuation zone and plan where you'd go.
- Top up supplies, medicines, fuel and cash.
- Charge power banks and devices.
- Freeze water bottles (leave room for expansion) to keep the fridge cold longer.

48 hours out (Watch: gales possible within 48 hours)

- Clean up the yard and put away or tie down loose items.
- Fill clean containers with drinking water. Fill the bath or buckets for flushing.
- Move the car under cover or to higher ground.
- Check on neighbours who may need help to prepare or leave.

24 hours out (Warning issued)

- Leave early if you're in an evacuation zone or have been told to go.
- If staying, close shutters or board windows if that's your plan, and set up your shelter room.
- Bring pets inside.
- Turn the fridge and freezer to their coldest settings.

During

- **Stay inside** in the strongest part of the house - usually an inside room such as a bathroom, hallway or internal laundry, away from windows.
- **If the building starts to break up,** shelter under a mattress or strong table, or in the bath.
- **Beware the eye.** If the wind suddenly stops, you may be in the eye of the cyclone. Stay inside. The winds will return, often from the opposite direction and with little warning.
- **Keep listening** to ABC Local Radio for updates, including flood warnings as the cyclone moves inland.
- **Never go outside** until authorities say it's safe.

After

- Wait for the all-clear before going outside.
- Watch for fallen power lines, damaged buildings, broken glass, debris and rising rivers.
- Don't drive unless it's necessary. Roads may be blocked and emergency vehicles need access.
- Photograph damage and contact your insurer.
- Check food in the fridge and freezer before eating it. See Food and safe cooking.
- Check on neighbours.
- Expect flooding for days afterwards as rain drains from catchments.

If you need extra support

- **People who need help to evacuate** should leave at the first evacuation advice, not wait for an Emergency Warning.
- **Medical equipment users** should plan for a week or more without mains power, or arrange to stay elsewhere.
- **Caravan and boat residents** should never stay in a caravan or on a boat during a cyclone. Move to a solid building.

Common myths

- **"It's only a Category 1."** Low-category cyclones can still cause dangerous flooding and storm tide.
- **"The eye means it's over."** The winds will return.
- **"Taping windows will stop them breaking."** It doesn't. Stay away from windows.
- **"It's weakened to a tropical low, so we're fine."** Ex-tropical cyclones can still bring days of flooding rain.

Your plan

Most sheltered room

How we check storm-surge exposure

Our evacuation zone

Who checks on whom

What we've checked

☐ Checked council evacuation areas

☐ Planned for prolonged service loss

Want to know more?

Categories describe wind strength. Storm surge is water pushed towards shore. Storm tide combines that surge with the normal tide. Secure gas bottles upright as their supplier directs and bring loose items in before winds build.

- Bureau of Meteorology - Tropical cyclone knowledge centre - categories, forecast tracks and warnings.
- Get Ready Queensland - Cyclone and storm surge - understanding your risk.
- Get Ready Queensland - Cyclone FAQs - common questions answered.
- healthdirect - Floods and cyclones - staying healthy.
- Energex - Alfred restoration - how long the 2025 outages lasted.
- Energex - Alfred update, 10 March 2025 - restoration targets during the event.

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Earthquake

Earthquakes in Australia

Many people are surprised to learn that Australia has earthquakes. We're in the middle of a tectonic plate rather than on its edge, so large earthquakes are much less common than in New Zealand, Indonesia or Japan. But the plate is under constant stress, and earthquakes happen somewhere in Australia most days. Most are too small to feel. Every year or two, one is large enough to cause damage.

Earthquakes give no warning, and the shaking usually lasts seconds. The danger comes mostly from things falling: bricks, chimneys, parapets and awnings outside; bookcases, TVs, mirrors and heavy objects inside. Afterwards, damaged buildings, gas leaks, fires and aftershocks can cause more harm.

What it looked like

Newcastle, 28 December 1989. A magnitude 5.6 earthquake struck Newcastle. Thirteen people died, many of them when buildings and awnings collapsed in the city centre, including at the Newcastle Workers Club. It remains Australia's deadliest earthquake, and it led to stronger building standards.

Mansfield, Victoria, 22 September 2021. A magnitude 5.9 earthquake - Victoria's largest onshore earthquake on record - shook Melbourne and was felt in several states. Bricks and facades fell from buildings in Chapel Street. No serious injuries were reported.

The lessons: most damage comes from older masonry and things that aren't secured, and a moderate earthquake can still be felt hundreds of kilometres away.

Know your risk

- Geoscience Australia's National Seismic Hazard Assessment shows which parts of Australia are more likely to have strong shaking. Parts of Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland have higher hazard than people expect.
- Older brick buildings, especially those built before modern earthquake standards, chimneys and parapets are the most likely to be damaged.
- Inside your home, think about what could fall on you, especially beside beds and sofas.

Your warning

There's no public warning before an earthquake. The shaking is the warning.

Afterwards:

- Check your state emergency service and Geoscience Australia's Earthquakes@GA for information.
- If you're on the coast and felt strong or long shaking, act on the natural tsunami warning signs. Move inland or uphill straight away. See Tsunami.

Before

Secure your home

- Fix tall furniture such as bookcases and wardrobes to the wall with brackets or straps suited to your wall type.
- Secure TVs, computer monitors and microwaves.
- Put heavy items on low shelves.
- Don't hang heavy pictures or mirrors over beds or the sofa.
- Use latches on kitchen cupboards so contents don't fall out.
- Make sure your hot water system is strapped or secured.

Practise

- Practise Drop, Cover and Hold On with everyone at home.
- Find safe spots in each room: under a sturdy table or desk, or against an inside wall away from windows.
- Keep sturdy shoes and a torch by each bed. Broken glass is common after earthquakes.
- Know how to turn off gas, power and water.

During - Drop, Cover and Hold On

1. **Drop** to your hands and knees before the shaking knocks you down.
2. **Cover** your head and neck under a sturdy table or desk. If there's nothing nearby, get against an inside wall away from windows and cover your head and neck with your arms.
3. **Hold on** to your shelter until the shaking stops.

If you use a wheelchair or walker, lock the wheels if you can, bend forward and cover your head and neck with your arms or a pillow.

If you're in bed, stay there, lie face down and cover your head with a pillow.

If you're outside, move to an open area away from buildings, trees, power lines and walls, then drop to the ground.

If you're driving, pull over somewhere clear of bridges, overpasses, power lines and buildings, and stay in the car until the shaking stops.

Stay inside during shaking. Many injuries happen when people run outside and are hit by falling bricks, glass or awnings.

After

- **Expect aftershocks.** They can come minutes, days or weeks later. Drop, Cover and Hold On again each time.
- **Check for injuries.** Give first aid and call Triple Zero (000) if someone is badly hurt.
- **Check for gas.** If you smell gas or hear hissing, open windows, leave the building and call your gas distributor from outside. Don't use light switches, lighters or phones inside.
- **Check for damage.** Look for cracks in walls, chimneys and foundations. Stay out of damaged buildings until they've been checked.
- **Watch for fire.** Broken gas lines and electrical damage can start fires.
- **On the coast,** check for tsunami warnings and act on natural signs.
- **Report it.** Once you're safe, you can send Geoscience Australia a felt report. It helps scientists understand the shaking.
- **Photograph damage** and contact your insurer.

If you need extra support

- **Older people and people living alone** may need help securing heavy furniture. Ask family, friends or a handyman service.
- **Children** can be frightened by aftershocks. Practise Drop, Cover and Hold On as a game, and talk about what happened afterwards.
- **People in apartments** should know their building's evacuation plan and not use lifts after shaking.

Common myths

- **"Australia doesn't get earthquakes."** It does - and damaging ones happen.
- **"Stand in a doorway."** In modern homes, doorways are no stronger than other parts of the house, and the door can swing and hurt you. Get under a table instead.
- **"Run outside."** Falling bricks and glass outside buildings are a major cause of injury. Stay in until the shaking stops.

Your plan

Sturdy shelter locations

After-shaking meeting point

Furniture we've secured, and what's left

What we've checked

☐ Practised the response with the household

Want to know more?

After you're safe, send Geoscience Australia a felt report. Use wall anchors and straps suited to your furniture, TV and wall type.

- Geoscience Australia - Earthquake - why Australia has earthquakes.
- Earthquakes@GA - recent earthquakes and felt reports.
- Geoscience Australia - National Seismic Hazard Assessment - where strong shaking is more likely.
- VICSES - Earthquake - before, during and after.
- Get Ready Queensland - Earthquake - Queensland guidance.
- Geoscience Australia - Victoria's biggest earthquake on record - the 2021 Mansfield earthquake.
- ABC News - Mansfield earthquake - what people experienced.

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Tsunami

What a tsunami is

A tsunami is a series of waves caused by a sudden movement of a large amount of water - usually an undersea earthquake, but sometimes a volcanic eruption or landslide. Out at sea, tsunami waves can travel at the speed of a jet plane and be barely noticeable. As they reach shallow water near the coast, they slow down, bunch up and grow.

Tsunamis aren't like normal surf. They can arrive as a fast-rising tide or a surge of water that keeps coming for minutes, and then pull back with great force. The waves can keep coming for hours, and the first is often not the largest.

For Australia, the most likely threat is a tsunami from a large earthquake in the ocean regions to our north, east or west. Most tsunamis that reach Australia cause dangerous currents in harbours and on beaches rather than flooding on land. But a large event could flood low-lying coastal areas.

What it looked like

Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai, January 2022. A massive undersea volcanic eruption near Tonga sent waves across the Pacific. The Joint Australian Tsunami Warning Centre issued alerts within hours. A wave of about 82 cm was recorded on the Gold Coast, and marine warnings were issued for parts of the east coast and for Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands.

Indian Ocean, December 2004. The Boxing Day tsunami killed more than 200,000 people around the Indian Ocean, including Australians on holiday. It led to the creation of the Australian tsunami warning system.

The lessons: warnings work if people know what they mean, and Australians travelling overseas need to know the natural signs.

Your warning

The Joint Australian Tsunami Warning Centre (run by the Bureau of Meteorology and Geoscience Australia) monitors earthquakes and sea levels around the clock. It issues three kinds of message for Australian coasts:

- **No threat** - an earthquake has happened but there's no tsunami threat to Australia.
- **Marine and immediate foreshore threat** - dangerous waves, strong currents and some flooding of the immediate foreshore are possible. **Get out of the water and away from the water's edge.** Stay away from beaches, rock platforms, harbours, estuaries and the shoreline.
- **Land inundation threat** - major flooding of low-lying coastal areas is possible. **Go to higher ground or inland straight away.**

State agencies will issue Emergency Warnings for land threats and direct evacuations.

Natural warning signs

If you're at the coast and you notice any of these, don't wait for an official warning:

- a strong earthquake, or one that lasts a long time
- the sea suddenly drawing back, exposing the sea floor
- a sudden rise in sea level
- an unusual roar from the ocean, like a jet or train

Move inland or to higher ground immediately. If you can't find a local map or direction, the Bureau's rule of thumb is to go at least 1 km inland or 10 m above sea level.

Before

- Find out whether your home, workplace or holiday spot is in a coastal evacuation area.
- Know your route inland or uphill, on foot as well as by car.
- Plan how you'd help anyone who needs extra time to move.
- Know how you'd receive warnings at the beach, on a boat or on holiday.
- When travelling overseas to the Pacific, Indonesia, Japan, Chile or other tsunami-prone places, check the local evacuation signs and routes when you arrive.

During

Marine threat:

- Get out of the water: swimming, surfing, fishing and boating.
- Move away from beaches, rock platforms, harbours, marinas and estuaries.

- If you're on a boat, follow the advice of your harbour master or marine authorities. Boats in deep water offshore are usually safer than in harbours, but don't put to sea without advice.

Land threat or natural signs:

- Go inland or uphill straight away, on foot if roads are jammed.
- If you can't get inland, go to the upper floors of a strong, multi-storey building.
- Take your go bag only if it's within reach.
- Don't go to the beach to watch.

After

- Stay away from the coast until the Bureau or emergency services cancel the warning. Waves and strong currents can continue for hours.
- Stay out of flooded and damaged areas. Floodwater may be contaminated, and buildings may be weakened.
- Check with your out-of-area contact.
- Follow the flood clean-up advice on the Return and clean up safely page.

If you need extra support

- **People with limited mobility** living near the coast should plan for a fast evacuation, with a named helper and a route.
- **Children at the beach** need to know that if the sea suddenly goes out, they must run uphill, not go and look.
- **Visitors** from overseas may not know Australian warnings. If you're with visitors, tell them.

Common myths

- **"A tsunami is one big wave."** It's a series of waves, sometimes over hours, and the first may not be the largest.
- **"The first wave was small, so it's over."** Larger waves often follow.
- **"I'll go and look at the sea drawing back."** That's the moment to run.
- **"Australia doesn't get tsunamis."** It does, though most cause dangerous currents rather than flooding.

Your plan

Higher ground or inland destination

Route away from the coast

Where we'd get warnings on the beach or on holiday

What we've checked

☐ Checked local coastal evacuation advice

Want to know more?

The Joint Australian Tsunami Warning Centre combines earthquake detection and sea-level readings. At the coast, move uphill or inland immediately if you feel long or strong shaking, hear an unusual roar or see a sudden rise or fall in sea level.

- Bureau of Meteorology - About tsunami warnings - the three warning types and what to do.
- Geoscience Australia - Tsunami - how tsunamis form.
- Get Ready Queensland - Tsunami - Queensland guidance.
- AIDR - Tsunami handbook (PDF) - the national planning handbook.
- Earthquakes@GA - recent earthquakes.

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Landslide

What it is and why it matters here

A landslide is earth, rock, sand or mud moving down a slope. Some move a few centimetres over months. Others move fast, carrying soil, trees and anything on the land with them.

In Queensland, most landslides happen when heavy rain soaks a hillside past the point where plant roots can hold the soil. The top layer slips and takes whatever sits on it. Rock falls from cliffs, gorges and road cuttings happen too, especially in hilly and coastal areas.

Get Ready Queensland notes that every local government area in Australia is believed to have some kind of landslide risk. Large, destructive landslides are rare. Small ones are common, especially in the wet season - and they're the ones most likely to close your road, damage a retaining wall or crack a driveway.

There are four main kinds you might hear about:

- **Rockfall** - rocks breaking away from cliffs, gorges, road cuttings or quarry faces.
- **Shallow landslide** - a thin layer of weak soil sliding off a steep slope or embankment after intense rain. These most often affect roads and railways.
- **Deep-seated landslide** - a large, deep mass of ground moving on steep land, sometimes slowly.
- **Debris flow** - soaked soil and rock moving fast, like a thick river of mud. These are the most dangerous.

What it looked like

Thredbo, 30 July 1997. Just before midnight, a slope above the Alpine Way gave way and became a debris flow. It destroyed two ski lodges and killed 18 people. It remains the worst landslide disaster in Australia's history. The cause was traced to a leaking water main, not rain.

The lesson for households is simple. Water is the main trigger for landslides, and it doesn't have to come from the sky. A leaking pipe, a blocked drain or a pool that slowly loses water can soak a slope just as well.

South-east Queensland and northern New South Wales, early 2022. The same rain that flooded Lismore and Brisbane also set off landslides that closed hinterland roads for weeks. For many households, the landslide didn't touch the house - it cut the only road out. Tweed Shire - 2022 landslide road damage

Know your risk

Start with your own block and the roads you rely on.

- **Look uphill as well as down.** A slope above your home, or a cutting beside your road, matters as much as the ground you're standing on.
- **Ask your council.** Councils can tell you about past landslides and any landslide risk assessments for your area. Do this before you buy land, build or add a pool or extension.
- **Check what your road depends on.** If your only way out runs along a steep cutting or across a creek gully, a small slip can isolate you. Note a second route if there is one.
- **Ask a professional.** If a retaining wall is leaning, or cracks keep growing, a geotechnical engineer can assess the slope. A builder or landscaper isn't the right person for this.
- **Renters:** report cracks, leaning walls and new seepage to your property manager in writing, with photos and dates.

Your warning

There's no dedicated landslide warning service in most of Australia. The closest signal is the Bureau of Meteorology's severe weather warning for heavy rainfall - the main trigger.

So your own eyes matter most. Watch for these signs, especially during and after long or heavy rain:

- new cracks in walls, floors, paths, driveways or roads, or cracks that are growing
- doors and windows that suddenly stick or won't close
- trees, power poles, fences or retaining walls starting to lean
- water seeping out of a slope, or soggy ground where it's normally dry
- broken water or sewer pipes, or a sudden jump in your water bill
- a creek that turns muddy or drops suddenly while it's still raining
- rumbling or cracking sounds from the slope

One sign alone may have an ordinary explanation. Several together, especially after rain, mean it's time to act.

Councils and road authorities may close roads while slopes are checked. Take those closures seriously, even if the road looks clear.

Before

Home and land

- Keep gutters, downpipes and drains clear, and make sure water from the roof is piped away from slopes.
- Fix leaking taps, pipes and pool plumbing quickly.
- Don't dig into the base of a slope or remove large amounts of vegetation from it without advice.
- Have retaining walls over about a metre high checked by a qualified person, and keep their drainage holes clear.
- Take dated photos of cracks so you can see whether they're growing.

People and animals

- Agree which room is furthest from the slope, and which way you'd go if you had to leave quickly.
- Talk to children about not digging under rocks, tunnelling into sand banks or sitting on rock ledges. Get Ready Queensland notes that children are among the most frequent victims of small landslides.
- Plan how you'd move animals away from a slope in a hurry.

Supplies and money

- Keep a few days of supplies in case a slip closes your road.
- Check whether your home insurance covers landslide, subsidence or earth movement. Many policies treat these differently from storm or flood damage, so ask your insurer directly and get the answer in writing.

Practise it

- Walk your escape route once, in daylight and dry weather.
- Drive your second route, so you know it before you need it.

During

- **If you see or hear the ground moving, get out.** Move sideways, away from the path of the slide, and onto stable ground.
- **Don't try to outrun it downhill.** Moving across the slope is safer.
- **If you can't get out,** move to the part of the building furthest from the slope. Get under a sturdy table and protect your head.
- **On the road,** watch for fallen rocks, mud, cracked surfaces and leaning trees. Don't drive into a slip or over cracked road.
- **Call Triple Zero (000)** if anyone is trapped, injured or in danger. Call the SES on 132 500 for help with damage that isn't life-threatening.

- **Keep clear of fallen power lines** and treat them as live.

After

- **Stay away from the slide area.** More movement is common, especially if rain continues.
- **Wait for the all-clear** from emergency services or your council before going back.
- **Check for broken gas, water and power lines,** and report them to your provider.
- **Watch for flooding.** A landslide can block a creek and cause water to back up, or release suddenly.
- **Get the slope assessed** by a geotechnical engineer before rebuilding or replanting.
- **Photograph everything** before cleaning up, and contact your insurer early.
- **Look after yourselves.** Losing a road, a garden or a home to a slip can be very unsettling. Talk about it, and reach out for support if you need it.

If you need extra support

- **People with limited mobility** may need more time to leave. Agree in advance who will help and how.
- **People who live alone** on steep blocks should have a neighbour who knows to check on them after heavy rain.
- **Rural and hinterland households** should plan to be cut off for several days.
- **If English isn't your first language,** TIS National can interpret when you call your council or insurer.

Common myths

- **"The house is dry, so the slope is fine."** The Thredbo landslide was triggered by a leaking water main, not rain.
- **"Landslides only happen in the mountains."** Shallow slips often happen on road embankments and suburban slopes.
- **"A retaining wall will hold anything."** Walls need working drainage and can fail when the soil behind them is soaked.
- **"Small cracks don't matter."** One crack may be nothing. Cracks that keep growing need checking.

Your plan

Nearby slopes or access roads to check

Alternate route

The room furthest from the slope

Our insurer's position on landslide cover

Engineer or council contact

Want to know more?

If you’re worried about a slope or retaining wall near your home, a geotechnical engineer can assess it.

- Get Ready Queensland - Landslide - the types of landslide in Australia, local risk and how to check it.
- Geoscience Australia - Landslide awareness (PDF) - warning signs and what to do, in a printable brochure.
- Bureau of Meteorology - Severe weather knowledge centre - heavy rainfall warnings, the main early signal for landslides.
- Get Ready Queensland - Find your local council - council maps, past landslide records and road closures.
- Insurance Council of Australia - Underinsurance - before you check your policy.
- Tweed Shire - 2022 landslide road damage - source for the factual example above.

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Dust storms and drought

Part 1 - Dust storms

What a dust storm is

Dust storms happen when strong winds lift loose soil from dry ground, usually in inland Australia after long dry spells, and carry it across the country. They can arrive as a towering wall of red-brown dust, or as a haze that thickens over hours. Visibility can drop to a few metres in minutes, and fine dust can stay in the air for hours or days.

The main risks are to breathing and to driving.

What it looked like

Sydney, 23 September 2009. A huge dust storm carried soil from inland New South Wales and South Australia across the east coast. Sydney woke to orange-red skies - the "Red Dawn" - and air quality was among the worst ever recorded in the city. Flights were disrupted, and hospitals saw more people with breathing problems.

The lesson: dust storms can reach coastal cities hundreds of kilometres from where they start, and they affect health more than property.

Your warning

- The Bureau of Meteorology includes dust in its forecasts and warnings, including severe weather warnings for damaging winds and dust.
- State environment agencies publish air quality readings and health advice.
- Apps such as AirRater let you track air quality where you are.

Before

- Know where to check air quality for your area, and save it on your phone.
- If anyone in your household has asthma, emphysema or heart disease, make sure their action plan is up to date and their medicines are in date.
- Choose a room you can keep as clean as possible - with windows that seal well, and ideally a portable air purifier with a HEPA filter.
- If you rely on tank water, check that the first-flush diverter and screens are working.

During

- **Stay indoors** with windows and doors closed. Put damp towels along the gaps under doors if dust is coming in.
- **Turn off evaporative coolers,** which draw outside air in. Set air conditioners to recirculate.
- **Delay driving** until visibility improves. If you're caught on the road, slow down, turn on your headlights and, if visibility drops badly, pull well off the road, turn off your lights and put on your hazard lights and handbrake, so others don't follow your tail lights into you.
- **Follow your action plan** for asthma or breathing problems. Call Triple Zero (000) for severe breathing difficulty.
- **Keep pets indoors.**

After

- Clean dust with a damp cloth or a vacuum with a HEPA filter, rather than sweeping, which stirs it up.
- Check tanks, gutters and filters before using tank water.
- Clean solar panels when it's safe.
- Check on people with breathing problems.

Part 2 - Drought

What drought is

Drought is a long period - months or years - with much less rain than usual. It doesn't arrive in a day, but it has deep effects: on water supplies, farms, gardens, animals, bushfire risk, jobs and mental health.

City households usually feel drought through water restrictions and higher food prices. Rural households can face losing their water supply, their stock and their income.

What it looked like

The Millennium Drought, about 2001-2009. South-eastern Australia went through one of its worst droughts on record. Dam levels fell so low that cities introduced strict water restrictions. In south-east Queensland, households were asked to use no more than about 140 litres per person per day. Many households learnt habits that still save water today. Queensland Water Commission 2007–08 annual report (PDF)

Your warning

- The Bureau of Meteorology publishes drought statements and rainfall outlooks.
- Your water provider and council announce water restrictions.
- State agriculture departments publish drought information and support for farmers.

Before and during a drought

At home

- Follow water restrictions and learn the rules for your area.
- Fix leaking taps and toilets.
- Use water-saving showerheads and taps.
- Keep a supply of drinking water in case your supply is interrupted.
- If you rely on tank or bore water, monitor your levels and arrange a water carrier early. Carriers get booked out in long droughts.

For animals

- Arrange a backup water and feed supply for pets and livestock well before you run short.
- Talk to your vet or agriculture department about animal welfare in drought.

For your health and wellbeing

- Drought can bring financial stress, worry and isolation, especially in farming communities. Talk to people you trust.
- Financial counsellors, including the free National Debt Helpline (1800 007 007), can help with money worries.
- Lifeline (13 11 14) is available any time.

Bushfire risk

Drought dries out vegetation and increases bushfire risk. Prepare your property and plan for fire. See Bushfire and grassfire.

