

Tips Sheet: Emergency “Go Bags” and Medication

Emergency service providers recommend all residents prepare a Go Bag in case they need to evacuate due to an emergency, such as, a wildfire or earthquake. They suggest having a week’s supply of medications stored in the Go Bag. However, barriers to obtaining and/or maintaining Go Bag medications exist.

Below are tips that residents may find helpful for addressing Go Bag medication issues:

- 1) To gradually save 7 days’ worth of emergency medication, refill the prescription (Rx) a few days early each month and set aside “extra” medication until an adequate amount of medication has accumulated. Most Rx’s can be refilled once 75% of medication has been used (based on last date the Rx was filled); controlled medication usually requires 90% of medication already used (based on last date the Rx was filled). **IMPORTANT FOR SAFETY: If separating out emergency medication into a new container, mark very clearly when the medication expires; taking expired medication can be dangerous.**
- 2) Compounded or extremely specialized medication should NOT be kept in Go Bags due to concerns, such as, short time to expiration, expense, or need for refrigeration. Instead, keep customer service numbers for the compounding pharmacy and your health insurance company in the Go Bag to request emergency filling of Rx once evacuated; most patients can tolerate a few missed days of medication, but if you need immediate medical attention, go to urgent care or the closest Emergency Department. (Instant cold packs can be used to store medication such as insulin during short term power outages.)

- 3) There are often safety mechanisms in place at pharmacies to avoid giving consumers unsafe amounts of medication, which can lead to a denial of early or emergency Rx refills. This barrier can be overridden if a physician writes a note that states, “OK to fill early”. Keep a hardcopy of the physician’s note in the Go Bag so you can show it to a pharmacy if you need a Rx refill. Critical medication instructions should also be kept in the Go Bag and on your person.
- 4) Most pharmacies and health insurance companies have a 24/7 phone number available. Keep a list of those phone numbers in your Go Bag as well as photocopies of your ID and Medicare, Medicaid or health insurance card.
- 5) In most cases, medicines can be filled by pharmacies in emergency situations (Lost, Stolen, Vacation policy); 3-day supply usually minimum but often full month supply given.
- 6) American Red Cross (ARC) has a Disaster Health Services (DHS) division that can facilitate emergency medication refills during a disaster. Request a DHS referral if staying in an ARC shelter.
- 7) Health insurance plans have automatic stops in place for cost effectiveness; Generic forms of medications are defaults; Receiving prior authorization and internal reviews that deem a medication “medically necessary” in a particular form (i.e., capsule vs. tablet) generally overrides these stops.
- 8) Understand that not all recommendations by emergency service providers can be met for all people; do what you can and have an alternative plan in place (e.g., list of pharmacy and health insurance customer service lines to contact ASAP).