

Preparing your household for emergencies



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About this guide

Emergencies can happen. Being prepared can give you peace of mind when they do. The aim of this guide is to give you clear, simple and practical advice to help you prepare for an emergency.

A lot of the information may seem like common sense, but you can significantly reduce the risks for you, your family and your property by being informed and prepared.

Westminster City Council and the emergency services work hard to make sure that the city is well prepared in the event of an emergency. It is important that you are ready too.

If you would like to speak to someone about this information in your own language, please visit your estate office who will arrange this for you.

General advice

Emergency first steps

There are a few key things that you should always do in an emergency:

- If people are injured or in danger, contact the emergency services by dialling 999.
- Always follow the advice of the emergency services.
- Try to remain calm and reassure others.
- If you are involved in an accident or injured check yourself for injuries - and help yourself before helping others.
- Keep up to date with the news in your area by tuning into local radio and television stations.

BBC London Radio	94.9 FM
Capital FM	95.8 FM
Heart	106.2 FM



My household emergency plan

1. What do we do in the event of a fire?

2. Where will we meet if we can't get into or stay in our home?

3. Who can we stay with if we are evacuated?

4. Who will collect the children from school if we are not able to get there?

5. Neighbours we will check on

6. Who will look after our pets if we are unable to?

7. Who can be our emergency friend to get medicine and supplies if we have to stay at home?

8. Where we turn off:

a Gas

b Water

c Electricity



Emergency kit check list

Keep the following items ready packed in your kit. If it is not practical to keep all items packed, attach a check list to the kit of things you need to grab before you leave.

Food and water

- Bottled drinking water
- Water for washing and cooking
- Non-perishable food (canned or dried)
- Can opener

Other emergency items

- Waterproof torch and spare batteries (check regularly)
- Radio and spare batteries (check regularly)
- Mobile phone charger
- First Aid kit and essential medicines
- Wind and rain proof clothing
- Strong shoes for outdoors
- Face and dust masks
- Blankets and sleeping bags
- Sun hats/ sunscreen
- Toilet paper
- Rubbish bags
- Useful telephone numbers
- Pet supplies

Supplies for babies and small children

- Food, formula and drink
- Change of clothing
- Nappies
- Toys and activities

Other supplies

- Hearing/sight aids
- Mobility aids
- Asthma and respiratory aids
- Your medication
- Special foods
- Insurance documents
- Wallet/purse
- Identification documents

Store your kit somewhere easy to find. It will be useful in all the emergency scenarios detailed in this guide.



Helping vulnerable neighbours

In many emergencies some members of the community may be more vulnerable than others, such as older and very young people.

Whilst you should always ensure you and your family are safe first, helping your friends and neighbours too can save lives.

Consider including in your emergency plan a list of vulnerable neighbours who may need help. Just checking that someone is well may make a difference.

Having an 'emergency friend'

One of the easiest ways to prepare for an emergency is to identify 'emergency friends'.

Emergency friends should be people who you trust that can help you (or you can help each other) if one of your homes or members of family, has been affected by an emergency.

Try and choose one friend who lives nearby and a second one who lives further away.

Ways you can help each other are:

- Swap house keys. You never know when you might lock yourself out or need someone to access your home if you cannot get there.
- Provide each other with a place to stay if you have been evacuated from your home or if it has been affected by a flood, fire or utility failure.
- Arrange to look after each other's children or to pick them up from school if you have an emergency at work or in the family.
- If you are ill your doctor might ask you to send someone to collect your medication for you.
- Take copies of your most important documents or pictures and keep them safe for each other.

Make sure all your family know who your emergency friends are and make a note of them in the home emergency plan in this guide.

Emergency contact details

You should fill in and store these contact details somewhere safe.

Emergency services	999
Police (non-emergencies)	101
NHS Choices	111
Anti-Terrorism Hotline	0800 789 321
Floodline	0845 988 1188
Local police station	
Westminster City Council	020 7641 6000
Work	
Doctor	
School	
Water loss (Thames Water)	0845 9200 800
Your water supplier	
Electricity loss (UK Power Networks)	0800 028 0247
Your electricity supplier emergency number	
Gas Emergency Service (National Grid)	0800 111 999
Your gas supplier	
Met Office	0870 900 0100
Emergency friend 1	
Emergency friend 2	
Vulnerable neighbours	

Coping with specific emergencies

Building evacuation

If the emergency services tell you to evacuate your home you must do so.