Common myths

- **"A dust storm is just bad weather."** Fine dust can cause serious breathing problems, especially for people with asthma or heart conditions.
- **"Drought only affects farmers."** Water restrictions, food prices and bushfire risk affect everyone.

Your plan

Where we check air and water information

Safe drinking water backup

Our clean-air room

Our water carrier (if on tank or bore)

Want to know more?

Save your local air-quality page before a dust storm so you can check conditions without relying on how the sky looks.

- AirRater - track air quality and symptoms.
- EPA Victoria - Check air and water quality - one example of a state air quality service.
- Bureau of Meteorology - Severe weather knowledge centre - dust and wind warnings.
- Queensland Health - Drinking water during and after a disaster - keeping tank and stored water safe.
- Agriculture Victoria - Emergency management - drought and emergency support for farms.
- National Debt Helpline - free financial counselling.
- Lifeline - support any time on 13 11 14.
- Queensland Water Commission 2007–08 annual report (PDF) - source for the factual example above.

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Extreme cold, snow and ice

Cold in a warm country

Australia is known for heat, but cold kills too - especially older people in homes that are hard to heat. Cold snaps bring frost and black ice to inland roads, snow to the alps and Tasmania, and freezing nights to places that rarely see them. Many Australian homes are built for summer rather than winter, with little insulation and gaps that let warmth out.

The main risks are:

- **Hypothermia** - when the body loses heat faster than it can make it.
- **Carbon monoxide poisoning** - from using heaters, BBQs, camp stoves or generators indoors.
- **House fires** - from heaters, electric blankets and overloaded power boards.
- **Road crashes** - on ice, frost and snow.
- **Being cut off** - in alpine areas, or when power fails in a cold snap.

Your warning

- The Bureau of Meteorology issues frost warnings, severe weather warnings for snow and blizzards, and road weather alerts in some areas.
- In alpine areas, check the road authority and resort advice for road closures and chain rules.
- The Bureau's sheep graziers warnings alert farmers to cold, wet and windy conditions that are dangerous for livestock.

Before winter

Your home

- Have heaters, flues and chimneys checked and cleaned by a qualified person.
- Have gas heaters serviced as the manufacturer recommends. A faulty gas heater can leak carbon monoxide.
- Test smoke alarms. Consider a carbon monoxide alarm if you use gas or wood heating.
- Seal draughts around doors and windows with draught stoppers or weather strips.
- Close curtains at dusk to keep heat in.
- Choose one room you can keep warm if heating fails or the power goes out.

Your supplies

- Warm, dry layers for everyone, including hats, socks and gloves.
- Extra blankets or sleeping bags.
- Hot water bottles (fill with hot, not boiling, water).
- Food and hot drinks you can make without power, safely.

Your people

- Arrange a daily check on older people and people who live alone during cold snaps.
- Know somewhere warm you could go, such as family, friends or a library, if your heating fails.

During a cold snap

- **Keep one room warm** - around 18 degrees or more if you can - and spend most of your time there.
- **Layer up** with several thin layers rather than one thick one. Wear a hat and socks to bed.
- **Eat regularly** and have warm drinks. Food gives your body fuel to make heat.
- **Keep moving** if you can, even gentle movement.
- **Never use a BBQ, camp stove, outdoor heater or generator indoors, in a garage or in a tent.** They give off carbon monoxide, which you can't see or smell. It can kill without warning.
- **Use heaters safely.** Keep them at least a metre from curtains, bedding and furniture. Turn them off when you leave the room or go to sleep. Don't dry clothes on them.
- **Check electric blankets** for frayed cords or scorch marks, and turn them off before you sleep unless they're designed for overnight use.

Carbon monoxide - know the signs

Carbon monoxide poisoning can feel like flu: headache, dizziness, nausea, tiredness, confusion and shortness of breath. If several people or pets in the same place feel unwell at the same time, suspect carbon monoxide.

If you suspect it: **get everyone into fresh air straight away, and call Triple Zero (000).**

Hypothermia - know the signs

Early signs: shivering, cold pale skin, clumsiness, slurred speech and confusion. Severe hypothermia can cause shivering to stop, drowsiness and unconsciousness.

What to do: move the person somewhere warm and dry, remove wet clothing, wrap them in blankets (including the head), and give warm sweet drinks if they're alert. Don't rub their skin or use very hot water. **Call Triple Zero (000) for suspected severe hypothermia.**

Travelling in snow and ice

- Check the weather, road conditions and road closures before you leave.
- In alpine areas, carry chains if required, and know how to fit them.
- Keep fuel above half, or your electric vehicle well charged - cold reduces battery range.
- Carry warm clothes, blankets, water, food and a torch in the car.
- Slow down. Black ice can be invisible, especially on shaded corners and bridges in the early morning.
- If you're stuck, stay with the car, run the engine only for short periods and make sure the exhaust pipe isn't blocked by snow.

After

- Check heaters and alarms before using them again after an outage.
- Check pipes and tanks for frost damage.
- Replace used supplies and dry wet gear.
- Check on anyone who was cut off.

If you need extra support

- **Older people** lose heat faster and may not feel cold as quickly. Daily checks matter.
- **Babies** can't regulate their temperature well. Dress them in layers and keep their room at a comfortable temperature. Don't use hot water bottles or electric blankets for babies.
- **People on low incomes** may struggle to afford heating. Ask your energy retailer about hardship programmes and concessions.

Your plan

Warm backup accommodation

Road closure information

Our warm room if heating fails

Who we check on in a cold snap

What we've checked

☐ Checked bedding and warm clothing

Want to know more?

Save road and alpine resort updates before travelling, including any snow-chain requirements for your route.

- healthdirect - Hypothermia - signs and first aid.
- Queensland Government - Using alternative fuel and electricity generation safely - carbon monoxide and generator safety.
- Queensland Fire Department - Indoor fire safety - heaters and electric blankets.
- Transport Victoria - Snow and winter driving - chains and alpine roads.
- Bureau of Meteorology - Severe weather knowledge centre - frost and snow warnings.

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Public health emergency and animal disease

Part 1 - Public health emergencies

What it can look like

A public health emergency is a threat to the health of a whole community: a pandemic, an outbreak of a serious infection, contaminated drinking water, or disease spreading after a flood. Unlike a storm, it may last for months, and it can change how we work, learn, shop and care for each other, even for people who never get sick.

What it looked like

COVID-19, 2020 onwards. Australian households had to adapt quickly to lockdowns, school closures, working from home, travel restrictions and shortages of some goods. People who already had a small pantry, a medicine reserve, a way to work from home and neighbours who checked in found it easier to cope.

Japanese encephalitis, 2022. After heavy rain and flooding, Japanese encephalitis - a mosquito-borne virus - was found in south-eastern Australia for the first time, across several states. Health authorities urged people to avoid mosquito bites and offered vaccination to people at higher risk.

The lessons: health emergencies can follow other disasters, and the everyday preparations in this book - food, medicines, a way to keep in touch - help with them too.

Your warning

- Your state or territory health department is the main source of health directions and alerts.

- The Australian Government Department of Health and the Australian Centre for Disease Control publish national advice.
- Water providers issue boil-water and do-not-drink notices. See Drinking water.

Before

- Keep a two-week pantry of food you eat, rotated as you go.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about keeping a reserve of regular medicines, and about electronic prescriptions.
- Keep a basic medicine kit: thermometer, pain and fever relief, oral rehydration solution, tissues and hand sanitiser.
- Keep your vaccinations up to date, and ask your doctor about any extra ones recommended for you.
- Agree how you'd get food and medicines if your household had to isolate: deliveries, a neighbour, a relative.
- Plan who could care for children, pets or dependants if the main carer got sick.
- Talk to your employer about working from home and leave.

During

- Follow current health directions from your state or territory.
- Wash hands often, cover coughs and sneezes, and stay home when you're unwell.
- If someone at home is sick, care for them in one room if possible, and ventilate the house.
- Check on neighbours who live alone, by phone or at the door.
- Ask for help early if medicines or care are about to run out.
- Look after your mental health. Long periods of disruption and isolation are hard. Keep in touch with people, keep routines and reach out for support.

After floods - mosquito-borne disease

Floods leave standing water where mosquitoes breed. To protect yourself:

- Use insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus.
- Wear long, loose, light-coloured clothing, especially at dawn and dusk.
- Empty containers that hold water around the home.
- Use screens and nets.

Part 2 - Emergency animal disease

Why it matters to households

Australia is free of many serious animal diseases found overseas, such as foot-and-mouth disease. An outbreak here could lead to movement restrictions on animals, animal products and people across large areas, and huge effects on farms, food supply and the economy. Even if you don't farm, you may be affected if you keep backyard poultry, horses, pigs or other animals, or if you live in a rural area.

What you can do

- **If you keep any livestock** - even a few chooks, a pet pig or a horse - check whether you need to register with your state agriculture department. Registration helps authorities contact you in an outbreak.
- **Never feed food scraps containing meat to pigs.** It's illegal in Australia because it can spread serious diseases.
- Report unusual signs of illness or unexplained deaths in animals to your vet or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888. Australian Government - reporting animal disease
- **When travelling overseas,** declare food, animal products and farm visits when you come home, and clean shoes and equipment.
- **Follow movement controls** if an outbreak is declared. They may stop you moving animals, equipment or products.

Your plan

Care or delivery backup

Relevant health or biosecurity contact

Who cares for dependants if the main carer is sick

Animals we keep and whether they're registered

Want to know more?

Bookmark your state health department and, if you keep animals, your state agriculture agency so you can find the current directions.

- Australian CDC - Preventing disease after floods - infections and how to avoid them.
- Queensland Government - Mosquitoes and black flies - protecting yourself after a disaster.
- Queensland Government - Japanese encephalitis - symptoms and vaccination.
- healthdirect - Natural disasters - health advice in emergencies.
- DAFF - Biosecurity - national biosecurity information.
- Agriculture Victoria - Emergency management - animal welfare and farm emergencies.
- Australian Government - reporting animal disease - source for the factual example above.

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Medical emergency at home

Why this belongs in an emergency book

The emergency your household is most likely to face isn't a flood or a fire. It's someone at home becoming seriously unwell or badly hurt. The first few minutes - before the ambulance arrives - can make a real difference, and they're much easier when you've thought about them in advance.

This page isn't a first aid course. It's a guide to being ready: knowing when and how to call, what to do while you wait and what information to have on hand. A first aid course is the best next step, and many organisations run them in a day.

When to call Triple Zero (000)

Call Triple Zero (000) if someone:

- is unconscious, not breathing normally or has no pulse
- has chest pain, especially with sweating, nausea or pain in the arm, jaw or back
- shows signs of stroke: face drooping, arm weakness, slurred speech - act FAST
- is having severe difficulty breathing or a severe asthma attack
- is having a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis)
- is bleeding heavily
- has a seizure that lasts more than five minutes, or their first seizure
- has taken an overdose or been poisoned
- has serious burns
- has been bitten by a snake
- has had a serious fall or injury, especially to the head, neck or back

If you're not sure, call. The call-taker will help you decide.

Making the call

1. **Dial 000.** From a mobile, 112 also works. If you use the National Relay Service, use the NRS emergency options.
2. **Say which service:** "Ambulance".
3. **Give your location.** Your full address, the nearest cross street, and any landmark or access instructions. The Emergency+ app can show your GPS coordinates and a what3words address.
4. **Say what's happened.** Answer the call-taker's questions.
5. **Follow their instructions.** They may talk you through CPR or first aid.
6. **Stay on the line** until they tell you to hang up.

While you wait

- Unlock the front door and turn on outside lights at night.

- Put pets in another room.
- Send someone to meet the ambulance at the street if you can.
- Gather the person's medicines, medication list and Medicare card.
- Note the time symptoms started.

CPR in brief

If someone is unresponsive and not breathing normally, call Triple Zero (000) and start CPR. The call-taker will guide you.

- Push hard and fast in the centre of the chest, about 100-120 times a minute.
- If you're trained and willing, give 2 breaths after every 30 compressions. If not, keep doing compressions only.
- If a defibrillator (AED) is available, turn it on and follow its spoken instructions. Many public places have one, and some apps show where.
- Keep going until help arrives or the person starts breathing normally.

You won't make things worse by trying. Doing something is far better than doing nothing.

Common emergencies - what to do first

Choking. If the person can cough, encourage them to keep coughing. If they can't breathe, cough or speak, call Triple Zero (000) and give up to five firm back blows between the shoulder blades, then up to five chest thrusts. Keep alternating.

Severe bleeding. Press firmly on the wound with a clean cloth or pad and keep pressing. Raise the injured part if you can. Call Triple Zero (000).

Burns. Cool the burn under cool running water for 20 minutes. Remove jewellery and clothing near the burn unless it's stuck. Don't use ice, butter or creams. Cover loosely with cling wrap. Seek medical help for any burn larger than a 20-cent coin, or on the face, hands, feet or genitals.

Snake bite. Call Triple Zero (000). Keep the person still and calm. Apply a pressure immobilisation bandage firmly over the bite and up the limb, and splint it. Don't wash the bite or try to catch the snake.

Anaphylaxis. Use their adrenaline autoinjector straight away if they have one, then call Triple Zero (000). Lay them flat, or let them sit if they're struggling to breathe. Don't let them stand or walk.

Poisoning. For advice, call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26, any time. If the person is unconscious, having trouble breathing or fitting, call Triple Zero (000).

When it's not an emergency

If you're worried but it's not life-threatening:

- **healthdirect:** 1800 022 222, any time, to talk to a registered nurse.

- **13 HEALTH** (13 43 25 84) in Queensland.
- **NURSE-ON-CALL** (1300 60 60 24) in Victoria.
- Your GP or an after-hours GP service.
- Your pharmacist.

Be ready - the medical summary

Keep a one-page summary for each person with a health condition, and put it where it can be found quickly - on the fridge or with the medicines. Include:

- full name, date of birth and Medicare number
- conditions and allergies
- current medicines and doses
- doctor's name and phone number
- emergency contact
- any advance care directive or special instructions

Be ready at home

- Make sure your house number is easy to see from the street, day and night.
- Keep a first aid kit and a first aid booklet in a known place.
- Teach children how to call Triple Zero (000) and say their address.
- If someone in your home has a serious condition, ask their doctor what to do in an emergency and write it down.

Your plan

How responders can find us

Household contact to notify

Where our medical summaries are kept

Where our first aid kit is kept

Who in our household has done a first aid course

What we've checked

☐ First aid training or refresher arranged

Name

Medicines, allergies and conditions

Emergency contact and phone

Want to know more?

Keep your home address, access directions and current medicine list beside your emergency contacts so someone else can help make the call.

- healthdirect - How to perform CPR - step by step, for adults, children and babies.
- healthdirect - Snake bites - first aid and when to get help.
- healthdirect - First aid kits - what to keep at home.
- ACMA - Emergency calls - how Triple Zero and 112 work.
- Access Hub - Emergency calls using the NRS - for people who are deaf or have hearing or speech difficulties.
- 13 HEALTH and NURSE-ON-CALL - health advice by phone.

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Home fire and escape

Faster than you think

A house fire can take hold in a few minutes. Modern homes are full of furnishings made from synthetic materials that burn hot and fast and give off thick, toxic smoke. Within minutes, smoke can make a familiar hallway impossible to see in or to breathe in. Most people who die in house fires are killed by smoke, not flames, and many fatal fires start at night while people are asleep.

The good news is that the things that save lives are simple and cheap: working smoke alarms, a practised escape plan and a few safe habits.

Smoke alarms

Working smoke alarms are the single most important protection against dying in a house fire.

- **Type.** Photoelectric smoke alarms are recommended by fire services. They're better at detecting the smouldering fires that often happen at night.
- **Where.** In every bedroom, in hallways connecting bedrooms, and on every level of the home. Follow your state's rules.
- **Interconnected.** Interconnected alarms all sound when one detects smoke, so everyone hears the warning wherever they are. In Queensland, interconnected photoelectric alarms in every bedroom are required in all homes from 1 January 2027. Other states have their own requirements. Queensland Fire Department - smoke alarm requirements
- **Test** each alarm monthly with the test button.
- **Clean** them with a vacuum brush every six months.
- **Replace** them by the date on the label - usually 10 years after manufacture.
- **Batteries.** If your alarm has a replaceable battery, change it every year. Many newer alarms have a 10-year sealed battery.

Renters: your landlord is responsible for installing and maintaining smoke alarms to the required standard. Report faulty alarms in writing.

If someone in your home is deaf or hard of hearing, ask about alarms with strobe lights or vibrating pads.

Your escape plan

- **Draw a simple plan of your home.** Mark two ways out of each room where possible - usually a door and a window.
- **Check that exits work.** Windows should open. Security screens and deadlocks should open from inside without a key, or have a key kept in the lock or nearby.
- **Choose a meeting place outside,** such as the letterbox or a neighbour's driveway, where everyone gathers and can be counted.
- **Plan for people who need help:** babies, young children, older people, people with disability. Decide who helps whom.
- **Practise** at least twice a year, including at night with the lights off. Make it a calm drill, not a scary one.

If there's a fire

- **Get down low and go, go, go.** Smoke rises, so the cleaner air is near the floor. Crawl if there's smoke.
- **Feel doors with the back of your hand** before opening them. If a door is hot, use another way out.
- **Close doors behind you** to slow the fire and smoke.
- **Get out and stay out.** Never go back inside for belongings or pets.
- **Call Triple Zero (000)** from outside.
- **If you can't get out,** close the door, put a towel or clothing along the gap underneath, open the window and call for help. Call Triple Zero (000) and tell them where you are.
- **If your clothes catch fire:** stop, drop and roll. Cover your face with your hands.

Kitchen fires

Cooking is one of the most common causes of house fires.

- **Never leave cooking unattended,** especially with oil.
- **If oil catches fire,** turn off the heat if it's safe, and smother the flames with a fire blanket or a pan lid. **Never put water on an oil or fat fire** - it can cause a fireball.
- Keep a fire blanket in the kitchen, mounted where you can reach it away from the stove.
- Keep tea towels, paper and curtains away from the stovetop.

Lithium-ion batteries

E-bikes, e-scooters, power tools, laptops, phones and power banks all use lithium-ion batteries. When damaged, overcharged or poorly made, they can overheat and catch fire very quickly, giving off toxic smoke.

- Use the charger that came with the device, or one approved by the manufacturer.
- Charge on a hard, non-flammable surface - not on beds, sofas or carpet.
- Don't charge e-bikes and e-scooters in hallways or near exits, and avoid charging overnight or while you're out.
- Stop using any battery that's swollen, hot, damaged or smells odd.
- Buy from reputable suppliers, and make sure products meet Australian standards.
- Don't put batteries in household rubbish or recycling bins. Use a battery recycling drop-off.

Heaters, blankets and power boards

- Keep heaters at least a metre from anything that can burn.
- Turn heaters off when you leave the room or go to bed.
- Check electric blankets for wear before winter, and turn them off before sleeping unless they're designed for overnight use.
- Don't overload power boards or join several together.
- Clean the clothes dryer's lint filter after every load.
- Avoid candles. Use battery lights instead, especially during power outages.

Fire extinguishers

A small dry chemical extinguisher in the kitchen and a fire blanket can put out a small fire before it spreads. Learn how to use them before you need them. But your first job is always to get people out. Only fight a fire if it's small, you have a clear way out behind you and you've been trained.

Apartments and units

- Learn your building's evacuation plan and where the fire stairs are.
- Never use lifts during a fire.
- If the fire is in your unit, get out, close the door and raise the alarm.
- If the fire is elsewhere, follow building instructions. Feel your door before opening it. If the corridor is full of smoke, it may be safer to stay in your unit with the door closed, gaps sealed, and call Triple Zero (000).

Children and fire

- Keep matches and lighters out of reach.
- Teach children that firefighters are there to help, and not to hide from them.
- Practise the escape plan with children and show them how to crawl under smoke.
- Teach them their address and how to call Triple Zero (000).

After a fire

- Don't go back in until firefighters say it's safe.
- Contact your insurer.
- If you need somewhere to stay, contact family, your insurer or your council's recovery services.
- Smoke and soot can be harmful. Get advice before cleaning.
- A house fire can be very distressing, especially for children. Talk about it and reach out for support.

Your plan

Main and alternate exits Describe the exits or attach a floor plan.

Outside meeting point Choose a place well clear of the building that everyone can find.

Who needs help and what we'll do (private) Consider children, visitors, mobility, and whether everyone can hear the alarms.

Next smoke alarm check Choose a date.

Next escape practice Choose a date.

Who will lead the practice? Use a name or household role.

Date of our last escape drill

Want to know more?

Use your state fire service's escape-plan template to walk through two ways out with everyone at home.

- Fire and Rescue NSW - Home escape plans - planning and practising your escape.
- Queensland Fire Department - Indoor fire safety - heaters, cooking and candles.
- healthdirect - First aid kits - what to keep for burns and injuries.
- Your state fire service - for smoke alarm rules in your state or territory.
- Queensland Fire Department - smoke alarm requirements - source for the factual example above.

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Rare but real

Why include rare events?

These events are very unlikely to affect you. They're here for two reasons. First, people are curious about them, and good information is better than rumour when they turn up in the news. Second, each one teaches something useful: what you'd do if flights stopped, if GPS failed or if windows broke without warning. The plans you've already made for power, phones and travel cover most of what you'd need.

Part 1 - Volcanic ash

Volcanoes and Australia

The Australian mainland has no active volcanoes erupting today, but it's not volcano-free. The Newer Volcanics Province of western Victoria and south-eastern South Australia includes Mount Gambier, whose Blue Lake fills a volcanic crater, and Mount Schank. Geoscience Australia considers these areas dormant rather than extinct. An eruption is very unlikely in our lifetimes, but not impossible. Geoscience Australia - volcano classification

The volcanoes most likely to affect Australians are overseas: in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, New Zealand and elsewhere in the Pacific. Australia's own external territory of Heard Island has an active volcano, far to the south-west.

What it looked like

Bali, November 2024. An eruption in eastern Indonesia sent an ash cloud across flight paths. Airlines cancelled flights between Australia and Bali for several days, leaving thousands of travellers stranded on both sides.

The lesson: volcanic ash is mostly a travel problem for Australians. It grounds planes because ash can damage jet engines.

If you're travelling

- Before you go, check whether your travel insurance covers delays and cancellations caused by volcanic ash - some policies treat it as a known event once it's in the news.
- Keep some flexibility in your plans, and a reserve of medicines in case you're stranded.
- Follow your airline's updates and the Smartraveller advice for the country.
- If you're near an erupting volcano, follow local authority directions and stay out of exclusion zones.

If ash falls where you are

- Stay indoors with windows and doors closed.
- Wear a P2 mask if you need to go outside, and protect your eyes.
- Disconnect downpipes from rainwater tanks before ash reaches them, if it's safe and you're advised to.
- Clear ash from roofs carefully - wet ash is heavy and can collapse roofs - but only if it's safe to do so.

- Avoid driving. Ash reduces visibility and makes roads slippery.

Part 2 - Space weather

What it is

The Sun regularly throws out bursts of energy and charged particles. When a large burst reaches Earth, it can cause a geomagnetic storm. Most of the time, this just means beautiful auroras. A very severe storm can interfere with:

- GPS and satellite navigation
- high-frequency (HF) radio and some satellite communications
- satellites themselves
- long power lines and electricity networks

The Bureau of Meteorology's Australian Space Weather Forecasting Centre monitors the Sun and issues alerts and warnings.

What it looked like

The Carrington event, 1859. The strongest geomagnetic storm on record caused telegraph systems to fail and spark, and auroras were seen as far north as the tropics. If a storm of that size happened today, it could disrupt satellites, GPS and power grids around the world.

May 2024. A strong geomagnetic storm brought auroras visible across southern Australia, from Tasmania to parts of New South Wales and South Australia. The Bureau monitored strong geomagnetic conditions, and there was no major disruption to Australian services.

The lesson: space weather is monitored around the clock, and serious disruption is rare. The practical step is to have backups that don't depend on GPS or the internet.

What to do

Space weather doesn't need a special plan. The everyday preparations in this book cover it:

- Keep paper maps or downloaded offline maps for your local area and regular routes.
- Keep a battery radio for news.
- Have a way to contact people that doesn't depend on one network.
- Follow your usual power outage plan if the power goes out.

If you run a business or farm that relies on GPS - such as precision agriculture or surveying - ask your equipment supplier about backup options.

