

Safe Drug Use After a Natural Disaster

Information on the use of medicines affected by fire, flooding, unsafe water, or power outages

[en Español \(/drugs/emergency-preparedness/seguridad-en-el-uso-de-los-medicamentos-despues-de-u](#)

Before a Natural Disaster

An emergency plan is especially important for those with health concerns, particularly if the power goes out. Taking precautions for storing medications and supplies is key to being prepared. Patients should:

- Keep an up-to-date list of their medications, including dose and indicated use
- Know how much medication they have on hand
- Obtain early refills if they anticipate access to their pharmacies will be disrupted
- Place medication bottles or packages in water-tight containers (such as plastic containers with lids) if there is a possibility of flooding or other water damage
- Have ice available for medications that need refrigeration

[Learn more about keeping drugs safe \(/drugs/information-healthcare-professionals-drugs/emergency-](#)

After a Natural Disaster

The Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) at FDA offers the following information on the use of drugs (medicines) that may be affected

by fire, flooding or unsafe water, and on the use of temperature-sensitive drugs when refrigeration is temporarily unavailable. After a natural disaster, it is important to inspect all drugs.

Drugs Exposed to Excessive Heat, Such as Fire

The effectiveness of drugs can be destroyed by high temperatures from a fire. If you think your medicines have been exposed to excessive heat, consider replacing them.

Drugs Exposed to Unsafe Water

Drugs exposed to flood or unsafe municipal water may become contaminated. This contamination may lead to serious health effects.

We recommend that drugs – even those in their original containers with screw-top caps, snap lids, or droppers – should be discarded (</consumers/consumer-updates/where-and-how-dispose-unused-medicines>) if they came into contact with flood or contaminated water. In addition, medicines placed in other storage containers should be discarded if the medicines came in contact with flood or contaminated water.

Lifesaving Drugs Exposed to Heat or Unsafe Water

A drug may be needed to treat a life-threatening condition, but a replacement may not be readily available. Drugs exposed to fire or unsafe water should be replaced as soon as possible. If the drug looks unchanged - for example, pills in a wet container appear dry - the drugs can be used until a replacement is available. If the pills are wet, then they are contaminated and need to be discarded.

Drugs that Need to Be Reconstituted (Made Into a Liquid)

Drugs that have to be reconstituted (made into a liquid using water) ***should be mixed only with purified or bottled water***. Liquids other than purified or bottled water should not be used to reconstitute these products.

Drugs that Need Refrigeration

Some drugs require refrigeration (for example, insulin and certain liquid antibiotics). If electrical power has been off for a long time, the drug should be discarded and replaced. However, if the drug is absolutely necessary to sustain life (for example, insulin), it may be used until a new supply is available.

Because temperature-sensitive drugs lose potency if not refrigerated, they should be replaced with a new supply as soon as possible. For example, insulin that is not refrigerated is effective for a shorter period of time than the labeled expiration date. Please see [Information Regarding Insulin Storage \(/drugs/emergency-preparedness/information-regarding-insulin-storage-and-switching-between-products-emergency\)](/drugs/emergency-preparedness/information-regarding-insulin-storage-and-switching-between-products-emergency) for more details.

If you are concerned about the efficacy or safety of a particular product, contact your pharmacist, healthcare provider, or the manufacturer's customer service department.

[Back to Natural Disaster Response \(/drugs/emergency-preparedness/natural-disaster-preparedness-ar\)](/drugs/emergency-preparedness/natural-disaster-preparedness-ar)

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Yes

No