Refusing to leave will put you, your household and those trying to help you at risk.

If you have pets you should have a plan for where they can stay in the event that you are evacuated from your home. You are advised not to bring them with you to an evacuation centre.

If you are evacuated, where possible you should stay with your emergency friend. If this isn't possible Westminster City Council will provide you with basic accommodation.

Ensure you bring your **emergency kit** with you when evacuated.

The people who run the evacuation centres are trained to give you support and advice. They will help you through the stress of an evacuation and prepare you for what to do afterwards.

Flooding

There are a number of things you can do in advance to prepare for flooding and to minimise the effects.

How to prepare:

- To check if your property is at risk of flooding, assess your risk and to find information on flood protection products, call the Environment Agency on 03708 506 506 or visit www.environment-agency.gov.uk
- If your property is at risk sign up to the Environment Agency's flood warning service using their website.



- Monitor weather forecasts, especially when heavy rain is expected. The Met Office can provide this information as well as extreme rainfall alerts.
- If a flood is likely, put plugs in sinks and baths and weigh them down to avoid water backing up through drains into sinks and toilets.
- Check your buildings and contents insurance policy to confirm you are covered for flooding and that you haven't underestimated the value of your home's contents.

Westminster City Council does not insure your furniture, belongings or decorations against theft, fire, vandalism or burst pipes - you need to take out your own insurance. Under a scheme with Aviva, which is open to all Westminster City Council tenants and leaseholders, it is easy for you to protect your belongings. Contact your local estate office for more information on the scheme or visit our website at www.cwh.org.uk/about-us/insurance.

- Know how to turn *off* your gas, electricity and water supplies. If you have any doubts you should ask your supplier for advice.
- Think about what you will do with pets, cars, furniture, electrical equipment and garden furniture should you be flooded.
- If you have been flooded before consider investing in flood protection equipment.

How to respond

- If safe to do so, turn *off* gas, electricity and water supplies when flood water is about to enter your home.
- **Never** touch sources of electricity when standing in flood water.
- **Never** drive through flood water. 80 % of flood deaths occur in vehicles.
- If your home has been flooded you are advised to move your family and pets upstairs.
- If there is raw sewage in your property **do not enter your property** and contact your estate office for advice.

Electricity failure

If you have a power cut, first check whether your neighbours have also lost supply. If they have, call the electricity loss hotline on **0800 028 0247**.

If your neighbours **have not** lost their electricity supply:

- Check your trip switch - a circuit breaker fuse system which will be near your electricity meter. If the trip switch is still on, call your supplier's emergency line for your area.
- If the trip switch is off, switch it back on.
- If it switches back off, one of your appliances may be faulty so unplug all appliances and reset the switch.
- If you have a pre-pay meter, check that you still have credit.
- If only part of your supply has failed and the switch won't reset, there may be a fault with your wiring so contact your local estate office.

How to prepare

- Have at least one standard land line telephone in the house as cordless telephones will not work in a power cut.
- Make sure your home is well-insulated. A well-insulated house can stay warm for 12 hours or longer.
- Keep a torch and spare batteries to hand.

How to respond

- Take care if using candles or other naked flames. Never leave lit candles in unoccupied rooms or with unsupervised children or animals.
- Do not open fridges for any longer than necessary - they will normally stay cold for many hours if kept shut.

Loss of water supply

If you lose water find out if it is just your property or your neighbours as well. If it is just your property you should contact your supplier. Thames Water's 24 hour emergency number is **0845 9200 800**.

If the whole block or estate has lost water supply, your water supplier has a duty to provide you with alternative water sources.

This could be bottled water, stand-pipes or water tankers. If you are unable to go out to collect water make sure you have an emergency friend that can collect water for you.