Part 3 - Asteroid airbursts

What they are

Every day, tonnes of dust and small rocks from space enter Earth's atmosphere and burn up harmlessly. Occasionally, a larger object - a few metres to a few tens of metres across - explodes in the air before reaching the ground. This is called an airburst. It can produce a bright flash, a loud bang and a shock wave strong enough to break windows over a wide area.

Scientists, including NASA and international partners, track larger objects that could pose a threat. There's no known large asteroid on a collision course with Earth. Any truly large threat would almost certainly be known about years in advance.

What it looked like

Chelyabinsk, Russia, February 2013. An object about 20 metres across exploded in the air over the city. The shock wave shattered windows across a large area, and more than a thousand people were injured, mostly by flying glass. Many had gone to their windows to look at the bright flash and were hurt when the shock wave arrived seconds or minutes later.

The lesson: if you see an unusually bright flash in the sky, move away from windows. The shock wave travels slower than light.

What to do

- If you see a very bright flash in the sky, move away from windows and glass doors, and take cover.
- Stay away from damaged buildings afterwards.
- Follow local emergency updates.
- Treat any injuries from broken glass, and call Triple Zero (000) if needed.

Why these plans overlap

All three of these rare events come back to the same basic preparations: a way to get information without the internet, paper maps, a reserve of medicines, a plan for staying away from windows, and someone outside the area you can contact. If you've done the rest of this book, you're already prepared for most of what these events could bring.

Your plan

Relevant local source or travel provider

Offline navigation fallback

Where we would get official updates

Want to know more?

Use these sources to distinguish a monitored event from speculation and find out whether any action is needed where you are.

- Geoscience Australia - Volcano - Australia's volcanoes and volcanic risk.
- ABC News - Bali flights cancelled - how the 2024 ash cloud affected travellers.
- Bureau of Meteorology - Space weather - forecasts, alerts and auroras.
- NASA - Asteroid facts - what asteroids are and how they're tracked.

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When services stop

The everyday side of every emergency

Whatever causes an emergency - a storm, a flood, a fire, a fault - the effects at home are usually the same few things: the power goes out, the water stops or isn't safe, the toilet doesn't flush, the fridge warms up, the road is closed, work and school close, and medicines or care are harder to get.

That's good news for planning. If you prepare for these everyday disruptions, you're prepared for most emergencies, whatever the cause.

Start with what you can least afford to lose

Ask: what would hurt our household most if it stopped for three days?

- For a family with a baby, it might be safe water for formula.
- For someone on home oxygen or dialysis, it's power.
- For an older person living alone, it might be cooling in a heatwave.
- For a household on an island or a single road, it's transport.

Plan for that first, and make sure its backup doesn't depend on the same thing failing. A backup that needs power won't help in a power outage.

How these pages work

Each page covers one service, with what to do before, during and after an outage, and a short plan to fill in. Start with power and water. Then work through the rest as they apply to you.

- When the power goes out
- Drinking water
- Toilets, waste and hygiene
- Food and safe cooking
- Transport and access
- Work, income and hardship
- School and childcare closures
- Medicines, equipment and care
- Heat, cold, smoke and indoor conditions

Want to know more?

Start with the service your household can least afford to lose and make sure its backup will work without the others.

- Australian Red Cross - Prepare - planning for everyday disruptions.
- AER - Who is your distributor? - who to call when the power goes out.
- Queensland Health - Get ready - health planning for disruptions.

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When the power goes out

The most common disruption

Power outages are the disruption Australian households are most likely to face. They happen in storms, heatwaves, floods, fires and cyclones, and sometimes on perfectly fine days when equipment fails. Most are fixed within hours. Some last days. After major events, parts of a network can take a week or more to restore.

What it looked like

Callide, May 2021. A failure at the Callide power station cut power to about 470,000 customers across Queensland. Powerlink says all affected south-east Queensland customers were back on within two hours.

Cyclone Alfred, March 2025. About 346,000 Energex customers lost power at the peak. Energex published targets of 75% restored by Wednesday, 95% by Friday and full restoration by Sunday, and reported full restoration on Sunday 16 March - about eight days after the major outages.

The lessons: plan for a short outage and a long one. And make sure your plan works in the dark, in the heat or both.

What stops working

Walk through your home and think about what needs power:

- lights
- fridge and freezer
- electric stove, oven and microwave
- air conditioning, fans and heaters
- hot water (if electric or gas-boosted with electric ignition)
- NBN, Wi-Fi and cordless phones
- phone and laptop charging
- medical equipment
- garage doors and electric gates
- water pumps for tanks and bores
- sewage pumps in some properties
- lifts and security doors in apartment buildings
- solar systems - many switch off in a blackout unless set up with a battery to supply the home

How restoration works

Electricity distributors (not retailers) look after the poles and wires. After a big event, they usually restore power in this order: first to essential services such as hospitals and water treatment, then to the parts of the network that bring back the most customers at once, then to smaller pockets and individual homes. That's why your neighbours' power may come back before yours.

Find your distributor on your bill. Save its outage map and faults number.

Before

Light and charge

- A torch or headlamp for each person, where they can find it in the dark.
- Spare batteries, and charged power banks.
- A battery or hand-crank radio.

Keep food cold

- Freeze a few bottles of water (leave room for expansion). They help keep the freezer cold and give you cold drinking water later.
- Keep a fridge thermometer, and a cooler and ice bricks ready.
- Before a forecast storm or cyclone, turn the fridge and freezer to their coldest settings.

Medical equipment and life support

- If anyone uses life support equipment, register with your electricity retailer. They'll tell your distributor, who must give you notice of planned outages.
- Registration doesn't guarantee supply in an unplanned outage. Agree a backup plan with your doctor and equipment supplier: how long the battery lasts, where you'd go, and when you'd go.

Know your manual overrides

- Practise opening the garage door and electric gates by hand.
- If you live in an apartment, know the stairs and who might need help.

During

- **Check whether it's just you.** Check your switchboard - if a safety switch has tripped, try resetting it once. If it trips again, call an electrician. Then check the distributor's outage map.
- **Note the time** the power went out.
- **Keep the fridge and freezer closed.** A closed fridge typically keeps food cold for about four hours. A full, closed freezer may hold temperature for about 48 hours, and a half-full one for about 24.
- **Start medical backups straight away.** If they won't last, contact your care team and move early to a place with reliable power.
- **Use torches, not candles.** Candles are a common cause of house fires during outages.

- **Unplug sensitive equipment** such as computers and TVs to protect them from surges when power returns. Leave one light switched on so you know when power is back.
- **Stay cool or warm.** See Heat, cold, smoke and indoor conditions.
- **Fallen power lines:** stay at least 8 metres away, treat them as live, and call your distributor or Triple Zero (000).
- **Generators** must run outdoors, away from doors, windows and vents. Never run one in a garage or carport, and never plug it into a power point - it can send power back into the lines and kill line workers.
- **Check on neighbours,** especially people who live alone or rely on equipment.

After

- Have wet wiring, sockets or appliances checked by a licensed electrician before use.
- Check food using Food and safe cooking.
- Ask a pharmacist about medicines that should have been refrigerated.
- Reset clocks, alarms and medical equipment.
- Recharge power banks and replace used batteries.
- If the outage was long, you may be eligible for a payment from your distributor under your state's guaranteed service level scheme, though outages caused by major events are often excluded. Check your distributor's website. Energex - guaranteed service levels and exclusions

If you need extra support

- **People on life support equipment** - register, plan and move early.
- **People who rely on cooling** (older people, people with some medical conditions) need a cool place to go in a summer outage.
- **People in apartments** may be stuck if lifts stop.
- **Households on tank or bore water** may lose water when pumps stop. Keep stored water.

Your plan

Power plan review date

Medical and mobility equipment

Medicines that need temperature control

Home access and essentials

Lighting and charging

Food and drinking water

Updates and check-ins

What would make us leave during a power outage?

Want to know more?

Find the distributor on your bill and save its outage map and emergency number. For powered medical equipment, ask your retailer or distributor how to register, get any required medical confirmation and confirm the backup with your supplier.

- AER - Who is your distributor? - find who to call.
- Energex outage finder and Ergon Energy outages - Queensland.
- Ausgrid, Endeavour Energy and Essential Energy - New South Wales.
- AusNet, CitiPower and Powercor, Jemena and United Energy - Victoria.
- SA Power Networks, Western Power, Horizon Power, TasNetworks, Evoenergy and Power and Water - other states and territories.
- EnergyAustralia - Life support - an example of how life support registration works. Ask your own retailer.
- Electrical Safety Office - Storms - safety after storm damage.
- Queensland Government - Using alternative fuel safely - generators and carbon monoxide.
- Energex - guaranteed service levels and exclusions - source for the factual example above.

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Backup power

Start with what you need, not what you could buy

Backup power is a big and growing market, and it's easy to spend a lot of money on equipment you don't need - or not enough on the equipment you do. The right starting point isn't a product. It's a short list of the things your household can't do without when the power is out, and how long you need them to last.

For most households, a few charged power banks and a torch for each person are enough. For households with powered medical equipment, a fridge full of medicines or someone who can't cope with heat, more planning is worth it.

Step 1 - List what matters

Write down what you'd want to keep running, in order of importance. For example:

1. Oxygen concentrator (essential, all the time)
2. Phones (essential, a few charges a day)
3. Fridge with insulin (important, can cycle on and off)
4. LED lights (important, evenings)
5. A fan (important in summer)
6. Radio (useful)

Things with heating elements - kettles, toasters, hair dryers, heaters, air conditioners and electric stoves - use a lot of power and are rarely worth running from backup.

Step 2 - Understand watts and watt-hours

- **Watts (W)** measure how much power something uses at a moment. It tells you whether a backup can run the device at all.
- **Watt-hours (Wh)** measure energy used over time. It tells you how long a backup will last.

To estimate watt-hours, multiply each device's watts by the hours you'll run it, then add them up.

Worked example: a fridge drawing 100 W for eight running hours uses 800 Wh. Add 120 Wh for lights, 40 Wh for a radio and 40 Wh for phone charging, and the total is 1,000 Wh. If you assume only about 80% of a battery's rated energy is usable after losses and reserves, you'd want about 1,250 Wh of capacity for one day.

For a fridge, a rough daily estimate in watt-hours is the energy label's kWh per year, divided by 365, multiplied by 1,000.

Watch the start-up surge. Fridges, pumps and other motors draw much more power for a moment when they start. Check that your backup can handle the surge as well as the continuous load.

Step 3 - Choose the right option

USB power banks. Cheap, small and safe. Good for phones, small lights, radios and some small fans. Most households should have one or two per person, kept charged.

Portable power stations. Larger rechargeable batteries with AC power points, USB ports and sometimes solar charging. They can run a fridge, CPAP, fan or lights for hours, depending on size. Safe to use indoors because they don't produce fumes. Check continuous output (W), capacity (Wh) and surge rating before buying.

Fuel generators. Can run larger loads for longer, as long as you have fuel. But they produce carbon monoxide and are a fire risk.

- **Always run them outdoors,** well away from doors, windows and vents. Never in a garage, carport, shed or under the house.
- **Never plug a generator into a power point** or connect it to your switchboard yourself. It can send power back into the network and kill line workers or neighbours. Connection to house wiring needs an approved changeover switch installed by a licensed electrician.
- Store fuel safely in approved containers, away from the house.
- Let it cool before refuelling.

Rooftop solar. Most grid-connected solar systems **switch off during a blackout** for safety, even in full sun. Unless your system has a battery and is set up to supply the home during an outage (often called "backup" or "islanding"), solar won't help. Ask your installer what your system does, which circuits are backed up and how to test it.

Home batteries. Some home battery systems can keep selected circuits running in a blackout. Others can't. Check with your installer, and test it.

Vehicles - V2L and V2H.

- **Vehicle-to-load (V2L)** uses an electric vehicle's battery to power plug-in appliances through a socket in the car or an adaptor at the charge port. Not all EVs support it, and you may need a manufacturer-approved adaptor - a normal charging cable isn't a substitute. Buy and test it before you need it. Keep enough charge to leave, detour and reach a working charger.
- **Vehicle-to-home (V2H)** can power home circuits, but only through compatible, approved equipment and licensed installation.
- **Plug-in hybrids** may start their petrol engine while powering devices, so only use them outdoors, well away from building openings.
- Never plug vehicle, battery or generator output into a household power point.

Step 4 - Medical equipment

If anyone relies on powered medical equipment:

- **Register with your electricity retailer for life support.** It doesn't guarantee supply, but it means you'll be told about planned outages.
- **Ask your equipment supplier** what backup is clinically suitable. Some devices need pure sine wave power, specific batteries or approved accessories.
- **Test the runtime** in real use: how long does the battery last at your usual settings?
- **Plan when you'll move** to a place with reliable power, well before the battery runs low.
- **Keep instructions, chargers and labelled leads** with the equipment.

Step 5 - Test and maintain

- Charge power banks and power stations every three to six months. Batteries left flat for long periods can be damaged.
- Run a test at your regular review: plug in the devices you'd use and see how long it lasts.
- Run generators briefly every few months, outdoors.
- Replace fuel that's been stored for a long time.
- Keep a short, printed set of instructions with each piece of equipment, so anyone can use it in the dark.

Safety reminders

- Keep plugs and equipment dry and off wet ground.
- Protect leads from damage, and don't create trip hazards.
- Charge lithium batteries on a hard, non-flammable surface, and stop using any that are swollen or damaged.
- After a flood or fire, don't try to reconnect solar, batteries or wiring yourself. Ask a licensed electrician.

If you have an EV

- ☐ Confirm the exact model and trim supports V2L
- ☐ Buy the compatible manufacturer-approved adaptor or cable if required
- ☐ Check output and appliance start-up surge
- ☐ Test essential appliances and the minimum charge setting
- ☐ Keep the adaptor and leads together with instructions
- ☐ Agree on a departure charge and a plan if V2L is unavailable

Vehicle model and trim

Manufacturer’s V2L output limit (W)

Minimum charge to leave and reach a charger

Where we store the adaptor and leads

What we need to power and estimated daily energy (Wh)

Your plan

Our backup equipment and its capacity

How long it lasts in our test

Date of last test

Want to know more?

Test your backup with the equipment you intend to run and keep a copy of the manufacturer’s instructions next to it.

- Energex - Bidirectional charging - V2H and V2G explained.
- Hyundai - Vehicle to load (V2L) - one manufacturer's V2L instructions. Check your own vehicle's manual.
- Queensland Government - Using alternative fuel and electricity generation safely - generator and carbon monoxide safety.
- Electrical Safety Office - Storms - electrical safety after storms.
- EnergyAustralia - Life support - an example of life support registration.

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Drinking water

Why water comes first

People can manage for a long time with little food, but only a few days without water. In an emergency, tap water can stop or become unsafe because:

- a water main bursts or pipes are damaged

- pumps or treatment plants lose power
- floodwater contaminates the supply
- bushfire ash or firefighting chemicals reach tanks and catchments
- there's a contamination incident at a treatment plant

You may lose water completely, or still have water coming out of the tap that isn't safe to drink.

Three different notices

Water providers and health authorities use different notices. They ask for very different things, so read the notice carefully.

Boil water alert. The water may have germs in it. Bring it to a rolling boil, let it cool in a clean, covered container, and use it for drinking, cooking, brushing teeth, making ice and preparing baby formula. You can usually still shower and wash, but don't swallow the water. Follow your provider's advice on what needs boiled water.

Do not drink. The water may have chemical contamination that boiling won't remove. Don't drink it, cook with it or make ice with it, even if boiled. You may be able to use it for washing and flushing - check the notice.

Do not use. The water isn't safe for any use - drinking, cooking, washing or bathing. You may still be able to use it for flushing toilets. Use only the alternative supply your provider names.

Boiling doesn't remove chemicals, and it doesn't make floodwater safe.

Storing water

The Supplies page sets out how much to store. A few practical points:

- **Use clean, food-grade containers** with tight lids - water containers from a camping or hardware store, or well-washed drink bottles. Never use containers that have held chemicals, paint or fuel.
- **Or use sealed bottled water,** which keeps until its best-before date.
- **Label each container** with the date filled.
- **Store in a cool, dark place** away from chemicals and direct sunlight.
- **Replace stored tap water** every six months or as your provider recommends.
- **Choose sizes you can lift.** A 20 litre container weighs about 20 kilograms. Several smaller containers may be easier.

Before a forecast storm or cyclone, fill extra containers, and fill the bath, laundry tub or clean buckets with water for flushing and washing. Keep children away from filled baths and buckets.

Rainwater tanks

If you rely on a rainwater tank:

- Know how much it holds and how long it would last your household.

- Know whether your pump needs power, and how you'd get water out without it. A tap at the bottom of the tank is useful.
- Keep gutters clean and the first-flush diverter working.
- After a bushfire, ash fall, flood or dust storm, the water may be contaminated. Disconnect downpipes before ash or smoke reaches you if you're advised to, and check your state health department's advice before drinking.

Bores

Bore water may become contaminated during floods. Don't drink it after flooding until it's been tested or you've had advice from your local council or health department.

During an outage

- **Use your stored water** for drinking, cooking, brushing teeth and baby formula first.
- **Ration sensibly.** Drink enough. Use washing water carefully.
- **Hot water system:** a full storage hot water system holds safe water you can use in an emergency. Turn off the power or gas to it first, and let the water cool before draining from the bottom valve. Check your manual.
- **Ice cubes and frozen bottles** in the freezer are drinking water.
- **Pool water** is for flushing only, and only if the sewer works. Never drink it.
- **Follow your provider's instructions** for any alternative supply, such as water carts or bottled water distribution.

After

- Wait for your water provider's all-clear.
- When supply returns, your provider may ask you to run your taps for a few minutes to flush the pipes.
- Replace filters in water filters and fridges if advised.
- Refill your stored water containers and check lids and seals.

If you need extra support

- **Babies:** use sealed bottled water or cooled boiled water for formula, and follow the instructions on the tin. Ask your child health nurse if you're unsure.
- **People with weakened immune systems** should ask their doctor about extra precautions during boil water alerts.
- **People who can't easily lift containers** should store water in smaller bottles and ask a neighbour to help carry supplies.
- **Pets** need clean drinking water too. Don't let them drink floodwater.

Your plan

Water supplier and outage contact

Where drinking water is stored

Backup source of safe water

What we've checked

☐ Checked our current water supply

☐ Allowed for pets and individual needs

Want to know more?

Save your water supplier's advice and contact number so you can check a boil-water notice or another drinking-water restriction.

- Queensland Health - Drinking water during and after a disaster - tanks, bores and boiling.
- NSW Health - What to do if a boil water alert is in place - step-by-step guidance.
- Australian CDC - Preventing disease after floods - water safety after flooding.
- Get Ready Queensland - Emergency kit - how much water to store.

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Toilets, waste and hygiene

Two different problems

When something goes wrong, it helps to know which of these you're dealing with:

- **No tap water, but the sewer works.** Your toilet will flush if you pour water into the bowl. You just need water to do it.
- **The sewer isn't working.** Pipes may be broken, blocked or flooded, or sewage pumps may have lost power. Flushing may make sewage back up into your home or your neighbours' homes, or overflow into the street.

Ask your water provider, council or strata manager which service is affected. Some homes, especially on low ground or in apartment buildings, rely on sewage pumps that stop when the power goes out.

Why hygiene matters in emergencies

In disasters, gastro and other infections spread easily: people are tired, water is short, and floodwater can carry sewage. Simple hygiene - handwashing, safe toilet use and careful waste handling - prevents much of this.

Before

Keep a hygiene kit together:

- soap and alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- disposable gloves
- heavy-duty garbage bags and ties
- toilet paper and wet wipes
- a sturdy bucket with a tight lid (if your council recommends a temporary toilet)
- absorbent material such as kitty litter or sawdust
- disinfectant
- period products, nappies and continence aids

Write down your water provider's wastewater fault number and your building or strata contact.

If the sewer works but tap water is off

- Pour a bucket of non-drinking water (from the bath, pool or a stored container) quickly into the toilet bowl to flush.
- Only flush when you need to.
- Stop straight away if sewage backs up or you're told to stop.

If the sewer isn't working - a temporary toilet

Only use a temporary toilet if your council or water provider advises it. A simple version:

1. Line a sturdy bucket with two heavy-duty garbage bags.
2. Add a layer of absorbent material such as kitty litter or sawdust.
3. After each use, add a little more absorbent material and close the lid.
4. When the bag is about half full, tie it off, double-bag it and store it securely outside, away from food, water, children and pets.
5. Ask your council how and when to dispose of it. Never put it in stormwater drains or floodwater.

Some households use two buckets: one for urine and one for solid waste, which reduces smell and volume.

Washing hands without running water

- Use a container with a tap, or have someone pour water for you.
- Use soap and safe water, and wash for at least 20 seconds.
- Use hand sanitiser when water is short, but wash with soap when hands are visibly dirty.
- Always wash hands after using the toilet, handling waste, changing nappies, and before preparing food or eating.

Rubbish

Rubbish collections may stop for days after an emergency.

- Keep food waste in sealed bags and bins, away from the house and out of reach of animals.
- Keep general rubbish separate from flood-damaged goods.
- Follow your council's instructions for kerbside collection of storm and flood waste.
- Don't burn rubbish.

Personal hygiene with little water

- Use wet wipes or a damp cloth for a sponge wash.
- Brush teeth with a small amount of drinking water.
- Keep period products, nappies and continence aids well stocked - these are often among the first things to run out in shops.

After

- Follow your provider's advice before using toilets normally again.
- Clean and disinfect buckets and equipment as directed. Never mix cleaning products - some combinations produce toxic gases.
- If sewage has come into your home, get advice from your council or health department before cleaning, and contact your insurer.

If you need extra support

- **People who use continence aids** should keep at least a week's supply.
- **People with mobility needs** should plan how they'd use a temporary toilet safely - a commode or toilet frame can help.
- **Babies and young children** need extra nappies and wipes, and a safe place for changing.

Your plan

Wastewater or strata contact

Alternate toilet or hygiene arrangement

Whether our home relies on a sewage pump

What we've checked

☐ Packed handwashing supplies

Want to know more?

Ask your water or wastewater provider how a sewer outage would affect your property, especially if it relies on a pump.

- NSW Health - Staying healthy during and after a flood - hygiene, sewage and clean-up.
- healthdirect - Floods and cyclones - avoiding infection.
- Australian CDC - Preventing disease after floods - gastro and other infections.

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Food and safe cooking

Eating well when things stop

In a short outage, food is mostly about two things: keeping what's in the fridge safe, and having a few easy meals that don't need power. In a longer one, it's about a pantry you can live from and safe ways to cook. This page covers both.

The fridge and freezer

Food poisoning bacteria grow quickly between 5°C and 60°C. Once the power goes out, the clock starts.

How long food stays cold:

- A closed fridge typically keeps food cold for about **4 hours**.
- A full, closed freezer may hold its temperature for about **48 hours**.
- A half-full freezer, about **24 hours**.

Keep the doors shut. Every time you open them, cold air escapes. Plan what you'll take out before you open the door.

Use a thermometer. A cheap fridge thermometer takes the guesswork out. Food in the fridge should be at 5°C or below.

Before a forecast storm or cyclone, turn the fridge and freezer to their coldest settings, and fill gaps in the freezer with frozen bottles of water - they help it stay cold for longer.

The 2-hour/4-hour rule

For perishable food - meat, fish, dairy, cooked rice and pasta, prepared salads, leftovers - add up the total time it's been between 5°C and 60°C:

- **Under 2 hours:** use it, or put it back in the fridge.
- **2 to under 4 hours:** use it straight away. Don't put it back in the fridge.
- **4 hours or more:** throw it out.

If in doubt, throw it out. Never taste food to check whether it's safe. Food that looks and smells fine can still make you sick.

Frozen food that still has ice crystals or is at 5°C or below can be refrozen, although quality may suffer. Food that has fully thawed should be treated like fridge food.

Throw out any food that has been in contact with floodwater, including food in containers that aren't fully sealed. Commercially sealed cans that aren't damaged can be cleaned and sanitised before opening.

Eat in the right order

1. **First,** eat fresh food from the fridge that will spoil soonest.
2. **Then,** frozen food as it thaws.
3. **Then,** your pantry and long-life supplies.