It is a good idea to keep some bottled water in your property for emergencies. The Food Standards Agency advise that the average adult should drink 1.5 - 2 litres of water in a typical day, that's about 6 - 8 250ml glasses.

Gas failure

If you smell gas in your home, call the free 24 hour national gas emergency number **0800 111 999**, whether the smell is inside or outside your property.

You'll be asked a series of questions designed to build a picture of the reported gas escape or gas emergency. From these details, the operator can identify the right gas safety advice for you such as:

- Do not turn electrical switches on or off, because this generates a small spark.
- Open doors and windows.
- Turn the gas off at the meter unless the meter is located in the cellar/basement.
- Avoid using naked flames.

An engineer will be sent to make the property safe. National Grid aims to attend all uncontrolled escapes within one hour and all controlled escapes within two hours.

In addition, Westminster City Council tenants should contact the Westminster City Council repairs

call centre on **0800 358 3783** (lines open Monday - Friday, 8.30am - 5pm) or the out of hours service on **020 7286 7412** at all other times.

If gas is lost for a long period, National Grid will keep all residents and your estate office up to date (i.e. when they can safely restore supplies, alternative heating and cooking provisions etc.)

Westminster City Council will provide temporary heating to residents on a priority basis, with priority being given to older people or families with young children.

If gas is lost for a prolonged period over a wide area, being prepared can make a difficult situation easier.

- If you have a pre-pay meter, check that you still have credit.
- To conserve existing heat in your home, use just one or two adjacent rooms. Keep these areas isolated by closing doors and/or hanging blankets over doorways. The kitchen and an adjoining room are usually good choices.
- If the authorities inform you that you could be without heating for several days, your best option may be to stay with your emergency friend.

Fire

There are a number of things you can do in advance to prevent fires from occurring and reduce the risk:

- Arrange a home safety visit from London Fire Brigade. You can pick up a leaflet in your estate office or call **08000 284 428**.
- Do not overload sockets, keep to one per plug.
- Do not use faulty electrical appliances.
- Always extinguish cigarettes properly.
- Never leave cooking unattended.
- Never leave burning candles unattended.
- All Westminster City Council tenanted properties are fitted with smoke detectors so please ensure you test and maintain your smoke alarm by pressing the test button every week.
- Ensure you know what the evacuation plan is for your block. This can be found on the Fire Action sign on your block's notice board.
- If you have to leave your flat in an emergency, never re-enter your home until the Fire and Rescue Service have made it safe.

Security incidents

If a security incident occurs, always follow the advice of the emergency services.

Unless you have been advised not to, in most cases you should:

- Go inside a building and stay inside until you are advised to do otherwise.
- Tune into a local radio or TV station for more information.

Chemical, biological or radiological incidents

The Fire and Rescue Service is equipped to decontaminate large numbers of people quickly. This involves showering them and then dressing them in temporary clothing. It is important that this takes place where the incident happened so that other areas, including homes, are not contaminated.

- Move away from the immediate source of danger.
- Wait for the emergency services to arrive and decontaminate you.
- Remember if you go home unchecked you could contaminate others.

Severe weather

There is a lot you can do to reduce the effect and potential cost of damage caused by severe weather.

Check local and national weather forecasts on local television, radio or on the Met Office's website - www.metoffice.gov.uk.

Coping with severe gales and windy conditions

- Secure or store loose objects outside that could blow into windows. Close and securely fasten doors.
- Park vehicles in a garage or well away from trees, buildings, walls and fences.
- If chimney stacks are tall or in poor condition, move all beds away from areas directly below them.
- Stay indoors as much as possible - do not go outside to repair damage whilst the storm is in progress.



- If you are outside, do not shelter close to buildings or trees and keep well away from the sheltered side of boundary walls and fences. Instead, find shelter in substantial, permanent and enclosed structures.
- Slow down if driving on exposed routes, such as over bridges, and find alternative routes if possible. Take particular care of side winds if driving a high-sided vehicle or if you are towing a caravan or trailer.
- Do not touch electrical or telephone cables that have been blown down.