Meals without power

Meals that need no cooking:

- breakfast cereal with UHT or plant milk
- crackers or wraps with tinned tuna, salmon or chicken, cheese spread or nut butter
- tinned beans, chickpeas or lentils with tinned corn and a dressing
- tinned fruit with long-life custard
- muesli bars, dried fruit and nuts

Meals for a camp stove or BBQ, cooked **outdoors only**:

- instant noodles or couscous (they cook in boiled water)
- pasta with jarred sauce
- tinned soups and stews
- eggs, if they've been kept cool

Keep a manual can opener, utensils, plates and a way to wash up.

Cooking safely

- **Never use a BBQ, camp stove, gas heater or generator indoors,** in a garage, carport or tent. They produce carbon monoxide, which can kill.
- Keep a fire extinguisher or fire blanket nearby when cooking outdoors.
- Keep children and pets well away from hot equipment.
- Store gas bottles upright, outside and away from heat.
- **If you smell gas,** leave the area and call your gas distributor from outside.
- If your gas supply was turned off, follow your gas supplier's instructions before using it again.

Keeping clean

With little water, hygiene is harder but more important.

- Wash hands with soap and safe water before preparing food and eating. Use hand sanitiser when water is short.
- Wash dishes with safe water and detergent.
- Clean benches with safe water and detergent.

Special diets and babies

- Plan carefully for allergies, coeliac disease, diabetes and cultural or religious food needs. Keep a separate supply that's clearly labelled.
- For babies on formula, keep sealed formula, sealed bottled water (or a way to boil water safely), clean bottles and a way to sterilise them.
- Breastfeeding is safe and continues to protect babies during emergencies. Breastfeeding parents need extra water and food.

Pets

Keep at least a week of pet food, including any special diet, and extra drinking water.

After

- Clean and sanitise the fridge before restocking.
- Restock in stages.
- Use your oldest pantry food first, and replace items your household will eat.
- Note what you ran out of or didn't use, and adjust your supplies.

Your plan

Meals and essential items

Food allergy or dietary requirements

Backup supplier or delivery option

What we've checked

☐ Checked use-by dates

☐ Checked food for pets and infants

Gas supplier

Safe alternative for meals

Want to know more?

Print the food-safety poster and leave it near the fridge. A thermometer and the time the power went out can save guesswork.

- FSANZ - Food safety in an emergency - power outages, floods and fires.
- FSANZ - 2-hour/4-hour rule - how the rule works.

- Food Safety Information Council - Food safety in emergencies - practical tips.
- Food Safety Information Council - Power outage poster (PDF) - print it and stick it near the fridge.
- Queensland Health - Food safety after a disaster - floodwater and food.
- Queensland Government - Using alternative fuel safely - BBQs, stoves and generators.

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Transport and access

Getting out, getting help, getting home

In many emergencies, transport is the thing that decides your options. If the road is open and the car has fuel, you can leave early, reach supplies or get to a cool place. If the only road is flooded, the ferry is cancelled or the car is flat, you're staying put - ready or not.

This page helps you plan for both: having a way to leave, and being ready if you can't.

Know your routes

- **Plan two routes** to your main destinations: your backup accommodation, the hospital, school and work.
- **Check they don't share a weak point** - the same low bridge, floodplain, road cutting, ferry or bushland stretch. Two roads across the same floodplain may close together.
- **Drive both routes** at least once, so they're familiar.
- **Keep a paper map** in the car, and download offline maps on your phone.
- **Know your road authority's traffic website or app** for closures.

Fuel and charge

- In storm, cyclone and fire seasons, try to keep **at least half a tank** of fuel.
- For an electric vehicle, set a charge level that covers leaving, a detour and reaching a working charger - and remember chargers need power. Cold weather and running the air conditioning reduce range.
- If a warning tells you to go, **leave** - don't wait for a full tank or full charge.
- Service stations need power to pump fuel and take payments. In widespread outages, they may close.

If you don't drive

Many people don't drive, or can't drive in an emergency. If that's you:

- **Arrange a lift now** with a neighbour, friend or family member, and a backup.
- **Know your public transport options** and how disruptions are announced.
- **Keep a taxi or rideshare number** and some cash.
- **Ask your council** whether it has a register or arrangements for people who need help to evacuate.
- **If you use a wheelchair or mobility aid,** make sure your transport and destination can take it. Accessible taxis book out quickly in an emergency - arrange it early.

Islands and ferries

If you live on an island or rely on a ferry, see Islands and ferry-dependent communities. Ferries often stop in high winds and rough seas, sometimes well before an emergency peaks. Plan to leave early, or plan to stay.

Your car kit

Keep a basic emergency kit in the car:

- high-visibility vest, warning triangle and torch
- water and long-life snacks (rotate them - heat in a parked car can spoil them)
- first aid kit
- phone charger and cable
- blanket, rain gear, hat and spare clothes
- paper map and printed emergency numbers
- tyre inflator or puncture kit, and jumper leads, as your vehicle handbook recommends
- waste bags, wipes and toilet paper
- your local ABC radio station preset

When you leave in an emergency

Take from the house:

- medicines, inhalers, adrenaline autoinjectors and prescriptions
- glasses, hearing aids, mobility aids, chargers and power banks
- wallet, keys, cash and important documents
- pets, with carriers, leads and food

Then:

- Check your route before setting out.
- Use warnings and closures to rule out unsafe routes.
- Tell your out-of-area contact where you're going and when you'll check in.
- **Never drive through floodwater, smoke or a closed road.**

If you're stuck on the road

- If you're stopped by floodwater, turn around.
- If you're caught in smoke from a bushfire, see Bushfire and grassfire.
- If you're stuck in a long traffic jam during an evacuation, stay calm, keep the radio on and conserve fuel.
- If your car breaks down, pull well off the road, turn on your hazard lights and call roadside assistance or Triple Zero (000) if you're in danger.

After

- Confirm roads and services have reopened before you return.
- Watch for damaged roads, debris, fallen lines and potholes after floods.
- Refuel or recharge when you can.
- Note which route worked, and update your plan.

Your plan

Alternate travel option

Road or ferry information

Fuel or charging backup

Roadside kit

☐ Keep a high-visibility vest, warning triangle and torch within reach
☐ Check the vehicle handbook for tyre inflator, puncture kit and jump-start arrangements
☐ Secure emergency tools, blankets and any approved extinguisher
☐ Pack rain gear, hat, spare clothes, towel and first aid supplies
☐ Rotate water and snacks and check for heat damage
☐ Pack waste bags, wipes, toilet paper and personal hygiene supplies

Paper and digital backups

☐ Print emergency numbers, roadside assistance and insurance contacts
☐ Keep an appropriate local wildlife rescue contact and paper directions
☐ Preset the local ABC station and save offline maps and backup EV chargers

Take from the house when leaving

☐ Medicines, inhalers, adrenaline autoinjectors, prescription information and pet medicines
☐ Glasses, hearing aids, mobility equipment, chargers and power banks
☐ Wallet, keys, cash, waterproof records and any backup devices

Want to know more?

Check whether your backup route shares the same bridge, floodplain or ferry as your usual route.

- NSW Government - Be ready for an emergency evacuation - planning to leave.
- Australian Red Cross - Prepare - planning routes and transport.
- Transport Victoria - Snow and winter driving - driving in winter conditions.
- Hyundai - Vehicle to load (V2L) - an example of using an EV to power devices. Check your own vehicle's manual.
- Your state road authority's traffic website - for closures.

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Work, income and hardship

When the shifts stop but the bills don't

Emergencies often hit household money twice: the cost of damage, clean-up and evacuation, and lost income when a workplace closes, roads are cut or someone has to stay home to care for family. For casual workers and small business owners, a week without work can be a serious problem. The bills - rent, mortgage, power, phone, insurance - keep coming.

A little planning ahead, and knowing where to ask for help, makes this much easier to manage.

Before

Talk to your employer

- How will they tell you if the workplace closes?
- Can you work from home? Do you have what you need to do that, including a backup internet option?
- What happens to your pay if the workplace closes, or you can't get there?
- What leave can you use if you need to care for family, or your home is damaged?

Save your manager's and payroll's numbers on paper.

Know your leave

The Fair Work Ombudsman explains the leave most employees are entitled to, including annual leave, personal and carer's leave, and community service leave for emergency service volunteers. Your award or agreement may give you more. Casual employees usually don't get paid leave, so a savings buffer matters even more.

Build a small buffer

- Even a small emergency fund helps. A few dollars a week adds up.

- Keep a paper list of your essential bills, account numbers and the hardship phone line for each provider.
- Check your insurance covers your home, contents and car for the hazards where you live. If you run a small business, ask about business interruption cover.

Plan for caring

If schools close or a family member needs help, who will look after them? Agree a backup carer, and ask what they could do.

During

- **Tell your employer early** if you can't travel, or need to care for someone.
- **Don't take risks to get to work.** Never drive through floodwater or into closed areas to get to a shift.
- **Keep records** of lost shifts, pay and extra costs, such as accommodation, fuel and food. You may need them for claims or assistance.
- **Check disaster assistance.** If your area has been declared a disaster area, you may be eligible for government payments. See Damage, insurance and assistance.

Hardship help

If payments are getting tight, ask early. You usually have to ask - help isn't automatic.

- **Banks and lenders** have hardship teams that can defer repayments, reduce payments or pause interest. Ask about disaster relief packages, which banks often announce after major events.
- **Energy, water and phone providers** have hardship programmes. They can set up payment plans and may waive some fees.
- **Landlords and property managers** - talk to them about rent if your income has dropped or the property is damaged. Each state's tenancy authority explains your rights.
- **Centrelink** - if you're already receiving a payment, tell Services Australia about changes in your circumstances.
- **Free financial counselling** - the National Debt Helpline (1800 007 007) can help you work out what to do and speak to creditors for you.
- **Avoid quick loans.** Payday lenders and "buy now, pay later" can make things harder. Talk to a financial counsellor first.

After

- Get any agreements about pay, leave or hardship arrangements in writing.
- Keep copies of claims and correspondence.
- If a bank, insurer or other financial firm doesn't help, you can complain to the Australian Financial Complaints Authority (AFCA) for free.
- If you're struggling with stress about money, talk to someone. Lifeline (13 11 14) is available any time.

If you run a small business

- Have a business continuity plan: how you'd keep operating, contact staff and customers, and protect stock and records.
- Back up records off-site.
- Check your insurance, including business interruption cover.
- Government small business support is often announced after major disasters. Check your state government and business.gov.au.

Your plan

Employer or payroll contact

Backup income or hardship contact

Want to know more?

Keep your employer’s contact details and pay records accessible so you can discuss disrupted work and check assistance options.

- Fair Work Ombudsman - Leave - leave entitlements, including in emergencies.
- Moneysmart - Financial hardship - asking for help with bills and loans.
- National Debt Helpline - free financial counselling.
- myGov - Experiencing a natural disaster - government support.
- Services Australia - Disaster support - payments and how to claim.
- Australian Financial Complaints Authority - free complaints service.

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School and childcare closures

When school closes before work does

Schools and childcare services often close early, or don't open, when a cyclone, flood, fire or heatwave is forecast. Sometimes they close because the building is damaged or without power, sometimes because staff can't get there, and sometimes because roads to school are unsafe. Closures can be announced the night before, or at short notice during the day.

For parents and carers, this means sudden questions: Who picks up the children? Who looks after them if I have to work? What if I can't get there?

A simple plan takes those decisions off your hands.

Before

Know how the service communicates

- How will the school or service tell you about closures? App, text, email, website, social media, local radio?
- Make sure your contact details are up to date, including a second contact.
- Ask what happens if a closure is announced during the day.

Authorised pickup

- Add at least one backup adult to the authorised pickup list - a neighbour, friend or relative who lives or works nearby.
- Make sure they know the route, the pickup procedure and have the school's number.
- Check how the school confirms who can collect a child, and what ID they need.

Know the school's emergency plan

- Will children shelter at school, or be moved to another site?
- Where would they be taken if the school had to evacuate?
- How will the school contact parents if phones are down?
- What happens to children who catch a bus?

Children in two homes

Share the pickup plan with both households, and agree who collects the children in an emergency.

Backup care

If schools close for several days and you need to work, who could care for your children? A grandparent, a neighbour, a friend? Some workplaces allow children to come along, or let you work from home.

Talking to children about the plan

- Tell children who might pick them up if you can't, and practise it with them.
- Tell them what to do if they're at school when an emergency happens: listen to the teachers and stay with the class.
- Make sure younger children know their full name, your name and your phone number - or keep a card in their school bag.
- For older children who travel alone, agree what they should do if transport stops: where to go, who to call.
- Keep a comfort item handy for younger children.

During

- **Check the service's message** before travelling.

- **Don't take risks.** Roads near home and school may be affected differently. Never drive through floodwater to pick up children - schools keep children safe until they're collected.
- **Confirm who is picking up each child,** and let the school know if it's someone different.
- **Send a short message** to your household and out-of-area contact.
- **If travel is unsafe,** ring the service to agree what happens next.

After

- Check reopening dates and bus times before the next school day.
- Talk with your children about what happened. Some may be worried, especially if the school was damaged or their friends were affected.
- Let the school know if your child has been through something distressing, so teachers can support them.
- Update pickup details if anything in the plan changed.

Your plan

School or childcare contact

Authorised pickup and backup

Meeting arrangement

How the service tells us about closures

Backup care if the school closes for days

What we've checked

☐ Checked authorised-pickup records

Want to know more?

Ask your school or childcare service how it announces closures and confirms who can collect your child.

- Australian Red Cross - Prepare - including planning with children.
- healthdirect - Kids and mental health - supporting children after an emergency.
- Fair Work Ombudsman - Leave - carer's leave when schools close.
- Your school or childcare service - for its emergency plan.

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Medicines, equipment and care

When routine care becomes urgent

For many households, the most serious risk in an emergency isn't the storm or flood. It's what happens if medicines run out, a fridge holding insulin warms up, a home oxygen concentrator stops, a support worker can't arrive or a dialysis appointment is missed. A routine part of life can become urgent within a day or two.

The answer is a plan made with the people who know your treatment: your doctor, pharmacist, specialist team, equipment supplier and support workers.

Medicines

Keep a reserve

Get Ready Queensland suggests a week's supply of essential medicines. Ask your pharmacist how to do this safely - for some medicines it's simple; for others there are rules about how much can be supplied at once.

- Refill prescriptions before you run low, not on the last day.
- Ask about electronic prescriptions (eScripts), which any pharmacy can dispense - useful if you have to leave home.
- If you're evacuating, take all your medicines, in their original packaging, and your prescriptions.

Keep a medication list

For each person, write down:

- the name of each medicine, the strength and the dose
- when it's taken
- what it's for
- the prescriber's name and phone number
- the pharmacy's name and phone number
- allergies
- storage needs, such as refrigeration

Keep a printed copy in your go bag and with this book. A photo on your phone is a good backup.

Medicines that need refrigeration

Insulin, some biological medicines, some eye drops, some vaccines and some liquid antibiotics need to be kept cool.

- Ask your pharmacist how long each medicine can safely stay out of the fridge, and at what temperature.
- Keep an insulated cooler bag and ice bricks ready. Don't let medicines touch ice directly, as freezing can damage them.

- In a power outage, note the time, keep the fridge closed and move medicines to the cooler if the outage will be long.
- If medicines have warmed up, **ask your pharmacist before using them.** Don't guess.

If you run out

- In an emergency, pharmacists can sometimes provide an emergency supply of certain regular medicines without a prescription. Ask.
- Evacuation centres often have health staff who can help.
- Never change your dose to stretch supplies without advice.

Powered medical equipment

If someone in your household uses equipment such as a home oxygen concentrator, CPAP or other ventilation support, home dialysis, an electric hospital bed or pressure mattress, feeding pump or powered wheelchair:

- **Register with your electricity retailer for life support.** Your retailer will tell your distributor. They must give you notice of planned outages. **Registration doesn't guarantee power in an unplanned outage.**
- **Ask your equipment supplier** how long the battery lasts under real use, how to charge it and what backup they recommend.
- **Agree a backup plan** with the treating team: what to do, who to call and when to move to a place with reliable power.
- **Move early.** Don't wait until the battery is nearly flat. Hospitals and health services may be busy during emergencies.
- **Keep instructions, chargers and spare parts** with the equipment.

See Backup power for advice on power banks and power stations.

Treatments and appointments

If you have regular treatments such as dialysis, chemotherapy or wound care:

- Ask your treatment team what happens if you can't get to an appointment, or the service closes.
- Ask about backup locations.
- Know who to call out of hours.

Home care and support workers

If you rely on carers or support workers:

- Ask your provider about their emergency plan. What happens if workers can't reach you?
- Have a backup person - family, friend or neighbour - who could help with essential tasks.
- Make sure your support workers know your emergency plan.

- NDIS participants can talk to their support coordinator or planner about including emergency preparedness in their plan.

During

- **Start the agreed backup early,** and track time and temperature.
- **Contact your pharmacist or care team** if supply, storage or equipment fails.
- **Move before treatment or equipment is at risk.**
- **Call Triple Zero (000)** if life is in danger.

After

- Check affected medicines with a pharmacist before using them.
- Restock your reserve and recharge equipment.
- Note what worked and what didn't, and update the plan with your care team.

Your plan

Pharmacy or care provider and phone

Power or cold storage backup

Supplier or carer backup

What we've checked

☐ Checked backup power with provider

☐ Discussed temperature-sensitive medicines

Want to know more?

Ask your pharmacist to help you write down storage needs and a refill plan for each essential medicine.

- Queensland Health - Get ready - health planning for emergencies.
- Queensland Health - Emergency kit, plain English (PDF) - health items for your kit.
- Get Ready Queensland - Emergency kit checklist (PDF) - including medicines.
- EnergyAustralia - Life support - an example of life support registration. Ask your own retailer.
- healthdirect - Natural disasters - health advice during disasters.
- Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness workbook (PDF) - planning with your support needs in mind.

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Heat, cold, smoke and indoor conditions

When home stops feeling safe

A house that's usually comfortable can quickly become too hot, too cold or full of smoke when the power goes out or the weather turns. People can become unwell indoors without realising it - especially older people, babies, people with chronic illness and people living alone.

This page brings together what to do about indoor conditions. The hazard pages - Heatwave, Extreme cold and Bushfire - have more on each one.

Pick your rooms now

Walk through your home and decide:

- **The coolest room** - usually on the lowest floor, away from the afternoon sun, with few windows.
- **The warmest room** - usually small, with few outside walls, where you can close the door.
- **The cleanest-air room** - with windows that seal well, where you could run an air purifier.

It may be the same room for all three.

Also choose **a backup place** to go if your home becomes unsafe: a friend's or relative's home, a library, a shopping centre, a community centre or an air-conditioned cinema. Think about how you'd get there, especially if you don't drive or someone needs accessible transport.

Too hot

Keep the heat out

- Close blinds, curtains and windows on the sunny side before the sun hits them.
- External shading - awnings, shade cloth, external blinds - works much better than inside curtains.
- Open windows in the evening and overnight if it's cooler outside and safe.

Keep people cool

- Use fans and air conditioning while you have power.
- Drink water regularly.
- Use cool, damp cloths on the neck and wrists, and cool showers or foot baths.
- Wear light, loose clothing.

If the power goes out in a heatwave, move early to your backup place. Don't wait until someone is unwell.

Watch for heat illness - see Heatwave, smoke and indoor heat for the signs.

Too cold

- Gather everyone in the warmest room and close the door.

- Layer up with warm, dry clothing, blankets and hats.
- Eat regularly and have warm drinks.
- Block draughts under doors.
- **Never bring a BBQ, camp stove, outdoor heater or generator inside** - carbon monoxide can kill.
- Use heaters safely - see Extreme cold, snow and ice.

Smoke

Bushfire smoke, dust and smoke from industrial fires can make indoor air unhealthy.

- Close windows and doors.
- Turn off evaporative coolers. Set air conditioners to recirculate.
- A portable air purifier with a HEPA filter can clean the air in one room. Size it to the room.
- Avoid adding indoor pollution: don't burn candles, incense or wood, and avoid frying.
- Check air quality with your state environment agency or AirRater.
- If the house can't stay cool enough with windows closed, or the smoke inside is heavy, go somewhere with cleaner air.
- People with asthma, lung or heart conditions should follow their action plans.

Mould and damp after floods

After flooding or leaks, mould can grow within a day or two and affect breathing, especially for people with asthma or weakened immune systems.

- Dry the house as quickly as possible: open windows, use fans and dehumidifiers when power is back.
- Remove wet carpets, underlay and furnishings that can't be dried.
- Clean hard surfaces with detergent and water.
- Wear gloves, eye protection and a P2 mask while cleaning mould.
- People with breathing problems should stay away during the clean-up.

Pets

Pets suffer in heat, cold and smoke too. Bring them inside your safer room, give them water and watch for distress.

After

- Check on the people who had the hardest time.
- Note which room worked, and which didn't.
- Consider improvements: shading, insulation, draught sealing or an air purifier.

Your plan

Safer room or alternate destination

Person we will check on

Want to know more?

Choose a backup place that meets your household’s needs for temperature, clean air and accessible transport.

- healthdirect - Heatstroke - signs and first aid.
- healthdirect - Hypothermia - signs and first aid.
- healthdirect - Bushfires and your health - smoke and masks.
- Queensland Health - Mould after a disaster - cleaning safely.
- AirRater - air quality where you are.

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Outages, cyber and public safety

Emergencies on a fine day

Not every emergency comes with storm clouds. Some of the most disruptive events in recent Australian memory happened on ordinary days: a phone network going down for most of a day, a software update stopping airlines and shops around the world, a cyber attack closing major ports, a data breach exposing millions of people's details.

These events rarely put lives directly at risk. But they can stop you calling for help, paying for food, getting a prescription, travelling or proving who you are. And because we rely on a handful of connected systems for almost everything, one failure can affect many services at once.

The same small backups cover most of them

- **A second way to call** - another network, a neighbour or a landline that works in a blackout.
- **Paper contacts** - the numbers you'd need if your phone was lost, flat or locked.
- **Some cash** - enough for a few days of essentials.
- **A small pantry and a medicine reserve** - so a short supply hiccup isn't a crisis.
- **Strong passwords and multi-factor sign-in** - so a breach elsewhere doesn't become a breach of your accounts.
- **A tested backup** of the files you'd hate to lose.

The pages in this section go into each kind of disruption in detail.

- When your phone or internet goes down
- Data breaches, scams and cyber incidents
- Payments and major IT outages
- Supply shortages
- Infrastructure failures
- Chemical incident, gas leak or hazardous fumes
- Local closures and access
- If you’re caught in an armed attack

Want to know more?

Print essential contacts and recovery steps so you can use them when your usual device or account is unavailable.

- Telecommunications in emergencies - why phones fail and how to plan around it.
- cyber.gov.au - Protect yourself and your family - simple steps to secure your accounts and devices.
- cyber.gov.au - Recover from a cyber incident - what to do if something goes wrong.
- Scamwatch - current scams and how to report them.

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When your phone or internet goes down

Check your phone can call 000

A charged phone is only useful if its software and model can connect to emergency services. Some older Samsung Galaxy models need a software update or replacement to call Triple Zero in certain circumstances, including when their usual mobile network is unavailable.

- Install the latest phone software. On a Samsung Galaxy, open Settings, then Software update, then Download and install.
- Act on any message from your telco about your handset or emergency calling.
- If you're unsure, ask your telco whether your exact model and software can call 000. Follow its advice about updates or replacement.
- Do not call 000 just to test your phone.

Samsung Australia's advice and affected model list. Check this again when an older phone is handed down or brought back into use.

Why phones fail

Most of us assume our phone will work when we need it. In an emergency, it often doesn't. Phones and internet can fail because:

- **The power is out.** Mobile towers have batteries, but they can run flat in long outages. NBN equipment and cordless home phones need mains power.
- **Equipment is damaged** by fire, flood or wind.
- **Networks are overloaded** when everyone tries to call at once.
- **A network fault** brings down a whole provider, even on a fine day.
- **Your phone is lost, damaged or flat.**

What it looked like

Optus, November 2023. A network fault cut phone and internet services for millions of Optus customers for most of a day. Some people couldn't call Triple Zero, businesses couldn't take card payments, and some hospitals and train services were affected.