Heavy snow and icy roads

- If you are travelling when snow is forecast, make sure you have warm clothes, food, water, a torch, mobile phone and charger and a spade with you. Tell someone when you expect to arrive and the route you plan to take.
- Try to wait for the roads to be gritted before travelling.
- **Do not drive unless your journey is really necessary.**
- If you must drive, check the Highway Code for advice on driving on ice and snow. The main points are:

- Do not overtake.
- Slow down.

Allow extra room - it can take **ten times as long to stop in these conditions.**

If you start to skid, ease gently **off the accelerator and avoid braking.** If braking is necessary pump the **brakes.**

- If you get stuck, stay with your car and tie something **brightly coloured** to the aerial.
- If you have to leave the vehicle, wear several layers to avoid losing heat and cover your head. Keep moving your arms and legs to help the blood circulate.



Thunderstorms and lightning

- Before a thunderstorm, unplug all non-essential appliances, as lightning can cause power surges.
- If you are outside, avoid water and find a low-lying open place that is a safe distance from trees, flag poles or metal objects.

Avoid activities such as golf, rod fishing or boating on a lake.

- If you are in an exposed location, squat close to the ground, with hands on knees and head tucked between them. Touch as little of the ground as possible; do not lie down.
- If you feel your hair stand on end drop to this position immediately.

Heat and sun

During periods of hot weather, older people and the very young are most at risk from heat exhaustion and the effects of the sun. If you have older neighbours check on them daily.

- Drink plenty of cold fluids but not alcohol, which dehydrates the body.
- Try to keep your house cool; closing blinds and curtains can help.
- At night, keep your bedroom well ventilated.
- Take cool (not cold) showers or baths.
- Avoid too much exercise – it can cause heat stroke or heat exhaustion.
- Wear lightweight, loose, light-coloured clothing, high-factor sunscreen and a wide brimmed hat. Apply sun-screen regularly during the day.
- If driving, keep your vehicle ventilated to avoid drowsiness. Take regular breaks and have plenty of water in the vehicle.
- Try to avoid going out during the hottest part of the day (11am –3pm) or being in the sun for long periods of time.
- **Do not leave children or animals in parked cars.**

Infectious disease

Pandemic flu occurs infrequently, when a new influenza virus emerges. The new virus may spread easily between people because they have little or no immunity to it.

You can reduce the risk of catching or spreading flu by:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing using a tissue.
- Dispose of dirty tissues promptly and carefully- bag and bin them.
- Avoiding non-essential travel and large crowds whenever possible.
- Maintain good basic hygiene, for example washing your hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face or to other people.
- Clean hard surfaces (i.e. kitchen worktops, door handles) frequently, using a normal cleaning product.

If you do catch flu, stay at home and rest. If you are concerned call your GP or NHS Choices on 111 or go to the NHS website at www.nhs.uk.

Do not go into your GP surgery, to a hospital, or to collect medication as you may spread the disease to others. Ask your emergency friend to go out for you.

- Take medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen or paracetamol to relieve the symptoms. Always read and follow the instructions with medicines.
- Children under 16 should not be given aspirin or ready-made flu remedies.
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids.



Further information

For more information about anything contained within this guide, contact the following organisations listed below by logging on to their websites or by telephone.

Organisation	Website and telephone number
DirectGov- Preparing for Emergencies	www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_176618.pdf
London Resilience Team	www.londonprepared.gov.uk
Environment Agency	www.environment-agency.gov.uk 03708 506 506
UK Resilience	www.gov.uk/government/policies/improving-the-uks-ability-to-absorb-respond-to-and-recover-from-emergencies
National Grid: gas	www2.nationalgrid.com/uk/safety 0800 111 999 (if you smell gas)
Met Office	www.metoffice.gov.uk 0870 900 0100 or 01392 885680
UK Power Networks	www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk 0800 028 0247 (power cuts and emergencies)
Thames Water: water	www.thameswater.co.uk 0845 9200 800 (loss of water)
London Fire Brigade: fire	www.london-fire.gov.uk/firesafety.asp 020 8555 1200
St John Ambulance: medical assistance	www.sja.org.uk 08700 104950 (general enquiries)