Optus, September 2025. A separate failure affected emergency calls on the Optus network. The ACMA later took Optus Mobile to court over the outage.

The lessons: a second way to call matters even when ordinary calls seem to work, and paper contacts are worth having.

Calling Triple Zero when your network is down

- If your own mobile network is down but another network has coverage, your phone may still be able to reach Triple Zero (000) through that other network.
- If a call fails, try straight away from another phone or network - a neighbour's phone, a landline that works in a blackout, or a second SIM.
- 112 also works from mobiles.
- If you use the National Relay Service, follow its emergency instructions. TTY users can dial 106. Registered SMS Relay users can text 0423 677 767 and ask for Triple Zero.

Satellite messaging

Some newer phones can send emergency messages via satellite when there's no mobile coverage, and some carriers offer satellite text messaging in remote areas. These features are useful, but they have limits:

- They usually need a clear view of the sky and can take minutes to connect.
- Not all phones, plans or areas are supported.
- Ordinary satellite messaging may not connect you directly to emergency services.

If you rely on one, check what your phone and plan support, and run the demo before you need it.

Before

A second way to call

- A second SIM or phone on a different network.
- A neighbour on a different network who's happy to help.
- A corded landline phone, if your landline works without mains power. (Many NBN phones don't.)

Keep power for your phone

- Charged power banks, and a car charger.
- Know how long your phone lasts on low-power mode.

Information on paper

- Write down the numbers you'd need: family, your out-of-area contact, your GP, your electricity distributor, your insurer and your bank.
- Write your local ABC Radio frequency on the fridge sheet.
- Download offline maps of your area, and keep a paper map in the car.

Agree what to do if you can't reach each other

- A time to check in, such as 8 am and 6 pm.
- A meeting place if someone misses a check-in.
- Who to contact next.

During

- **For immediate danger, call Triple Zero (000).** If it doesn't connect, try another phone or network straight away.
- **Text rather than call** when networks are busy. Texts use less capacity and often get through when calls don't.
- **Keep messages short.** "Safe at home. Power out. Will text at 6 pm."
- **Save battery:** low-power mode, lower screen brightness, close unused apps, turn off Bluetooth and location if you don't need them.
- **Use the radio** for news and warnings.
- **Use printed maps** and only travel if the route is safe.
- **If you're outside coverage,** use your tested satellite SOS option if your phone supports it.

The Emergency+ app

Emergency+ is a free app developed by Australia's emergency services. It shows your GPS coordinates and a what3words address - three words that identify a 3 metre square - so you can tell the Triple Zero call-taker exactly where you are. It also has shortcuts to call Triple Zero, the SES and the Police Assistance Line. Install it, open the location screen once to see how it works, and check it works with any accessibility settings you use.

After

- Tell your out-of-area contact you're safe.
- Note which phone, network or backup worked, and which didn't.
- Recharge power banks and replace anything you used.
- If your provider was at fault, you may be entitled to compensation. Check your provider's website.

If you need extra support

- **People who rely on a phone for a medical alarm** should ask their provider how the alarm works in a power or network outage, and have a backup plan.
- **People who are deaf or have hearing or speech difficulties** should set up the National Relay Service in advance and practise using it.
- **Older people** may need help setting up low-power mode, Emergency+ and a second way to call.

Your plan

Out-of-area contact and phone

Local ABC frequency

Offline map or printed directions

Missed check-in action

Our second way to call

Our check-in times if phones are down

What we've checked

☐ Tested a backup communications method

Want to know more?

Emergency+ shows GPS coordinates and a what3words address for a 3 m square. It includes shortcuts for Triple Zero (000), SES and the Police Assistance Line. Try its location screen in advance and check how it works with your accessibility settings.

- ACMA - Emergency calls - how Triple Zero calls work across networks.
- Telecommunications in emergencies - preparing for phone and internet outages.
- Access Hub - Emergency calls using the NRS - TTY, SMS Relay and other options.
- Apple - Emergency SOS via satellite - how it works in Australia.
- Telstra - Satellite messaging - support and limits.
- Emergency+ app - download and how it works.
- ACMA - Optus court action over the September 2025 outage - what went wrong.
- ABC Radio reception - find your local frequency.

Australian Government Triple Zero information - calling emergency services and using Emergency+.

Samsung Australia - older Galaxy devices and Triple Zero: check affected models and the required action.

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Data breaches, scams and cyber incidents

You're not alone

If you've had a data breach notice, you're in very large company. The Optus breach in 2022 affected up to 9.8 million customers. Medibank's, the same year, affected about 9.7 million. In 2025, Qantas reported around 5.7 million customer records in an affected system. Most Australian adults have had at least some personal information exposed somewhere.

A breach notice isn't a reason to panic. It's a prompt to take a few sensible steps, and to watch for the scams that usually follow.

Three different problems

A data breach is when an organisation loses control of information about you: your name, date of birth, address, phone, email, licence or passport number, Medicare number or health details. You didn't do anything wrong, but criminals may try to use that information.

A scam is when someone tries to trick you into giving them money or information. Scams spike after breaches and disasters, because scammers use the news to sound believable.

A cyber incident is when your own devices or accounts are attacked: a hacked email account, ransomware, a virus or a stolen phone.

Before - protect your accounts

Passwords

- Use a different password for every important account. A password manager makes this practical.
- Use long passphrases - four or more random words - rather than short complex passwords.
- Never reuse your email password anywhere else. Your email is the key to resetting everything else.

Multi-factor sign-in

Turn on multi-factor authentication (a code or app approval as well as your password) for email, banking, myGov, social media and your phone account. It stops most account takeovers, even if your password is stolen.

Recovery

- Store recovery codes securely, away from this printed book.
- Set up trusted emergency access in your password manager, if it offers it, so someone you trust can get into key accounts if you can't.

Devices

- Turn on automatic updates for phones, computers and apps.
- Use a screen lock on every device.
- Turn on "find my device" so you can lock or wipe a lost phone.

Backups

Use the 3-2-1 approach: three copies of important files, on two kinds of storage, with one copy away from home or in the cloud. Keep one backup disconnected so ransomware can't reach it. Test that you can restore a file once or twice a year.

A family code word

Scammers can now copy voices using short recordings from social media. Agree a private code word with family members. If someone who sounds like your child or parent calls asking for urgent money, ask for the code word - or hang up and call them back on the number you already have.

If you get a breach notice

1. **Check it's real.** Go to the organisation's website directly - not through a link in the email or text.
2. **Find out what was taken.** The notice should say.
3. **Change passwords** for that account, and anywhere you've used the same password. Do this from a trusted device. Sign out of other sessions.
4. **Turn on multi-factor sign-in** if you haven't already.
5. **If identity documents were exposed,** contact the issuer - your state transport agency for a licence, the Australian Passport Office for a passport, Services Australia for Medicare - to ask whether to replace them.
6. **If you're at risk of identity fraud,** ask the credit reporting bodies for a free credit ban, which stops anyone opening credit in your name.
7. **Watch for follow-up scams** that mention the breach.
8. **Get help if you need it.** IDCARE (1800 595 160) offers free support for identity theft and data breaches.

Spotting a scam

Scams often:

- create urgency: "Act now or your account will be closed"
- pretend to be a bank, government agency, delivery company, telco or family member
- ask for payment by gift card, cryptocurrency or bank transfer to a new account
- ask for passwords, one-time codes or remote access to your computer
- offer something too good to be true

Scams after disasters include fake charity appeals, fake government disaster payments, door-knocking tradespeople demanding cash up front, and fake offers to speed up insurance claims. Check charities on the ACNC register, check a tradesperson's licence with your state regulator, and only apply for disaster payments through myGov or Services Australia.

The golden rule: if you're unsure, stop. Hang up, don't click and contact the organisation yourself using a number you already know.

If your device or account is attacked

- **Disconnect** an infected device from the internet and other networks.
- **Lost or stolen phone:** use your device maker's lost-device service to lock or wipe it, and contact your telco to block the SIM.
- **Hacked email:** reset the password from a different, trusted device, turn on multi-factor sign-in and check for forwarding rules the attacker may have set up.
- **Money at risk:** call your bank immediately using the number on your card or in its app.
- **Report cybercrime** to ReportCyber through cyber.gov.au, or call the Australian Cyber Security Hotline on 1300 292 371.
- **Report scams** to Scamwatch.

After

- Keep records: dates, reference numbers, copies of reports and receipts.
- Check your bank statements and your credit file over the following months.
- Test the recovery steps that helped you, and fix the ones that didn't.
- Look after yourself. Being scammed or hacked is distressing and can happen to anyone. It isn't a sign of foolishness.

If you need extra support

- **Older relatives** are often targeted. Talk with them about common scams, the family code word and who to call if they're unsure.
- **People with disability** may want a trusted supporter to help set up multi-factor sign-in and recovery.
- **Children and teens** - eSafety has resources on online safety, image-based abuse and scams aimed at young people.

Your plan

Trusted recovery contact

How we verify an urgent request

Where our backups are kept

Want to know more?

If a licence or passport was exposed, ask the issuing agency about replacing it. If a Medicare number was exposed, contact Services Australia. If an email address was exposed, watch for targeted messages and change any exposed or reused password. Ask a credit reporting body for a free credit ban if you're at risk. Verify donations, tradies and relief payments independently.

- OAIC - Respond to a data breach notification - step-by-step guidance.
- OAIC - Act quickly if you're affected by a data breach - the first things to do.
- OAIC - Fraud and your credit report - credit bans explained.
- cyber.gov.au - Protect yourself and your family - passwords, updates and backups.
- cyber.gov.au - Recover from a cyber incident - what to do after an attack.
- Scamwatch - current scams and reporting.
- IDCARE - free identity and cyber support.
- eSafety Commissioner - online safety for all ages.
- ACNC - Supporting disaster relief - checking a charity before you give.
- OAIC - Optus and Medibank breach advice, and the Qantas incident update.

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Payments and major IT outages

When you can't pay

Most of us now pay for almost everything by card or phone. That works well until the network, the bank, the shop's system or the power fails. Then you can find yourself unable to buy food, fuel or medicine, even with money in the bank.

What it looked like

CrowdStrike, July 2024. A faulty software update from a cyber security company caused computers running Windows to crash around the world. In Australia, airlines, banks, supermarkets, broadcasters and other organisations were affected. Self-serve checkouts stopped, flights were delayed and some payment systems went down. It wasn't a cyber attack - it was a software fault. Most services returned to normal the next day.

Optus, November 2023. When the Optus network went down, many shops and businesses using Optus couldn't take card payments.

Disasters. After floods, cyclones and fires, power and phone outages can stop payments across a whole town for days.

The lesson: some cash, a second payment option and paper copies of key details give you choices when systems fail.

Before

Cash

Keep enough cash in small notes for a few days of essentials - food, fuel and medicines - within your budget. Work it out from what you normally spend. Keep it somewhere safe, separate from your documents.

A second way to pay

- A card from a second bank, or a card on a different network.
- A physical card as well as your phone wallet.

Paper copies

- Your bank's phone number for lost cards and fraud.
- Booking references for travel and accommodation.
- Prescriptions, or the name and number of your pharmacy.

Fuel

During storm, cyclone and fire seasons, try to keep at least half a tank of fuel, or your electric vehicle well charged. Fuel pumps need power and payment systems to work.

When you travel

Carry medicines, water and a snack in your hand luggage in case systems go down and you're stuck in queues.

During

- Ask whether the shop is accepting cash, and keep your receipt.
- If a card payment fails, pause. Check whether it went through before trying again - otherwise you may be charged twice.
- Check updates directly with your bank, airline or service provider, through their official website or app.
- **Ignore unsolicited links** and offers to "fix" your account. Scammers move quickly during outages.
- If you need a prescription and the pharmacy system is down, ask the pharmacist about an emergency supply. Pharmacists can sometimes supply a short emergency supply of some regular medicines.

After

- Check your accounts for duplicate charges once banking returns, and contact your bank through its app or the number on your card.
- Replace any cash you used, as your budget allows.
- Note what worked, and update your plan.

When a disaster hits your income

If an emergency means you can't work, or you've lost income or property:

- **Talk to your bank, lender, energy retailer and telco early.** Most have financial hardship teams that can defer or reduce payments. You have to ask.
- **Check government support.** Disaster payments and allowances may be available. Apply through myGov or Services Australia. See Damage, insurance and assistance.
- **Get free financial counselling** from the National Debt Helpline on 1800 007 007.
- **If a bank or insurer won't help,** you can complain to the Australian Financial Complaints Authority (AFCA) for free.

If you need extra support

- **People who don't use digital banking** should keep some cash on hand at all times and know the nearest bank branch or post office that offers banking.
- **People with disability** may want to agree with a trusted person how they'd pay for essentials if systems fail.

Your plan

Bank contact

Backup payment method

Cash on hand for emergencies

Want to know more?

Check with your bank how to report a lost card or access help when its app is unavailable, and keep that number on paper.

- cyber.gov.au - CrowdStrike outage alert - what happened in July 2024.
- Moneysmart - Financial hardship - asking for help with bills and loans.
- National Debt Helpline - free financial counselling.
- Australian Financial Complaints Authority - free complaints service for banks and insurers.
- Services Australia - Disaster support - government payments.
- Australian Red Cross - Get packing - including cash in your kit.

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Supply shortages

Why shelves empty

Australian supermarkets hold only a few days of stock on the shelves and in the back room. They rely on a steady flow of trucks, trains and ships. When that flow is interrupted - or when lots of people buy extra at once - shelves can empty quickly, even if there's plenty of food in the country.

Shortages can happen because of:

- **cut roads and railways** after floods, fires or landslides
- **port disruptions** from cyber attacks, strikes or severe weather
- **panic buying**, when worried shoppers clear shelves of a few items
- **pandemics and illness** affecting staff and suppliers
- **global supply problems**, such as shortages of medicines or parts
- **power outages** that close shops or stop fuel pumps

What it looked like

Western Australia, early 2022. Floods in South Australia cut the Trans-Australian railway - the main freight link to Western Australia - for more than three weeks. WA supermarkets ran short of some goods until the line reopened and supplies caught up.

DP World, November 2023. A cyber incident forced DP World to pause operations at four major Australian ports. Operations resumed after three days, and around 30,000 backlogged containers were cleared over the following days.

COVID-19, 2020. Panic buying emptied shelves of toilet paper, pasta, rice and hand sanitiser for weeks, even though supply was largely fine. Supermarkets introduced purchase limits.

The lessons: supplies usually catch up within days or weeks. A small rolling pantry means you don't need to join the rush.

Before - the rolling pantry

A rolling pantry is a slightly fuller cupboard of food you already eat, used and replaced in rotation. It's the best protection against short-term shortages, and it costs very little if you build it gradually.

- **Add one or two extra items** to each shop. A tin of tuna, a packet of pasta, a jar of pasta sauce.
- **Put new items at the back** and use the oldest first.
- **Aim for a week or two** of meals you'd happily eat, plus the Supplies basics.
- **Think about the essentials that are hard to substitute:** infant formula, special diet foods, pet food, and the medicines you rely on.
- **Keep non-food essentials too:** toilet paper, soap, period products, nappies, cleaning products.

On a tight budget, a few extra dollars a week builds a useful buffer within a couple of months.

Medicine shortages

Some medicines go short from time to time because of global supply problems.

- Ask your pharmacist early if a medicine you rely on is getting hard to find. They can often source it, suggest an alternative brand or contact your doctor about a substitute.
- Don't run down to your last few doses before refilling a script.
- Never change or stop a medicine without advice.

Fuel shortages

Fuel can run short in an area cut off by flood or fire, or when power fails at service stations.

- In storm, cyclone and fire seasons, keep your fuel tank above half or your electric vehicle well charged.
- Don't store large amounts of fuel at home. It's a fire risk and may breach rules. If you store a small amount for a generator, use an approved container and keep it outside the house, away from ignition sources.

During a shortage

- **Use what you have** and buy what you need.
- **Don't panic buy.** Taking more than you need causes the very shortages that hurt people who can't buy ahead - older people, people on low incomes, people with disability.
- **Look for alternatives.** A different brand, a different shop, a local market or a home delivery service.
- **Check on neighbours** who can't easily get to the shops, and offer to pick something up.
- **Ask your pharmacist early** about medicines.

After

- Refill your pantry gradually when supplies return, rather than all at once.
- Change your plan if one route, shop or supplier left you short.
- Note which items you missed most, and add more of those to your rolling pantry.

If you need extra support

- **People on special diets or with allergies** should keep a larger buffer of hard-to-replace foods.
- **Parents of babies** should keep at least a week or two of formula, nappies and wipes.
- **People who can't easily get to the shops** should have a backup shopper - a neighbour, friend or delivery service - arranged in advance.

Your plan

Second supplier or delivery option

Items we can't easily substitute

Who we'd shop for, or who'd shop for us

Want to know more?

Choose familiar alternatives for your usual meals so a missing ingredient does not mean an extra trip to the shops.

- ABC News - DP World ports - how a cyber attack stopped container movements.
- ABC News - DP World backlog - the aftermath.
- ABC News - WA supply backlog - when the railway reopened in 2022.
- Australian Red Cross - Get packing - building your supplies.
- Get Ready Queensland - Emergency kit - what to keep at home.

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Infrastructure failures

When one thing breaks, many things stop

Modern life depends on a handful of systems that depend on each other. Electricity runs water pumps, phone towers, traffic lights, fuel pumps, lifts, EFTPOS terminals and hospitals. Phone networks carry payments, emergency calls and warnings. A single bridge or road may be the only link to a town. When one fails, others often follow.

Infrastructure failures aren't always caused by disasters. Equipment breaks, fires start in substations, water mains burst and software fails, on fine days as well as stormy ones.

What it looked like

South Australia, 28 September 2016. Severe storms and tornadoes damaged transmission towers, and the whole state lost power. Most homes were reconnected within hours, but some areas waited days. Traffic lights, trains, phones and businesses across the state were affected.

Callide, Queensland, May 2021. A failure at the Callide power station led to about 470,000 customers losing power across Queensland. Powerlink reported that all affected south-east Queensland customers were back on within two hours.

Victoria, February 2024. Storms brought down transmission towers near Anakie, and about 530,000 customers lost power at the peak.

The lessons: big outages are usually fixed in hours, but sometimes take days. Plan for combinations - power, water, phones and transport together.

Know your dependencies

Walk through a normal day and ask what you'd do if each of these stopped:

- **Electricity:** lighting, cooking, refrigeration, cooling and heating, medical equipment, water pumps, garage doors, lifts, phones and internet.
- **Water:** drinking, cooking, washing, flushing.
- **Phones and internet:** calls, warnings, banking, work, school.
- **Transport:** roads, bridges, trains, buses, ferries, fuel.
- **Payments:** cards, phone wallets, ATMs.

For each one your household can't do without, write down a backup that doesn't depend on the same system. A battery radio doesn't need power or internet. Cash doesn't need EFTPOS. A paper map doesn't need GPS.

Before

- Keep your provider numbers on paper: electricity distributor (for faults), water provider, gas distributor, council, transport operator.
- If you live in an apartment, ask your building manager what happens in a power failure: lifts, water pressure, security doors, fire systems.

- Practise opening electric gates and garage doors by hand.
- If someone relies on powered medical equipment, register with your electricity retailer for life support, and have a backup plan. See Backup power.
- If your only road crosses one bridge or floodplain, plan for being cut off and know your alternative.

During

- **Keep clear** of failed equipment, damaged roads, fallen lines and barriered areas.
- **Follow your provider's advice** on whether to wait, shelter or leave.
- **Start backups early,** especially for care, medicines and transport.
- **Check services one by one** before setting out. A road might be open while the service station on it is closed.
- If traffic lights fail, slow down, follow any police directions or signs, and apply your state's give-way rules. At an uncontrolled crossroad, give way to vehicles on your right. Queensland Government - give-way rules
- **Don't call Triple Zero for outage updates** - use your provider's outage map or faults line, and keep 000 free for emergencies.

After

- Ask the utility, or your strata manager, what needs checking before you restart equipment.
- Reset clocks, alarms and medical equipment.
- Test your fallback and replace what you used.
- Note what failed and what worked, and update your plan.

If you need extra support

- **People on life support equipment** must be registered with their electricity retailer, but registration doesn't guarantee supply. Always have a backup plan.
- **People in high-rise buildings** may be stuck if lifts stop. Plan for stairs, and for someone to help if needed.
- **People without a car** may be stranded if public transport stops. Arrange a backup lift.

Your plan

Service we depend on and its backup

Want to know more?

Identify which services at home depend on power, water or internet, then record a fallback for each essential one.

- Powerlink - Widespread power outage - the 2021 Callide event.
- AEMO - Power system event in Victoria - the February 2024 storms.

- AER - Who is your distributor? - find out who to call for power faults.
- Get Ready Queensland - Downed power lines - safety and reporting.
- Telecommunications in emergencies - phone and internet outages.
- Queensland Government - give-way rules - source for the factual example above.

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Chemical incident, gas leak or hazardous fumes

Inside or outside?

Hazardous materials are part of everyday life: natural gas and LPG in homes, chlorine for pools, chemicals in garages and sheds, fuel and chemicals on trucks and trains, and industrial sites in and near suburbs. Most of the time they're handled safely. When something goes wrong, what you do depends mostly on one question: **is the danger inside your home, or outside?**

- **Inside** - a gas leak, mixed cleaning chemicals, a carbon monoxide build-up. **Get out.**
- **Outside** - a chemical spill, an industrial fire, a toxic smoke plume. **Usually, go inside and shelter**, unless the warning tells you to leave.

Gas leaks at home

Natural gas and LPG have a smell added - often described as rotten eggs or cabbage - so you can detect leaks.

If you smell gas inside:

1. **Don't** turn any lights or electrical switches on or off. Don't use phones, lighters or matches inside. A spark can ignite gas.
2. **Turn off the gas** at the meter or bottle if you can do it safely.
3. **Open doors and windows** to air the house.
4. **Get everyone out,** including pets.
5. **Call your gas distributor's faults line** from outside, well away from the building. If the smell is strong, or there's a fire or anyone is unwell, call Triple Zero (000).
6. **Don't go back in** until the gas distributor or fire service says it's safe.

If you smell gas outside, move away from the area and call your gas distributor. Report damaged gas meters and pipes after storms, floods and earthquakes.

LPG bottles should be stored upright, outside and away from drains and ignition sources. Have them checked if they've been in a fire or flood.

Carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas with no smell or colour. It comes from burning fuel - gas heaters, wood heaters, BBQs, camp stoves, generators and cars. Never use outdoor fuel-burning equipment indoors, in a garage or in a tent. Have gas heaters serviced regularly.

If several people or pets feel unwell at once with headache, dizziness, nausea or tiredness, suspect carbon monoxide. Get everyone into fresh air and call Triple Zero (000).

Household chemicals

- **Never mix cleaning products.** Bleach mixed with ammonia, vinegar or acids can produce toxic gases.
- Store chemicals in their original containers, out of reach of children and away from food.
- Store pool chemicals as the label directs. Some pool chemicals can react violently if they get wet or are mixed.
- In flood-prone areas, store chemicals up high where floodwater can't reach them.

If someone swallows or breathes in a chemical, call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26. If they're unconscious, having trouble breathing or fitting, call Triple Zero (000).

Incidents outside - shelter in place

If there's a chemical spill, industrial fire or toxic smoke in your area, the warning will tell you what to do. Usually it's to go inside and shelter in place, because travelling through the affected area can expose you to more harm.

To shelter in place:

1. Go inside straight away, and bring people and pets in.
2. Close all windows and doors.
3. Turn off air conditioning, evaporative coolers and fans that draw air from outside.
4. Close fireplace dampers and vents.
5. Go to an inside room, ideally upstairs (many chemicals are heavier than air) with few windows.
6. Seal gaps under doors with damp towels if the smell is strong.
7. Listen to the radio or check your warning app for updates.
8. Stay inside until you're told it's safe.

If you're told to leave, go immediately, follow the route given and don't go towards the plume or spill.

Know what's near you

- Are there major roads, rail lines or industrial sites near your home, work or school?
- Is there a pool chemical store, fuel depot or factory nearby?
- Which way does the wind usually blow?

You don't need to worry about these. But knowing they're there helps you understand a warning quickly.

After

- Wait for the all-clear before opening up or going outside.
- Air the house when it's safe.
- Follow any advice about cleaning surfaces, washing produce from the garden or using tank water.
- Have gas appliances checked by a licensed gasfitter if the gas was turned off.
- See a doctor if you have symptoms such as coughing, sore eyes or headaches that don't clear.

Your plan

Safety contact for our building or utility

Nearby industrial or transport routes to consider

Our gas distributor's faults number

Where our gas meter or bottles are, and how to turn them off

Our shelter-in-place room

Want to know more?

Check the action in the warning: a chemical incident may require staying indoors rather than travelling through the affected area.

- Australian Warning System - what shelter and leave warnings mean.
- Queensland Government - Using alternative fuel safely - carbon monoxide and generators.
- healthdirect - Natural disasters - health advice after incidents.
- AER - Who is your distributor? - finding your energy distributor.

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Local closures and access

When your usual route is closed

Sometimes you can't get where you need to go - not because of a flood or fire, but because a road is closed for a major event, a police operation, a crash investigation, a protest, a gas leak or a building collapse. These closures are usually short, but they can catch people out: a parent who can't reach school pick-up, a carer who can't get to a client, a person who can't get home to their medicines.

The same few habits help with all of them.

Before

- **Know two routes** to the places that matter: home, work, school, childcare, the doctor, your backup destination.
- **Know a public meeting place** where your household can find each other if you're separated and phones aren't working - a library, a shopping centre or a park near home.
- **Check before big events.** Concerts, sporting finals, marathons and festivals often close roads. Check your road authority or transport operator before setting out.
- **Arrange backup school pick-up.** Make sure the school knows who else is authorised to collect your children.
- **Keep essentials with you** when you're out for the day: medicines, a phone charger, water and a snack.

During

- **Follow police directions.** Stay away from closed areas, cordons and police operations, even if you live there. Ask officers at the cordon if you need to get home.
- **Don't try to get around a closure** on side streets or through a cordon.
- **Tell your household where you are** and when you expect to be home.
- **Check official updates** from police, your road authority and ABC Local Radio.
- **Verify before you share.** Rumours spread quickly on social media during police operations. Sharing unverified information or photos can cause panic or put people at risk. Share only official updates.
- **If you're near a large crowd that becomes unsafe,** move away calmly towards open space, away from walls and barriers, and keep your arms up near your chest so you can breathe if the crowd presses in.

If you can't get home

- Contact your household and your out-of-area contact.
- Arrange for a neighbour to check on pets or people at home.
- Think about medicines - if you're stuck for longer than expected, a pharmacist may be able to give an emergency supply.
- Find somewhere safe to wait, such as a friend's place, a café or a library.

After

- Check your route before returning.
- Tell the people who were expecting to hear from you.
- Note anything that would have made it easier, and update your plan.

If you need extra support

- **Carers and support workers** should agree with their clients what happens if they can't arrive on time.
- **People who rely on public transport** should know alternative services and keep a little cash for a taxi or rideshare.
- **Children who travel alone** should know what to do and who to call if their bus or train is cancelled.

Your plan

Alternate route or travel arrangement

Where we find verified updates

Want to know more?

Check your road authority and transport operator for closures before setting out, including on your backup route.

- Australian Warning System - official warnings.
- Australian National Security - What to do in an attack - public safety advice.
- Your state road authority and public transport operator - for closures and disruptions.

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If you’re caught in an armed attack

Why this page is here

Armed attacks in public places are very rare in Australia. Most people will never be caught up in one. This page is here for the same reason a fire drill is: knowing three simple steps in advance means you're more likely to act quickly and safely if you ever need to.

Australia's national advice is **Escape. Hide. Tell.** It applies anywhere: a shopping centre, a stadium, a festival, public transport, a workplace or a school.

Escape

If there's a safe way out, take it.

- **Move quickly and quietly** away from the danger, in the opposite direction.
- **Leave your belongings behind.** Bags, shopping and phones can be replaced.
- **Help others to escape** if you can do so safely, but don't let them slow you down if they won't come.
- **Keep going** until you're well away from the area.

- **Don't go towards the noise** to see what's happening.
- **Stop others** from going towards the danger, if it's safe to do so.

Think about where you'd go in places you visit often. Exits aren't only the doors you came in by: staff areas, loading docks, fire exits and back doors may be closer.

Hide

If you can't escape safely, hide.

- **Get out of sight.** Find a room you can lock or block, ideally with solid walls and a door that closes.
- **Lock or barricade the door** with heavy furniture.
- **Turn off lights.**
- **Silence your phone,** including vibrate, and turn down the screen brightness.
- **Stay quiet and still.** Spread out if you're in a group.
- **Stay away from doors and windows.**
- **Be ready to move** if the attacker comes close and you have a chance to escape.

Tell

When it's safe, call Triple Zero (000).

- Ask for **police**.
- Give your **exact location**.
- Say **what you've seen**: how many attackers, what they look like, what weapons they have, and which way they went.
- Say **how many people are with you** and whether anyone is injured.
- If you can't speak, stay on the line so the call-taker can listen. Answer questions by tapping or pressing buttons if they ask you to.

Also warn other people nearby, if you can do so safely.

When police arrive

Police will focus on stopping the attacker first. They may not be able to help the injured straight away, and they may not know who the attacker is.

- Stay calm and follow their instructions.
- Keep your hands empty and visible.
- Avoid sudden movements, pointing, screaming or running towards them.
- Don't hold anything that could be mistaken for a weapon.

Helping the injured

Once you're safe and it's safe to help:

- Call Triple Zero (000) if no one has.
- For heavy bleeding, press firmly on the wound with a clean cloth or your hands, and keep pressing until help arrives.
- Keep the injured person warm and talk to them calmly.

A first aid course gives you the skills and confidence to help in any emergency.

Afterwards - looking after yourself

Being caught up in or near an attack - or even seeing it on the news - can be deeply upsetting. Common reactions include shock, fear, trouble sleeping, being easily startled and replaying what happened. These usually ease over weeks.

- Talk to people you trust.
- Keep to routines where you can.
- Limit how much news and social media you watch.
- Be patient with yourself.
- Reach out for help if feelings don't ease or are affecting daily life. Your GP, Lifeline (13 11 14) or a mental health service can help.

Talking to children

Children may hear about attacks from the news, social media or friends. They often worry about whether it could happen to them.

- Ask what they've heard, and listen.
- Reassure them that attacks are very rare and that police and many other people work to keep everyone safe.
- Answer questions simply and honestly, at their level.
- Limit their exposure to news footage.
- Keep routines and watch for changes in behaviour, sleep or appetite.

Reporting concerns

If you see something suspicious, or you're worried someone may be planning to harm others, report it. In an emergency, call Triple Zero (000). For information that isn't urgent, contact the National Security Hotline on 1800 123 400. Australian Government - National Security Hotline

Your plan

Places we visit often, and their nearest exits

Want to know more?

Read the national Escape. Hide. Tell. advice in advance so the steps are familiar if you ever need them.

- Australian National Security - What to do in an attack - Escape. Hide. Tell. in full.

- healthdirect - Mental health helplines - support after a traumatic event.
- healthdirect - Kids and mental health - helping children cope.
- Phoenix Australia - Disaster Mental Health Hub - recovery after trauma.
- Lifeline - 13 11 14, any time.
- Australian Government - National Security Hotline - source for the factual example above.

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People who need extra planning

Plans that fit real people

Emergency advice is often written as if every household is two able-bodied adults with a car, a credit card and a phone that works. Most households aren't like that. Children, older people, people with disability or chronic illness, renters, people living alone, people who don't speak English at home, people on islands and people with animals all face extra steps - and often the people who face the most steps get the least time.

The pages in this section are about making a plan that fits. The most important principle is simple: **make the plan with the person it's for.** People know their own needs, routines and preferences best. A plan made for someone without asking them often fails on the day.

Three questions for every plan

1. **How will this person get the warning?** In a format they can read, hear or understand, even without power or internet.
2. **How much time do they need?** To get ready, to move and to settle somewhere else. Set an earlier trigger to leave.
3. **What do they need wherever they go?** Medicines, equipment, power, a carer, an accessible bathroom, their animals, a quiet space.

The P-CEP framework

Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) is an Australian framework developed with people with disability. It helps people work through their support needs in eight areas, including communication, health, assistive technology, personal support, transport, living situation, social connections and assistance animals. The free workbook is useful for anyone with extra support needs, and for the people who support them.

- Children and teens
- Disability, chronic illness and extra care
- Pets and livestock
- Older people and people living alone
- Renters and apartments
- Warnings in a format you can use
- Islands and ferry-dependent communities
- Caring for someone from a distance

Want to know more?

Use these pages with the person involved so the plan reflects their preferences and everyday support needs.

- P-CEP resource package - tools for person-centred planning.

- P-CEP workbook (PDF) - the free workbook.
- Australian Red Cross - Prepare - planning resources, including Easy English and Auslan.

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Children and teens

Children cope better when they're included

Children notice when adults are worried, even when nobody says anything. Without information, they fill the gaps with their own fears. Children who know there's a plan - and have a part in it - generally cope better during an emergency and recover more quickly afterwards.

The aim isn't to frighten them with what could go wrong. It's to give them a sense that the family knows what to do, and that they can help.

Talking about emergencies, by age

Toddlers and preschoolers (about 2-5)

- Keep it simple and concrete: "If the smoke alarm beeps, we go outside to the letterbox."
- Practise through play - a teddy bear's escape drill, a pretend torch walk.
- Teach them their full name, your name and, as they get older, how to call Triple Zero (000).
- Reassure them that grown-ups will keep them safe.

Primary school (about 5-12)

- Explain the main hazards where you live, briefly and honestly.
- Give them a job: carrying their own small bag, looking after the torch, helping with the pet.
- Let them help pack their own go bag: a torch, a snack, a water bottle, a book or game, a comfort item and a card with family phone numbers.
- Practise the meeting place and the escape route. Keep it calm and brief.
- Teach them what to do if they're at school, at a friend's house or at sport when something happens: stay with the adult in charge.

Teenagers (about 13-18)

- Involve them in making the plan. Ask for their ideas.
- Give them real responsibilities: checking warnings, looking after a younger sibling or a pet, packing the car.
- Talk about what to do if they're home alone, or out with friends, when an emergency happens.
- Make sure they know how to turn off power, gas and water, and when.
- Encourage them to do a first aid course.
- Talk about checking information before sharing it on social media.

Before

- Keep school and childcare pickup permissions up to date, with at least one backup adult.
- Share the plan with the other household if children live in two homes.
- Pack a comfort item for each child who needs one, and something to do: books, cards, colouring, a charged device with downloaded games or shows.
- For babies, keep formula, bottles, nappies, wipes, a change of clothes and a carrier in your kit.
- Practise a short drill once or twice a year.

During

- **Stay calm.** Children take their cues from adults.
- **Tell them what's happening** in short, honest sentences: "There's a big storm. We're going to stay in the bathroom until it's finished. I'm right here."
- **Keep them close,** and know where they are at all times.
- **Keep routines** where you can: meals, a story, the same bedtime.
- **Limit distressing news.** Children, especially young ones, can believe that replayed footage is happening again.
- **Let them ask questions,** even the same question many times.

After

Children react to emergencies in different ways. Common reactions include:

- clinginess, or fear of being separated
- trouble sleeping, nightmares or bedwetting
- going back to younger behaviours
- tummy aches or headaches
- irritability, anger or withdrawal
- playing out the event in games or drawings
- worry when it rains, storms or smells of smoke

These reactions are normal and usually ease over weeks.

How to help:

- Spend time together and keep routines.
- Listen. Let them talk, draw or play about what happened.
- Answer questions honestly, at their level.
- Reassure them that they're safe and that the family is working on getting things back to normal.
- Let them help with simple recovery tasks, if it's safe.
- Look after yourself too. Children cope better when the adults around them are coping.

Get help if reactions are severe, don't ease after a few weeks, or affect school, friendships or sleep. Talk to your GP, school counsellor or Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800).

Teens home alone

If teenagers are sometimes home alone, agree:

- what warnings to watch for, and where
- when to leave, and where to go
- who to call, in what order
- what to take, including pets
- not to wait for a parent if the warning says leave

Your plan

Who's authorised to collect each child

What helps them stay calm

Each child's job in the plan

Want to know more?

Practise the meeting-place and pickup plan in calm weather using words your child understands.

- healthdirect - Kids and mental health - signs of distress and how to help.
- Australian Red Cross - Prepare - planning with children.
- Phoenix Australia - Disaster Mental Health Hub - supporting children after disasters.
- healthdirect - Mental health helplines - including Kids Helpline.

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Disability, chronic illness and extra care

You know your own needs

People with disability and chronic illness are more likely to be harmed in emergencies - not because of their disability or illness itself, but because plans, warnings, transport, evacuation centres and services often aren't built with them in mind. Support workers may not be able to arrive. Equipment may lose power. Accessible transport may be booked out. An evacuation centre may not have an accessible bathroom or a quiet space.

The best protection is a plan made by you, with the people you choose, that covers your support needs in detail. This page walks through what to think about. The free Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) workbook goes further.

Using the P-CEP workbook

P-CEP was developed in Australia with people with disability. It helps you think through your support needs in eight areas:

1. **Communication** - how you get and share information, including warnings.
2. **Management of health** - medicines, treatments, conditions and health contacts.
3. **Assistive technology** - equipment, aids and devices, and how they're powered.
4. **Personal support** - who helps you, and what happens if they can't come.
5. **Assistance animals** - their needs, and where they can go.
6. **Transportation** - how you'd leave, and who'd help.
7. **Living situation** - your home, its accessibility and its risks.
8. **Social connectedness** - the people who check on you and could help.

You can fill it in yourself, or with a family member, support worker, NDIS support coordinator or other trusted person.

Talk to your support network

- **Your support provider:** what's their emergency plan? Who comes if your usual worker can't? How will they contact you?
- **NDIS participants:** talk to your support coordinator or planner about including emergency preparedness in your plan. Some supports may be able to help with planning or equipment.
- **Your doctor and specialist team:** what should you do if you can't get to treatment, or your condition changes during an emergency?
- **Your equipment supplier:** how long do batteries last, how do you charge them and what backups are suitable?
- **Family, friends and neighbours:** who could help, and with what? Agree it in advance, and write it down.

Warnings

- Choose at least two ways to get warnings that work for you, such as a captioned app, a vibrating phone alert, a trusted person who'll call you, or a battery radio.
- If you're deaf or hard of hearing, or have speech difficulties, set up the National Relay Service and practise an emergency call.
- If you're blind or have low vision, check that your warning app works with your screen reader.
- See Warnings in a format you can use.

Time

You may need more time to get ready and to move. Set an earlier trigger to leave than the general advice - for example, leave when a Watch and Act is issued, rather than waiting for an Emergency Warning. Arrange transport early. Accessible taxis and vehicles book out fast.

Power and equipment

- Register for life support with your electricity retailer if you use eligible equipment. It doesn't guarantee supply.
- Know your equipment's battery runtime under real use.
- Keep chargers, spare batteries, instructions and labelled leads together.
- Plan where you'd go if the power is out longer than your battery lasts.
- See Medicines, equipment and care, and Backup power.

Where you'd go

Before you need it, find out:

- whether friends or family could take you, and whether their home is accessible
- whether local evacuation centres have accessible bathrooms, beds, power for equipment, and quiet spaces
- whether a hotel or motel nearby has accessible rooms
- whether your assistance animal can come (assistance animals are generally allowed in public places)

Pregnancy

If you're pregnant, keep your maternity hospital and after-hours numbers handy, carry your pregnancy record and know a second way to reach care if your usual hospital can't be reached. Ask your midwife or doctor about your plan if you're close to your due date during storm, cyclone or fire season.

What to pack

As well as the general kit:

- medicines and a medication list
- equipment, chargers, batteries and spare parts
- mobility aids, and a backup (such as a manual wheelchair)
- communication aids and a printed communication card
- continence supplies
- a copy of your plan and support contacts
- a summary of your needs for people who don't know you, such as evacuation centre staff

During

- Start your plan early.
- Contact your support people and let them know what you're doing.
- Move before equipment or treatment is at risk.

- Tell emergency services or evacuation centre staff what you need.
- Call Triple Zero (000) if your life is in danger.

After

- Check equipment for damage, especially after floods.
- Restock medicines and supplies.
- Review what worked with your support people, and update your plan.

Your plan

My agreed backup care and how to reach it

Accessible transport or destination

Where my P-CEP plan is kept

Want to know more?

Use the P-CEP capability wheel to check everyday needs, then complete the workbook with the people you want involved.

- P-CEP resource package - person-centred planning tools.
- P-CEP capability wheel - the eight areas of support.
- P-CEP workbook (PDF) - the free workbook.
- NDIS - Connecting participants with supports - support coordination.
- Access Hub - Emergency calls using the NRS - accessible emergency calls.
- Red Cross Easy English plan (PDF) - an accessible planning tool.
- healthdirect - Natural disasters - health advice.

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Pets and livestock

Planning for animals saves people too

People sometimes delay leaving, refuse to leave or go back into danger because of their animals. A pet plan makes it much easier to leave early - which is safer for everyone.

During Black Summer, when the Navy evacuated people from Mallacoota, more than 150 pets went with their families. Planning ahead means you won't have to choose.

Small pets - before

Identification

- Make sure every dog and cat is microchipped and the details are current. Many lost pets can't be reunited because the microchip has an old phone number.
- Keep collars and ID tags with your mobile number.
- Keep a recent photo of each pet, showing any distinctive markings.
- Keep vaccination and registration records with your plan.

A pet emergency kit

- food for at least five days, and a can opener if needed
- water and bowls
- medicines, with dosing instructions
- lead, harness and collar
- a secure carrier or crate for each cat and small dog
- litter tray and litter, or waste bags
- bedding and a familiar toy
- vet's and after-hours vet's details
- a backup carer's details

Practise

- Practise getting pets into carriers and the car. Cats especially can be hard to catch when stressed - leave the carrier out so it becomes familiar.
- Know where your pets hide when they're frightened.

Where they'd go

- Find pet-friendly places in advance: friends or family, boarding kennels or catteries, pet-friendly motels.
- Ask your council whether local evacuation centres take pets, or have arrangements nearby. Many now do, but rules vary.
- Agree with a neighbour that whoever is home will take the other's pets if needed.

Small pets - during

- Bring pets inside early, before the weather turns. Frightened animals can run off.
- If you're leaving, take your pets with you.
- Keep cats in carriers and dogs on leads.
- If you truly can't take an animal, leave it inside in a safe room with plenty of water and food, and tell emergency services or an animal welfare organisation. **Never tie animals up** - they can't escape danger.

Birds, fish, reptiles and small animals

- Birds, rabbits, guinea pigs and reptiles need secure, ventilated carriers, food and, for reptiles, a way to keep warm.
- Fish tanks lose oxygen and temperature in power outages. A battery-powered air pump helps.

- Backyard chickens need shelter, water and food. If you have to leave, ask a neighbour to check on them.

Horses and livestock

Large animals need much more planning and much more time.

- **Before the season,** arrange a float or truck, a driver, a safe destination and an early trigger to move them. Allow time for several trips.
- **Know your options:** a friend's property out of the risk area, a showground or agistment.
- **Identification:** keep animal ID and property identification codes current. You'll need them to move stock.
- **If you can't move them,** put them in a large, well-grazed paddock with water, away from bushland, power lines and floodplains. Open internal gates so they can move away from danger - but never let them onto roads.
- **Ask your state agriculture department** about local arrangements, animal identification and movement restrictions.

After

- Keep pets inside or on a lead until things settle. Fences may be damaged, and familiar smells may be gone.
- Watch for injuries, burns to paws, smoke inhalation and stress.
- Check pasture, water troughs and dams before letting livestock back.
- If your pet is lost, contact your council, local vets, animal shelters and RSPCA, and check lost-pet pages.
- Report injured wildlife to a local wildlife rescue group.

Assistance animals

Assistance animals are generally allowed in public places, including evacuation centres. Carry evidence of your animal's status, and pack its food, water and equipment.

Your plan

Pet-friendly destination

Transport and backup carer for animals

Our pets, and their microchip numbers

Livestock destination and trigger to move

Want to know more?

Pack leashes, carriers, recent photos, medication, water and vaccination details. Arrange transport and a destination early for horses and livestock.

- Get Ready Queensland - Protect your pet - pet emergency plans and kits.

- NSW Government - Pets and livestock - planning for animals of all sizes.
- Agriculture Victoria - Emergency management - livestock and farm animals.
- RSPCA - Contact - your state RSPCA.
- Defence Ministers - Mallacoota - the Navy evacuation that included pets.

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Older people and people living alone

Someone who'll notice

About one in four Australian households is a single person. Living alone has many benefits, but in an emergency it brings one big risk: nobody may notice if something goes wrong. A fall during a blackout, heat illness during a heatwave or a missed evacuation warning can go unnoticed for hours or days. ABS - 2021 Census household figures

Older people face extra risks too. They're more affected by heat and cold, more likely to rely on medicines and equipment, and sometimes less able to move quickly or carry supplies. In the 2009 Victorian heatwave, most of the extra deaths were among older people.

The single most useful thing you can do is arrange for someone to notice.

Set up a check-in

- **Choose a check-in person** - a family member, friend or neighbour - who'll contact you every day during an emergency, a heatwave, a cold snap or a power outage. Name a backup.
- **Agree how:** a phone call, a text or a knock on the door.
- **Agree when:** for example, by 9 am each day during a warning.
- **Agree what happens if you don't answer:** who they'll call next, who has a key, and when they'll call Triple Zero (000).
- **Tell them about your health,** medicines and anything they'd need to know if you were unwell.

Some councils and community organisations run check-in registers or telephone services for older people and people living alone. Ask your council what's available in your area.

Make your home easier to manage

- Keep a torch by the bed and in the kitchen, and a phone within reach.
- Keep a charged mobile phone or a corded landline that works without power.
- Consider a personal alarm, but check how it works in a power or network outage.
- Keep water, food and medicines where you can reach them easily.
- Store heavy items low, so you don't need to climb.

- Ask someone to help secure heavy furniture, clear gutters or tie down outdoor items. Don't climb ladders alone.

Leaving home

- Decide in advance where you'd go - a relative, a friend, an evacuation centre - and how you'd get there.
- If you don't drive, arrange a lift now, with a backup.
- Set an early trigger to leave, especially if you move slowly or need help.
- Keep your go bag light enough to carry, or on wheels.

Heat and cold

Older bodies don't regulate temperature as well, and some medicines make heat more dangerous.

- In a heatwave, have a cool room and a cool place to go. Drink water regularly, even if you don't feel thirsty. Ask your doctor about your medicines in the heat.
- In a cold snap, keep one room warm, layer up and eat regularly.
- See Heatwave, smoke and indoor heat, and Extreme cold, snow and ice.

If you're supporting an older relative or friend

- Talk to them about their plan, and listen to what they want.
- Make sure they have a charged phone, a torch, a radio and a printed copy of their plan in a format they can read.
- Make sure they know how they'll get warnings.
- Check that they can get transport if they need to leave.
- Visit or call daily during heatwaves, cold snaps and outages.
- If they live in aged care or retirement living, ask about the facility's emergency plan.

Staying connected

Loneliness and isolation make emergencies harder, and they often get worse afterwards. Staying connected with neighbours, community groups, a place of worship, a club or a volunteer group means more people will notice you - and you'll notice them.

After

- Let your check-in person know you're safe.
- Restock supplies.
- Talk about the experience with someone. Emergencies can be unsettling, especially when you've been on your own.

Your plan

Check-in person, time and backup

What we'll do if a check-in is missed

Who has a spare key

Want to know more?

Agree what your check-in person should do if you do not answer, including who nearby can help.

- Australian Red Cross - Get organised - planning with the people around you.
- healthdirect - Natural disasters - health advice.
- Better Health Channel - Heat-related health problems - older people and heat.
- Get Ready Queensland - Find your local council - ask about local check-in or support services.
- ABS - 2021 Census household figures - source for the factual example above.

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Renters and apartments

Working with someone else's building

About a third of Australian households rent, and many more live in apartments, units or townhouses governed by a body corporate or owners corporation. That changes how you prepare. You can't usually make changes to the building, some decisions belong to the landlord or strata, and shared spaces such as stairs, lifts and car parks have their own risks. ABS - 2021 Census housing tenure

You can still do a great deal. The key is knowing which jobs are yours, which belong to someone else, and who to call.

Who does what

Usually your job:

- your household plan, kit and supplies
- contents insurance for your belongings
- reporting repairs and hazards promptly
- keeping your own space safe: furniture, balcony, belongings
- testing smoke alarms in your home (in most states)

Usually the landlord's or strata's job:

- structural repairs, roof, gutters, drainage and trees
- installing and maintaining smoke alarms to the required standard

- building insurance
- common areas, fire stairs, lifts and building fire systems
- building evacuation plans and emergency procedures

Rules vary by state. Your state tenancy authority or fair trading office can explain your rights.

Before - renters

- **Report repairs in writing,** with photos and the date: leaks, loose roofing, faulty smoke alarms, damaged windows or doors, overhanging trees. Ask when they'll be fixed, especially before storm or fire season.
- **Ask your property manager** who to call for urgent repairs after hours, and keep the number.
- **Get contents insurance.** Your landlord's building insurance won't cover your belongings, and it won't pay for your temporary accommodation.
- **Ask before attaching** anything to walls, such as furniture straps. Many landlords will agree to safety measures.
- **Know your shut-offs** - power, water and gas.

Before - apartments and strata

- **Find the building's emergency plan.** Where are the fire stairs, the evacuation points and the assembly area?
- **Plan for lifts stopping.** If you or someone in your household can't use stairs, talk to your building manager about evacuation help, and plan to leave early.
- **Ask about backup power** for lifts, lighting, water pumps and fire systems.
- **Know who to call** - the building manager, strata manager and body corporate - and save their numbers on paper.
- **Keep balconies clear** of loose items in storm and cyclone season.
- **Check strata insurance** covers the building for the hazards in your area.

During

- Follow the building's instructions and emergency services' directions.
- **Never use lifts** during a fire or when the power is unstable.
- In a fire, if the fire is in your unit, get out and close the door. If it's elsewhere in the building, follow the building's instructions. If corridors are full of smoke, it may be safer to stay in your unit with the door closed and call Triple Zero (000).
- Check on neighbours, especially those who may need help with stairs.

After

- **Report damage** to your property manager or building manager in writing, with photos.

- **If your rental is unliveable,** tenancy laws in each state set out what happens with rent and the lease. Contact your state tenancy authority for advice before agreeing to anything.
- **Contact your contents insurer** about your belongings and temporary accommodation.
- **Don't start repairs to the building yourself** without permission, unless they're urgent to prevent further damage - and keep receipts.

Your plan

Building or landlord emergency number

How I'll leave if a lift is out

Our building's assembly point

Our contents insurer and policy number

Want to know more?

Ask your landlord or strata manager who handles repairs, shared alarms and building evacuation arrangements.

- Moneysmart - Storm, flood and fire insurance - including contents insurance for renters.
- Fire and Rescue NSW - Home escape plans - including apartments.
- Insurance Council - Calculators - estimating the value of your contents.
- Your state tenancy authority or fair trading office - for your rights as a renter.
- ABS - 2021 Census housing tenure - source for the factual example above.

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Warnings in a format you can use

A warning only works if you can understand it

Most emergency warnings are designed for people who can hear a siren, read English, see a screen and use a smartphone. Many people can't do all of those things - including people who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or have low vision, have a cognitive or intellectual disability, speak a language other than English at home, can't read well, or don't own a smartphone.

If a warning doesn't reach you in a form you understand, it hasn't warned you. This page is about setting up warnings that work for each person in your household, before you need them.

Choose at least two ways for each person

For each person in your household, write down at least two ways they'll get a warning, and check both work without mains power. For example:

- a warning app with captions, text or vibration

- AusAlert messages to a compatible phone
- a battery radio, with someone to explain
- a trusted person who'll call, text or visit in their preferred language or format
- a neighbour who'll knock
- TV with captions or Auslan interpreting (when the power's on)

If you're deaf, hard of hearing or have speech difficulties

- **National Relay Service (NRS).** Set up your NRS option before an emergency and practise an emergency call. Options include TTY (dial 106) and SMS Relay (registered users can text 0423 677 767 and ask for Triple Zero). Print the instructions and keep them with your plan.
- **Visual and vibrating alerts.** Use smoke alarms with strobe lights or vibrating pads, and set your phone to flash or vibrate for emergency alerts.
- **Auslan.** During major emergencies, many official media conferences now include Auslan interpreters. The Red Cross RediPlan is available in Auslan.
- **Captioned news.** ABC and other broadcasters caption many emergency broadcasts.
- Ask a hearing neighbour to knock if there's an evacuation.

If you're blind or have low vision

- Check that your warning app works with your screen reader.
- Use a battery radio for updates.
- Ask a neighbour or friend to call you during warnings.
- Keep your plan in a format you can use: large print, braille, or an audio recording.
- Know your escape routes by touch and sound.
- If you have a guide dog, include it in your plan.

If you speak a language other than English

- **TIS National** offers free phone interpreting on 131 450 for calls to many services, including councils and some utilities. The Triple Zero operator can arrange an interpreter in an emergency - say "Police", "Fire" or "Ambulance" and then the name of your language.
- **Translated resources.** NEMA, state emergency services and the Red Cross publish preparedness information in many languages.
- **A trusted person** - a family member, friend or community leader - who'll pass on warnings in your language.
- **Community radio and multicultural media** often broadcast emergency information in community languages during major events.

If reading is hard, or for people with cognitive disability

- Use **Easy English** resources, which use short sentences, simple words and pictures. The Red Cross has an Easy English emergency plan.

- Keep the plan short, with pictures.
- Practise the steps together, more than once.
- Agree a trusted person who'll explain warnings and help with decisions.
- Use the "Quick words" below as a simple card.

If you don't have a smartphone

- Emergency Alert can still send a recorded voice message to landlines in an affected area, and text messages to mobiles.
- A battery radio is the most reliable way to get updates.
- Ask a neighbour or family member to call you when there's a warning.

Quick words to keep handy

Print these on a card and keep it by the phone:

- **Danger now? Call Triple Zero (000). Say your address.**
- **A warning tells you what to do. Read it, or ask someone to explain it.**
- **If you're told to leave, take people and animals. Go while the road is safe.**
- **If you're told to stay inside, stay inside. Keep your phone charged. Listen to the radio.**

Your plan

Preferred language or way of getting a warning

Who can pass it on

Where our NRS instructions are kept

Want to know more?

RediPlan is available in Auslan. Use official Easy English and translated material to practise the steps together.

- Access Hub - Emergency calls using the NRS - TTY, SMS Relay and other options.
- TIS National - free interpreting on 131 450.
- NEMA - Multi-language preparedness resources - translated information.
- Red Cross Easy English plan (PDF) - a simple, accessible plan.
- Australian Red Cross - Resources - including Auslan RediPlan resources.
- Disaster Recovery Allowance, simple English (PDF) - government help in simple English.
- About AusAlert - emergency messages to compatible phones.

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Islands and ferry-dependent communities

When the ferry stops

Living on an island - such as the Southern Moreton Bay Islands, North Stradbroke Island (Minjerribah), Russell Island, Magnetic Island, Bruny Island or Kangaroo Island - or in any community that relies on a ferry, barge or single bridge, changes how you prepare. When services stop, it can take much longer for supplies, medicines, carers, tradespeople and emergency help to reach you. And it can be harder to leave.

Ferries can stop for high winds, rough seas, fog, storms, cyclones, mechanical faults and staff shortages. They often stop well before an emergency peaks, which means the window to leave can close earlier than on the mainland.

Before

Know your services

- Save your ferry and barge operators' alert services. Know how cancellations are announced - text, app, website, social media or radio.
- Know the last safe departure times when severe weather is forecast.
- Check passenger and vehicle services separately. They often have different timetables and limits.
- Check accessible boarding if anyone uses a wheelchair or mobility aid.
- Know whether there's a water taxi or other option, and how much it costs.

Build a bigger buffer

- Build your supplies towards the 14-day column in Supplies, especially in storm and cyclone season.
- Keep extra fuel or charge for your car, generator or boat, stored safely.
- Keep more cash on hand - island shops may not take cards when systems fail.

Medicines, equipment and care

- Talk to your pharmacy and care team about a safe reserve of medicines - more than the mainland week if your island is often cut off.
- Plan refrigerated medicines carefully, including how you'd collect them from the mainland.
- If you have regular treatment on the mainland (such as dialysis or chemotherapy), ask your treatment team what happens if the ferry stops.
- Know where medical help is on the island, and how medical evacuations work. Ask your local health service.

Decide when you'd leave

Agree where you'd stay on the mainland, and set an early trigger to leave - for example, when a cyclone watch is issued, or if essential care may be interrupted. Once the ferries stop, leaving may not be possible.

Connect with your island community

Island communities are often close-knit and resourceful. Find out about local emergency groups, the SES or rural fire brigade on your island, and community noticeboards or groups that share updates. Know your neighbours and what they can offer.

While services are suspended

- Check the ferry operator's alerts and your state warning service.
- Keep away from exposed jetties, breakwaters and the foreshore during storms.
- Use your backup check-in with family on the mainland.
- Look out for neighbours, especially those living alone or with health needs.
- **Call Triple Zero (000) for life-threatening emergencies.** Emergency services can arrange medical evacuations when ferries aren't running.

After

- Check when services resume before travelling.
- Expect queues and delays when ferries restart.
- Restock supplies, and note what ran short.
- Update your plan.

Remote and rural communities

Much of this page also applies to remote and rural communities on the mainland that can be cut off by flooded roads or bridges for days or weeks. If that's you, plan for a longer buffer, know how your community gets supplies and medical help when roads are cut, and stay in touch with your local emergency services.

Your plan

Ferry operator and backup route

Mainland destination and transport

Medicines or care arrangements

Want to know more?

Check passenger and vehicle ferry arrangements separately, including accessible boarding and how cancellations are announced.

- Australian Red Cross - Prepare - planning for longer isolation.
- Telecommunications in emergencies - staying connected when you're cut off.
- healthdirect - Natural disasters - health advice.
- Get Ready Queensland - Find your local council - council island plans and disaster dashboards.
- Your ferry and barge operators - for alerts and timetables.

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Caring for someone from a distance

When you can't just drive over

Many of us care for someone who lives somewhere else: an ageing parent in another town, an adult child with disability in supported accommodation, a friend recovering from illness, a relative in a remote community. When a warning is issued where they live, you may be hours or a flight away, and roads may already be closed.

You can still help a great deal - if the plan is made together, in advance, and doesn't depend on you being able to get there.

Start with what they want

The person you support has the right to make their own decisions. Ask them:

- What worries them about emergencies?
- What would they do if a warning was issued?
- Who nearby do they trust and feel comfortable asking for help?
- What help do they want from you, and what would feel intrusive?
- What are they comfortable sharing with neighbours or services?

Work the plan out together, in the format they prefer - printed, large print, Easy English or on their phone.

Set up a local backup

The most important part of distance caring is someone **nearby** who can act if needed.

- Agree on one or two local contacts - a neighbour, friend, relative or community member - who're happy to help.
- Make sure the person you support, the local contacts and you all have each other's numbers.
- Agree what the local contact can do: check in, bring supplies, help them leave, look after a pet.
- Consider who has a spare key.
- Thank them, and check in with them each year.

Agree a check-in plan

- **When:** a daily call or text during warnings, heatwaves, cold snaps or outages.
- **How:** phone, text, video, or a visit from the local contact.

- **If they don't answer:** what you'll do and in what order - try again, call the local contact, call their care provider, call Triple Zero (000) if you believe they're in danger.

Write it down, and give a copy to everyone involved.

What you should keep

Keep a copy of their plan with yours, including:

- their address and nearest cross street
- their local warning service and council
- their local ABC frequency
- their GP, pharmacy, care provider and support workers
- their medicines list and medical summary (with their permission)
- their local contacts
- their transport backup
- where they'd go if they had to leave

Watching warnings from afar

- Set your warning app to watch their address as well as yours.
- Know the warning service for their state, which may be different from yours.
- Check the Fire Danger Rating and severe weather warnings for their area during the season.

Services that can help

- **Their care provider:** ask what their emergency plan is, and how they'll contact you.
- **Council and community support:** some councils and community groups run check-in registers or telephone services. Ask what's available in their area.
- **Aged care and supported accommodation:** ask the facility about its emergency plan, how it communicates with families, and when it would evacuate.
- **NDIS participants:** the support coordinator can help include emergency preparedness in the plan.

During an emergency

- Stay calm, and keep calls short so phone lines stay free.
- Pass on clear, official information. Avoid sharing rumours.
- Contact the local backup if you can't reach the person.
- Don't drive into a closed or dangerous area to reach them. Let local emergency services help.
- If they've evacuated, ask them to register with Red Cross Register.Find.Reunite if it's open, so you can find them.

After

- Help with the practical side from a distance: insurance calls, government assistance applications, finding tradespeople.
- Check in on how they're coping, not just their house.
- Look after yourself too. Worrying from a distance is stressful.
- Review the plan together, and thank the local contacts.

Your plan

Daily check-in and missed-call plan

Nearby contact and agreed support

Their warning service and local council

Want to know more?

Agree a nearby backup contact with the person you support so help does not depend on your being able to travel.

- P-CEP workbook (PDF) - planning together with someone who has support needs.
- Australian Red Cross - Get Prepared app - share plans and contacts.
- Australian Red Cross - Register.Find.Reunite - finding people after an emergency.
- healthdirect - Natural disasters - health advice.

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After it’s over

Recovery takes longer than the event

The storm passes in an hour. The flood goes down in a week. But recovery - cleaning up, repairing, claiming, rebuilding and getting back to normal life - can take months or years. People are often surprised by how tired they feel, how long paperwork takes and how emotions can arrive weeks later.

Recovery isn't a straight line, and there's no right speed. The most important things are to stay safe, keep records, ask for help early and look after each other.

Four steps

1. **Return and clean up safely.** Go back only when it's safe, and protect your health during clean-up.
2. **Record losses and get help.** Photograph damage, keep receipts and contact your insurer and support services.
3. **Restock and review.** Replace what you used and update your plan while the lessons are fresh.
4. **Look after yourselves and each other.** Recovery is emotional as well as practical.

Keep a recovery diary

A simple notebook or phone note makes recovery much easier. Record:

- dates and times of calls, who you spoke to and what was agreed
- claim and reference numbers
- photos and videos of damage, dated
- receipts for emergency spending, accommodation, food and repairs
- lost work and pay
- how you're feeling - it helps to look back and see progress

Confirm it is safe to return

- ☐ Check official return and access instructions
- ☐ Check current power, gas, water and road advice
- ☐ Keep away from fallen lines and damaged buildings
- ☐ Arrange a safe place for children or pets while checking damage

Clean up and protect your health

- ☐ Check utility and health guidance before using water, food or electrical equipment
- ☐ Arrange qualified advice for suspected asbestos or structural damage

- ☐ Check guidance on sewage, floodwater and mould
- ☐ Use suitable protective equipment when authorities say clean-up is safe

Record losses and get help

- ☐ Photograph damage when safe
- ☐ Keep invoices and receipts
- ☐ Contact the insurer before non-urgent repairs or disposing of evidence
- ☐ Check official assistance and verify any repair offer
- ☐ Update family, landlord or strata where relevant
- ☐ Contact your bank through a known channel if money is at risk
- ☐ Report suspected cybercrime and verify relief or donation offers

Restore supplies and review

- ☐ Restock medicines, food, water and equipment
- ☐ Re-establish check-ins and routine care
- ☐ Record what worked and what needs improvement
- ☐ Set a review date and replace outdated copies

- Return and clean up safely
- Damage, insurance and assistance
- Restock and review
- Looking after yourself and each other

Want to know more?

Keep a dated record of damage, spending and conversations so you have the details when seeking help or making a claim.

- myGov - Experiencing a natural disaster - government support in one place.
- Australian Red Cross - Coping after a crisis - practical and emotional recovery.
- healthdirect - Natural disasters - health during recovery.
- Disaster Assist - find assistance for your event.

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Return and clean up safely

The clean-up can be dangerous too

Many injuries and illnesses happen after the emergency is over - during the return home and the clean-up. People fall from roofs and ladders, cut themselves on debris, get electric shocks from wet wiring, are bitten by snakes sheltering in homes, strain backs lifting waterlogged furniture, breathe in mould and asbestos, and get sick from contaminated water. Exhaustion makes all of these more likely.

Take it slowly, protect yourself, and get help for the dangerous jobs.

Before you go back

- **Wait until authorities say it's safe.** Check your state warning service, council and ABC Local Radio.
- **Check road conditions.** Roads may be damaged, blocked or still closed.
- **Arrange care** for children and pets, so you can check the property without them. Children and animals shouldn't be around debris, floodwater or mould.
- **Take** sturdy boots, gloves, long sleeves and trousers, a torch, a camera or phone, drinking water, food, insect repellent, first aid supplies and a P2 mask.

Before you go inside

Walk around the outside first. **Don't go in** if you notice:

- a smell of gas
- fallen power lines, or damage to the meter box or switchboard
- cracked, leaning or unstable walls, roof or foundations
- water still inside, especially if it may be touching power points
- snakes or other animals sheltering inside

Call the relevant service from a safe place: your gas distributor, electricity distributor, SES (132 500) or Triple Zero (000) if there's immediate danger.

Electricity and gas

- **Don't turn the power on** if water has reached power points, the switchboard or appliances. Have a licensed electrician check the wiring and appliances first.
- **Don't use wet electrical appliances** until they've been checked.
- **If the gas was turned off,** have it turned back on by your gas supplier or a licensed gasfitter.
- **Solar systems and batteries** that have been flooded or burnt are dangerous. Don't touch them - call a licensed electrician or the installer.

Water and food

- **Don't drink tap water** until your provider says it's safe. Use bottled water or safe stored water.
- **Check tank and bore water** before drinking - see Drinking water.
- **Throw out food** that's been in contact with floodwater, and food from fridges and freezers that have been without power too long. See Food and safe cooking.

Protect yourself while cleaning

- **Wear:** gloves, sturdy waterproof boots, long sleeves and trousers, eye protection and a P2 mask when dealing with mud, mould or dust.
- **Cover cuts** with waterproof dressings. Seek medical advice if a wound becomes red, swollen or painful.
- **Wash your hands** often with soap and safe water, especially before eating.
- **Take breaks,** drink water and don't work alone.
- **Lift carefully.** Waterlogged furniture, carpets and plasterboard are very heavy. Get help.
- **Don't climb on roofs or use chainsaws** unless you're trained and equipped. Call the SES or a licensed tradesperson.

Floodwater and mud

Floodwater and mud can carry sewage, chemicals, fuel and dead animals.

- Keep children away from floodwater and mud.
- Clean hard surfaces with detergent and water, then let them dry.
- Throw out items that can't be cleaned and dried, such as mattresses, soft toys, carpets and underlay - after photographing them for insurance.
- Dry the house as quickly as possible to limit mould: open doors and windows, use fans and dehumidifiers once power is safe.

Mould

Mould can start growing within a day or two of flooding.

- Wear gloves, eye protection and a P2 mask when cleaning mould.
- Remove porous materials (plasterboard, carpet, insulation) that have mould growing on them.
- Clean hard surfaces with detergent and water.
- People with asthma, allergies or weakened immune systems should stay away during clean-up.
- For large areas, get professional help.

Asbestos

Homes built or renovated before 1990 may contain asbestos in walls, ceilings, eaves, roofs, flooring and fences. Storm, flood and fire damage can make it dangerous.

- **If you suspect asbestos, stop.** Don't cut, drill, break, sand or water-blast it.
- Wet down damaged material lightly to stop dust spreading, if it's safe.
- Get advice from a licensed asbestos assessor or removalist.

Snakes, spiders and wildlife

Floods and fires push animals into homes, sheds and yards.

- Look carefully before reaching into cupboards, under furniture or into piles of debris.
- Wear boots and gloves.
- Leave snakes alone. Call a licensed snake catcher.
- For a snake bite, call Triple Zero (000), keep the person still and apply a pressure immobilisation bandage.
- Contact a wildlife rescue group for injured wildlife.

Mosquitoes

Standing water after floods breeds mosquitoes, which can spread diseases such as Japanese encephalitis and Ross River virus.

- Use insect repellent, and cover up, especially at dawn and dusk.
- Empty containers holding water around your home, where it's safe.
- A Japanese encephalitis vaccine is available to some people at higher risk. Ask your doctor.

Tell people

- Let your out-of-area contact know you're back.
- Tell your landlord or strata manager about damage, in writing.
- Contact your insurer early.

Your plan

Who we notify on return

Licensed contractor or property contact

Official clean-up information

What we've checked

☐ Know who to call about utilities and hazards

Want to know more?

Flooding can increase the risk of mosquito-borne infections, including Japanese encephalitis in affected areas. Cover up and use repellent. A vaccine is available to eligible people. Keep clear of mould, snakes, displaced animals and contaminated water.

- Australian Red Cross - Cleaning up after a disaster - step-by-step clean-up advice.
- Queensland Health - Asbestos during and after a disaster - what to do if you suspect asbestos.
- Queensland Health - Mould after a disaster - cleaning mould safely.
- Australian CDC - Preventing disease after floods - infections and hygiene.
- healthdirect - Floods and cyclones - health advice.
- Get Ready Queensland - Downed power lines - electrical safety.
- Queensland Government - Mosquitoes and black flies - protecting yourself.
- Queensland Government - Japanese encephalitis - vaccine eligibility.
- healthdirect - Snake bites - first aid.

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Damage, insurance and assistance

Paperwork is part of recovery

After an emergency, a lot of recovery happens on the phone, online and on paper: insurance claims, government payments, council grants, bank hardship requests, receipts and quotes. It can be exhausting, especially when you're also cleaning up, living somewhere temporary and looking after a family.

Good records and knowing where to go make it much easier. You don't have to do it all at once, and you don't have to do it alone.

Start a recovery folder

Keep everything in one place - a folder, a box or a phone album and notes:

- **Photos and videos** of damage, taken before cleaning up. Include close-ups and wide shots of each room, and the outside.
- **A list of damaged items,** with approximate age and value. Photos or receipts from before the event help.
- **Receipts** for everything you spend because of the event: emergency accommodation, meals, clothing, tarps, cleaning supplies, transport.
- **A call log:** date, time, who you spoke to, what they said and any reference numbers.
- **Copies of everything** you send or receive.
- **Records of lost work and pay.**

Making an insurance claim

1. **Contact your insurer as soon as you can,** even if you're not sure what's covered. Insurers often set up dedicated phone lines after big events. Ask for a claim number.
2. **Ask what they need.** Photos, lists, receipts, quotes? Do they want to inspect before you clean up or throw things out?
3. **Prevent further damage if it's safe,** such as putting a tarp over a broken roof. Keep receipts - reasonable costs are often covered.
4. **Don't throw out damaged items** until you've photographed them and checked with your insurer - unless they're a health risk, such as rotting food or sodden carpets.
5. **Ask about emergency payments and temporary accommodation,** if your policy covers them.
6. **Get repairs approved** before work starts, unless they're urgent.
7. **Keep notes** of every conversation.

If you're unhappy with how your claim is being handled, first complain to your insurer's internal complaints team. If that doesn't resolve it, you can go to the Australian Financial Complaints Authority (AFCA) for free.

If you're not insured or underinsured, you're not alone. Ask your council and state government about recovery grants, and talk to a free financial counsellor.

Government disaster payments

When governments activate support for a disaster, payments may be available for people in affected areas.

- **Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment.** A one-off payment for eligible people who've been seriously affected, such as those whose home was badly damaged or who were seriously injured. Where activated and you qualify, it's generally $1,000 per adult and $400 per child under 16.
- **Disaster Recovery Allowance.** A short-term payment for eligible people who've lost income as a direct result of the disaster.
- **State and territory grants.** States often provide grants for emergency hardship, essential household contents, structural repairs and reconnecting services. These differ by state and event.

To check what's available:

- Use Disaster Assist to find your event.
- Check myGov and Services Australia, or call the Emergency Information Line on 180 22 66.
- Ask at a council recovery hub, if one opens.

Only apply through official channels. Scammers set up fake payment websites and text messages after disasters.

Other help

- **Banks and lenders:** ask about disaster relief packages and hardship arrangements.

- **Energy, water and phone providers:** ask about hardship help, payment plans and fee waivers.
- **Landlords:** talk about rent and repairs. Your state tenancy authority can advise on your rights.
- **Free financial counselling:** National Debt Helpline, 1800 007 007.
- **Free legal help:** Legal Aid and community legal centres can help with insurance disputes, tenancy issues and debt.
- **Charities:** organisations such as Red Cross, Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul and local groups often provide practical help, vouchers and goods.

Watch for recovery scams

- **Dodgy tradespeople** door-knocking with cheap offers, asking for cash up front or pressuring you to sign. Check licences with your state regulator, and check with your insurer before agreeing to anything.
- **Fake charities** asking for donations. Check the ACNC register.
- **Fake government payments** by text or email. Only apply through myGov or Services Australia.
- **People offering to "speed up" your claim** for a fee.

If money or account details are at risk, call your bank using the number you already trust.

Your plan

Claims contact and reference

Where we record photos and receipts

Official disaster assistance contact

Want to know more?

Use Disaster Assist to look up your event. Keep dated photos, invoices, proof of address and records of lost pay. Services Australia lists the evidence needed for each payment.

- Disaster Assist - find support for your event and location.
- myGov - Experiencing a natural disaster - government support in one place.
- Services Australia - Understanding government disaster support - payments and eligibility.
- Services Australia - Disaster payments factsheet (PDF) - a summary.
- Disaster Recovery Allowance, simple English (PDF) - for people who've lost income.
- Moneysmart - Storm, flood and fire insurance - claims and disputes.
- Australian Financial Complaints Authority - free complaints service.
- National Debt Helpline - free financial counselling.
- Legal Aid Queensland - free legal help (other states have their own Legal Aid).
- Scamwatch - reporting scams.

Online sources · 21 November 2026 · Guide version 3.1
Open the online sources for all sections

Restock and review

The best time to improve your plan

Right after an emergency, you know more about your plan than you ever will again. You know what you used, what ran out, which contacts answered, which warnings arrived, what you forgot and what you were glad you had. In a few months, those details fade.

So once things have settled - not in the middle of the clean-up, but within a few weeks - take half an hour to restock and review.

Restock in stages

You don't need to replace everything at once, especially if money is tight.

1. **First,** replace medicines, batteries, phone charge and drinking water.
2. **Next,** refill food, first aid supplies and pet supplies.
3. **Then,** replace anything else, as your budget allows.

Check dates on everything you didn't use, too. Emergencies are a good reminder to rotate.

A household debrief

Sit down with everyone in the household - children included - and talk through what happened. Keep it relaxed. There are no wrong answers.

What worked?

- What are we glad we had or did?
- Which contacts and warnings were useful?
- Who helped us, and how?

What didn't?

- What ran out first?
- What did we wish we'd had?
- Which phone numbers or plans didn't work?
- Was anyone left waiting for help, or unsure what to do?

What surprised us?

- What happened that we hadn't planned for?
- How long did things take - power, water, roads, shops?

How are we feeling?

- Is anyone still worried, tired or upset? See Looking after yourself and each other.

Choose one fix now

Don't try to fix everything. Choose the single change that would have made the biggest difference, and do it this week. Then choose the next one.

Examples:

- "Buy a second power bank."
- "Add our neighbour's mobile number to the plan."
- "Move the go bags to the cupboard by the front door."
- "Register for life support with our electricity retailer."
- "Set an earlier trigger to leave."

Update the plan

- Update contacts, routes and destinations that changed.
- Add anything new you learnt.
- Print a fresh copy of the plan and the fridge sheet.
- Write the date on it, and set the next review date.

Say thank you

If neighbours, friends, volunteers or strangers helped you, thank them. And if you're able, think about how you could help others next time - whether by checking on a neighbour, joining a volunteer group or sharing what you learnt.

Share what you learnt

Talk to your street or community about what worked and what didn't. Your experience could help another household prepare. If something in this guide could be clearer, use **Suggest an improvement** to tell us.

Your plan

Supplies to replace

One change for next time

Next check date

Want to know more?

Replace used items and update the plan while you still remember what worked and what was missing.

- Australian Red Cross - Prepare - updating your plan.
- Australian Red Cross - Get packing - restocking your kit.

- Australian Red Cross - Coping after a crisis - recovering well.

Online sources · 21 November 2026 · Guide version 3.1
Open the online sources for all sections

Looking after yourself and each other

Feelings after an emergency are normal

Going through an emergency affects people in many ways. It's common to feel tired, jumpy, anxious, angry, sad, numb or flat - sometimes all in the same day. Some people feel fine at first and struggle weeks or months later, when the practical work slows down. Anniversaries, storms, smoke or rain can bring feelings back.

These reactions are normal responses to an abnormal experience. For most people, they ease over time, especially with support from people around them.

Common reactions

- trouble sleeping, or bad dreams
- feeling on edge, easily startled or irritable
- difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- going over what happened again and again
- feeling sad, tearful, guilty or hopeless
- tiredness, headaches or stomach problems
- avoiding reminders of the event
- drinking more alcohol or using other drugs to cope
- feeling disconnected from others

What helps

Look after the basics

- Keep meals and sleep as regular as you can.
- Drink water, and go easy on alcohol and caffeine.
- Move your body each day, even a short walk.
- Take breaks from the clean-up and the paperwork.

Stay connected

- Spend time with people you trust. Talk about what happened if you want to - and don't if you don't.
- Accept practical help: a meal, a lift, help with forms.
- Check on the helpers too. People who've been supporting others often forget themselves.

Limit news and social media

Repeated news coverage, especially images of the event, can keep distress going. Take breaks.

Do something meaningful

Small, manageable tasks help people regain a sense of control. Give each person in the household one job. Helping others, when you're ready, can also help you.

Be patient with yourself

Recovery isn't a straight line. Some days will be harder than others.

Children

Children need extra reassurance and routine after an emergency. Tell them what's happening in simple words, answer their questions honestly and let them ask the same question more than once. See Children and teens for common reactions and how to help.

When to get more help

Reach out for support if:

- feelings are severe, or don't ease after a few weeks
- they're getting in the way of work, school, relationships or daily life
- you're using alcohol or other drugs to cope
- you're having thoughts of harming yourself or others

You don't have to wait until things are bad. You can reach out at any time.

Where to start:

- your GP, who can refer you to a psychologist or counsellor (Medicare rebates may be available)
- a community recovery hub, if one has opened after the event
- the support services below

Support lines

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14 - crisis support, any time
- **Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 4636 - mental health support
- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800 - for young people aged 5 to 25
- **13YARN:** 13 92 76 - crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, any time
- **1800RESPECT:** 1800 737 732 - support for people affected by family, domestic or sexual violence
- **Triple Zero (000)** - if you or someone else is in immediate danger

Stress and relationships

The stress of an emergency and recovery can strain relationships. Arguments and tension are common. But stress is never an excuse for violence or control. If you're experiencing violence or abuse, or are worried about your own behaviour, support is available through 1800RESPECT. If you're in immediate danger, call Triple Zero (000).

Community recovery

Recovery is easier together. Community events, memorials, working bees and support groups help people feel less alone and rebuild connections. If your community is holding them, consider going - even briefly.

Your plan

Daily check-in and routine

Wellbeing or support contact

Want to know more?

Interrupted sleep, tiredness, difficulty concentrating and feeling on edge are common after a disaster. The Red Cross Get Prepared app helps you make a stress plan. You can reach out for support whenever you need it.

- healthdirect - Mental health helplines - a full list of support lines.
- Phoenix Australia - Disaster Mental Health Hub - recovering after disasters, for individuals and communities.
- Australian Red Cross - Coping after a crisis - practical and emotional recovery.
- Australian Red Cross - Get Prepared app - including a stress plan.
- healthdirect - Kids and mental health - supporting children.
- Lifeline, 13YARN and 1800RESPECT - support any time.

Online sources · 21 November 2026 · Guide version 3.1
Open the online sources for all sections

Emergency fridge sheet

The fridge sheet is the one page everyone in the house - and anyone visiting - should be able to find in a hurry.

- Print both sides and fill in the blanks by hand.
- Write your address and nearest cross street clearly. Visitors, carers and babysitters may not know it.
- Add your local ABC frequency, your out-of-area contact and your meeting places.
- Put it on the fridge or inside a kitchen cupboard door.
- Show it to babysitters, carers and house-sitters when they arrive.
- Update it when anything changes, and print a fresh one each year.

Side 1. In an emergency

- **Life in danger** Triple Zero (000)
- **Storm and flood help** SES 132 500 where available
- **Non-urgent police** 131 444 where available
- **Health advice** healthdirect 1800 022 222. Qld 13 HEALTH 13 43 25 84.

Local ABC Radio (AM or FM) _____

Local disaster dashboard _____

Out-of-area contact and phone _____

Meeting place near home _____

Meeting place outside our area _____

Warning levels

Advice - stay informed. Watch and Act - take the action named in the warning. Emergency Warning - act immediately.

Fire Danger Ratings

Moderate - plan and prepare. High - be ready to act. Extreme - take action now. Catastrophic - leave bushfire risk areas.

If it’s flooded, forget it.

Side 2. Get ready this weekend

1. Look up your address and routes on local flood and bushfire maps.
2. Bookmark your warning services and write down your ABC frequency.
3. Pick two meeting places and two ways out.
4. Choose an out-of-area contact and agree how you’ll check in.
5. Build up five days of food and water. Allow about 3 L a person a day for drinking and basic cooking, plus extra as needed.
6. Test your torch, radio and power bank.



Scan to open Prep For It.

General information only. Always follow the warning for your area. Guide Version 3.1.

Emergency now

Life in danger? Call Triple Zero (000)

Police, fire or ambulance. Say your address and nearest cross street. Stay on the line.

Storm or flood damage
SES 132 500

Non-urgent police
131 444

Health advice
healthdirect 1800 022 222

Poisons Information Centre
13 11 26

Which service should I call?

SES: a tree on your roof, a leak you can't control, rising water with no one in danger. Where available. Non-urgent police: where available.

Queensland: 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84). Victoria: NURSE-ON-CALL (1300 60 60 24).

Check the warning for your area

Queensland

New South Wales

Victoria

South Australia

Western Australia

Tasmania

ACT

Northern Territory

No internet? Tune a battery radio to your local ABC station.

Do what the warning says

Told to leave? Take people and animals. Go while the road is safe. Never drive through floodwater.

Told to shelter? Stay inside, away from windows. Keep your phone charged and the radio on.

Not sure? If you can see danger coming - water rising, smoke, embers - don't wait for a warning.

Then

- Text your out-of-area contact: “Safe. At home. Will update at 6 pm.”

- If the power is out, note the time and keep the fridge shut.
- Check on neighbours when it's safe.

Open The first 24 hours

Open my plan

Sources and further reading

Links are grouped by section. Check the source for your location before acting on local advice.

Welcome

Open this section

- Powerlink Callide restoration report
- Energex final Alfred restoration report
- Australian Red Cross preparedness
- Australian Red Cross Get Prepared app
- Australian Red Cross RediPlan and Auslan resources

Your household

Open this section

- ABC Radio reception and frequencies
- Australian Warning System
- Australian Red Cross Get Prepared app
- Australian Red Cross Easy English plan

Your warnings

Open this section

- Australian Warning System
- Australian Fire Danger Rating System
- Bureau of Meteorology severe weather
- ABC Emergency
- AusAlert and compatible devices
- Get Ready Queensland Emergency Alert
- Queensland Health heat warnings
- Australian Warning System icons and warning levels
- Standard Emergency Warning Signal
- AusAlert information and FAQs
- Queensland disaster dashboards by location
- Get Ready Queensland warnings and alerts
- ABC Radio reception and frequencies
- Queensland Disaster Management
- Queensland Fire Department
- Hazards Near Me NSW

- NSW Rural Fire Service
- VicEmergency
- Country Fire Authority
- Alert SA
- SA Country Fire Service
- Emergency WA
- Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- TasALERT
- Tasmania Fire Service
- ACT Emergency Services Agency
- ACT ESA survival plan
- SecureNT
- NT Fire and Rescue Service

The first 24 hours

Open this section

- Australian Warning System
- ACMA emergency calls
- Australian Red Cross preparedness

Hazards near you

Open this section

- Australian Warning System
- Bureau of Meteorology severe weather

Storms, hail and damaging winds

Open this section

- AEMO February 2024 Victorian power event
- Bureau of Meteorology severe weather
- Get Ready Queensland fallen powerlines

Flood and dam releases

Open this section

- Lismore City Council flood records
- ABC News Lismore community rescues
- NSW SES flood safety

- Get Ready Queensland sandbags

Bushfire and grassfire

Open this section

- Australian Fire Danger Rating System
- Defence Ministers Mallacoota evacuation
- Queensland Fire Department bushfire planning
- healthdirect bushfire smoke
- ABC News Mallacoota waterfront evacuation
- University of Tasmania AirRater

Heatwave, smoke and indoor heat

Open this section

- healthdirect heatstroke
- healthdirect bushfire smoke
- Victorian Department of Health heatwaves
- Bureau of Meteorology severe weather
- Queensland Health heat warnings
- Better Health Channel heat illness
- NSW Health Beat the Heat

Tropical cyclone and storm tide

Open this section

- Energex final Alfred restoration report
- Bureau of Meteorology severe weather
- healthdirect floods and cyclones
- Energex Alfred restoration targets
- Energex Alfred outage peak
- Get Ready Queensland cyclone and storm tide advice

Earthquake

Open this section

- VICSES earthquake guidance
- Geoscience Australia seismic hazard assessment
- Geoscience Australia Mansfield earthquake
- ABC News Mansfield earthquake

- Geoscience Australia earthquake reports

Tsunami

Open this section

- Bureau of Meteorology tsunami warnings
- Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience tsunami handbook

Landslide

Open this section

- Geoscience Australia landslides
- healthdirect disaster advice

Dust storms and drought

Open this section

- Bureau of Meteorology severe weather
- Queensland Health drinking water safety

Extreme cold, snow and ice

Open this section

- Transport Victoria snow and winter driving
- Bureau of Meteorology severe weather
- Queensland Health generator and fuel safety

Public health emergency and animal disease

Open this section

- healthdirect disaster advice
- Australian Government biosecurity

Medical emergency at home

Open this section

- healthdirect disaster advice
- ACMA emergency calls
- Australian Red Cross preparedness
- Queensland 13 HEALTH

- Victoria NURSE-ON-CALL
- Triple Zero and police assistance numbers

Home fire and escape

Open this section

- Fire and Rescue NSW home escape plans
- Queensland Fire Department indoor fire safety

Rare but real

Open this section

- ABC News Bali volcanic ash and flights
- Geoscience Australia volcanoes
- Bureau of Meteorology space weather
- NASA asteroid facts

Outages, cyber and public safety

Open this section

- Australian Government telecommunications in emergencies
- Australian Signals Directorate incident recovery

When your phone or internet goes down

Open this section

- ACMA emergency calls
- ACMA 2023 Optus outage findings
- ACMA September 2025 Optus investigation
- ABC Emergency
- National Relay Service emergency instructions
- Apple Emergency SOS via satellite in Australia
- Telstra Satellite Messaging support and limits
- Triple Zero Emergency+ app

Data breaches, scams and cyber incidents

Open this section

- Australian Signals Directorate incident recovery
- Qantas July 2025 breach update

- OAIC fraud and your credit report
- IDCARE identity and cyber support
- Scamwatch
- OAIC steps to take after a breach
- OAIC Optus data breach
- OAIC Medibank data breach
- OAIC responding to a breach notice
- ACNC charity register and disaster donations

Payments and major IT outages

Open this section

- Australian Signals Directorate 2024 CrowdStrike outage
- Australian Red Cross emergency kits
- Moneysmart financial hardship

Supply shortages

Open this section

- ABC News DP World ports reopening
- DP World clearing the port backlog
- ABC News Trans-Australian Railway supply disruption
- Australian Red Cross emergency kits

Infrastructure failures

Open this section

- Get Ready Queensland fallen powerlines
- Australian Government telecommunications in emergencies

Chemical incident, gas leak or hazardous fumes

Open this section

- healthdirect disaster advice
- Australian Warning System

Local closures and access

Open this section

- Australian Warning System

- Australian National Security public safety advice

If you’re caught in an armed attack

Open this section

- Australian National Security public safety advice

When services stop

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross preparedness

When the power goes out

Open this section

- Powerlink Callide restoration report
- Energex final Alfred restoration report
- Get Ready Queensland fallen powerlines
- Queensland Health generator and fuel safety
- EnergyAustralia life support registration
- Australian Energy Regulator distributor directory
- Energex outage map

Backup power

Open this section

- Energex bidirectional EV charging
- Hyundai Australia V2L manual example
- Queensland Electrical Safety Office storm advice
- EnergyAustralia life support registration

Drinking water

Open this section

- Queensland Health drinking water safety
- NSW Health boil water alerts

Toilets, waste and hygiene

Open this section

- NSW Health flood hygiene
- healthdirect floods and cyclones

Food and safe cooking

Open this section

- Food Standards Australia New Zealand food safety in an emergency
- Queensland Health food safety after a disaster
- FSANZ 2-hour and 4-hour rule
- Queensland Health generator and fuel safety
- Food Safety Information Council emergency advice
- Food Safety Information Council printable outage poster

Transport and access

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross preparedness
- Australian Government telecommunications in emergencies

Work, income and hardship

Open this section

- Fair Work Ombudsman leave
- myGov natural disaster support
- Moneysmart financial hardship

School and childcare closures

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross preparedness

Medicines, equipment and care

Open this section

- healthdirect disaster advice
- Australian Red Cross preparedness
- Get Ready Queensland 2026 kit checklist (PDF)

Heat, cold, smoke and indoor conditions

Open this section

- healthdirect heatstroke
- healthdirect bushfire smoke

People who need extra planning

Open this section

- Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness workbook
- Australian Red Cross preparedness

Children and teens

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross preparedness
- healthdirect children’s mental health

Disability, chronic illness and extra care

Open this section

- Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness workbook
- NDIS support coordination
- healthdirect disaster advice
- P-CEP workbook (PDF)
- P-CEP capability wheel

Pets and livestock

Open this section

- NSW Government preparing pets and livestock
- Defence Ministers Mallacoota evacuation
- Get Ready Queensland and RSPCA pet plan
- RSPCA state and territory contacts
- Agriculture Victoria emergency management

Older people and people living alone

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross preparedness

- healthdirect disaster advice

Renters and apartments

Open this section

- Fire and Rescue NSW home escape plans
- Moneysmart storm, flood and fire insurance

Warnings in a format you can use

Open this section

- TIS National interpreting
- National Relay Service emergency instructions
- Australian Red Cross Easy English plan
- NEMA translated emergency resources
- Services Australia disaster help in simple English
- Australian Red Cross RediPlan and Auslan resources

Islands and ferry-dependent communities

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross preparedness
- Australian Government telecommunications in emergencies
- healthdirect disaster advice

Caring for someone from a distance

Open this section

- P-CEP workbook (PDF)
- Australian Red Cross Get Prepared app
- healthdirect disaster advice

Stay or go

Open this section

- NSW Government emergency evacuation guidance
- Australian Red Cross Register.Find.Reunite
- Australian Warning System
- Australian Red Cross preparedness

Supplies

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross emergency kits
- Get Ready Queensland emergency kit
- NSW Government preparing pets and livestock
- Australian Red Cross preparing documents and insurance
- Moneysmart storm, flood and fire insurance
- Get Ready Queensland 2026 kit checklist (PDF)
- Get Ready Queensland and RSPCA pet plan
- Queensland Health plain-English health emergency kit (PDF)
- healthdirect first aid kit contents

Prepare your home

Open this section

- Queensland Electrical Safety Office storm advice
- Australian Red Cross preparedness
- Fire and Rescue NSW home escape plans
- Queensland Health generator and fuel safety
- Moneysmart storm, flood and fire insurance
- National Debt Helpline
- Insurance Council submission on underinsurance (2019)
- Insurance Council building and contents calculators
- Insurance Council underinsurance guidance

Neighbours and support

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross preparedness
- Australian Government telecommunications in emergencies
- ABC News Lismore community rescues

Skills and support network

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross preparedness
- Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness workbook

After it’s over

Open this section

- myGov natural disaster support
- healthdirect disaster advice
- Australian Red Cross cleaning up after a disaster

Return and clean up safely

Open this section

- healthdirect floods and cyclones
- Queensland Health mould after a disaster
- Queensland Health asbestos after a disaster
- Get Ready Queensland fallen powerlines
- Australian Centre for Disease Control flood clean-up
- Queensland mosquito advice after floods
- Queensland Health Japanese encephalitis and vaccine eligibility

Damage, insurance and assistance

Open this section

- Moneysmart storm, flood and fire insurance
- myGov natural disaster support
- Scamwatch
- Services Australia disaster payments and eligibility
- Services Australia phone numbers
- Disaster Assist
- Services Australia disaster payment factsheet (PDF)

Restock and review

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross preparedness
- Australian Red Cross emergency kits

Looking after yourself and each other

Open this section

- healthdirect mental health support
- Australian Red Cross preparedness

- 13YARN crisis support
- 1800RESPECT family and domestic violence support
- Australian Red Cross Get Prepared app
- Lifeline crisis support

Keep your plan current

Open this section

- Queensland Health disaster readiness
- Queensland Electrical Safety Office storm advice
- ABC Radio reception and frequencies

Contacts

Open this section

- Triple Zero Emergency+ app
- ABC Emergency
- ABC Radio reception and frequencies
- Disaster Assist
- RSPCA state and territory contacts
- Australian Red Cross RediPlan and Auslan resources
- 13YARN crisis support
- 1800RESPECT family and domestic violence support
- IDCARE identity and cyber support
- National Debt Helpline
- Police Assistance Line
- 13 HEALTH (Queensland)
- NURSE-ON-CALL (Victoria)
- 13YARN
- 1800RESPECT

Print and keep current

Open this section

- Australian Red Cross emergency preparedness

Full guide references

Version 3.1 · 21 November 2026. These sources accompany the detailed guides. Follow current official warnings and advice.

- NEMA explains how AusAlert works
- Get Ready Queensland - Know your risk
- ABC - October 2020 hailstorm
- ABC - Christmas 2023 storm restoration
- Get Ready Queensland - Storm
- NSW SES - Storm season
- Bureau of Meteorology - floodwater dangers
- Bureau of Meteorology - Flood knowledge centre
- Get Ready Queensland - Flood
- Geoscience Australia - Flood
- Bureau of Meteorology - extreme heat
- Bureau of Meteorology - Heatwave knowledge centre
- Get Ready Queensland - Heatwave
- Dehydration
- EPA Victoria - Air quality
- Bureau of Meteorology - Tropical cyclone knowledge centre
- Get Ready Queensland - Cyclone and storm surge
- Geoscience Australia - Earthquake
- Get Ready Queensland - Earthquake
- Geoscience Australia - Tsunami
- Get Ready Queensland - Tsunami
- Tweed Shire - 2022 landslide road damage
- Get Ready Queensland - Landslide
- Queensland Water Commission 2007–08 annual report (PDF)
- healthdirect - Hypothermia
- Australian Government - reporting animal disease
- healthdirect - How to perform CPR
- healthdirect - Snake bites
- Queensland Fire Department - smoke alarm requirements
- cyber.gov.au - Protect yourself and your family
- eSafety Commissioner
- Australian Financial Complaints Authority
- Queensland Government - give-way rules
- Australian Government - National Security Hotline
- Phoenix Australia - Disaster Mental Health Hub
- Energex - guaranteed service levels and exclusions
- Ergon Energy outages
- Ausgrid
- Endeavour Energy
- Essential Energy

- AusNet
- CitiPower and Powercor
- Jemena
- United Energy
- SA Power Networks
- Western Power
- Horizon Power
- TasNetworks
- Evoenergy
- Power and Water
- ABS - 2021 Census household figures
- Get Ready Queensland emergency kit checklist (PDF)
- Agriculture Victoria - dog drinking-water needs
- Moneysmart explains how to check for underinsurance
- Australian Red Cross - Coping after a crisis
- Legal Aid Queensland