

10 Easy Ways to Protect Your Family In Case of Natural Disaster or Medical Emergency

September 20, 2005

If **you** knew that spending 15 minutes right now could save the people you love in the event of an emergency, would you do it? Of course you would.

During disasters like Hurricane Katrina and terrorist attacks like the London bombings, one need has come to the forefront more than any other -- the need to get a victim's identification, medical history and emergency contact information as quickly as possible. The Next of Kin Education Project, Next of Kin Registry and Shoewallet.com have joined forces to launch an international public awareness initiative, featuring ten easy ways anyone can safeguard their family in the event of a life-threatening situation.

At Home

Create a list of emergency information for each member of the family including:

Their name, age, address, phone, name of primary physician, allergies, any prescription drugs they're on, chronic conditions, anything else you would want an emergency physician to know.

At least three emergency contacts:

- Your name, home & cell numbers and address, for your spouse, your spouse for yourself and you as contact for your children;

- A nearby relative or good friend;

- An out of town/state relative or friend. In case of regional emergency, you can often call long distance, even though you can't call locally. A distant friend can be a touch point for the entire family until communication is restored.

Make several copies of each and place them:

In an easy to find place near your main home phone

Each child's list in his permanent school record, in addition to his regular emergency card. In your or your spouse's personnel file with your regular emergency card.

With the person you chose to be your emergency contact. You can also put this list in your computer, or PDA so you have it with you in an emergency.

Don't forget to ask your contact people for permission to use them. Some people might not feel comfortable having to be relied upon in an emergency. Better to know that now!

Every six months put a reminder in your calendar to review and update all of your emergency plans. It's also a good idea to remind your parents and other close relatives to do the same thing.

Home/Cell Phone

Clearly indicate your emergency contacts on your main telephone speed dial. Don't use the person's name, use their relationship to you ie. "parents", "sister", "husband", "work". Then do the same thing on your cell phone. After the London bombings a paramedic came up with the idea of putting "ICE" (in case of emergency) on your cell phone, with the number of your emergency contact. You can do that on your cell or simply put in "husband" or "home" like you did above. Make sure you do the same thing on your PDA, laptop or anything else you usually carry.

Protecting Children

In the days after 9/11, 2,100 children were left in daycare because their parents had never indicated on their daycare emergency cards, who should be called if the parents were unable to reach them to pick them up. Choose someone you would want them to be with, until you can get to them and make sure their school has that information.

Since children don't carry wallets or drivers licenses, make sure that there is emergency information sewn into your child's backpack, on their cell phone or anything else they always have with them.

Emergency Plan

Make sure each member of the family knows what to do in an emergency, especially if you can't get back home, or if your home is uninhabitable. Appoint a special place for everyone to meet away from home, and make sure everyone knows who your out of state point of contact is, in case you need to relay messages to each other. Keep that plan with the emergency lists, in an easy to find place.

Safeguarding Copies of Vital Information

As victims of Hurricane Katrina have found, when you're doing your best to function or start life anew after a disaster being without your driver's license, birth certificate, social security card or bank account numbers can be a huge problem.

Make a copy of all of your and your children's vital records and put them in bank safe deposit box or other secure place, preferably in two different locations. One of them should be in another city or state if possible. For even more security, scan the documents on to a password protected CD, instead of storing hard copies.

Away From Home

Most accidents happen just a few blocks from home, just where people feel comfortable doing errands or going out for a run without their driver's license or other ID.

A Shoewallet, a small lightweight wallet you attach to your shoes, holds an emergency contact card, and a license/credit card/key, to make sure your info is always right where you need it.
www.shoewallet.com/nokep

If you have a company ID badge, slip an emergency contact card into it for those quick runs out of the office for meetings or a snack.

To be sure hospitals and emergency personnel can find your next of kin in an emergency, whether you have your information with you or not, register your information free of charge at the Next of Kin Registry. NOKR is an internationally recognized resource to put you and your family together in case you are unconscious or unable to speak/give consent for treatment. www.nokr.org

Special Needs

If you or your family member has chronic medical conditions, you need to make your medical history and records easy to find in an emergency.

EMedic.com is a service that for a yearly fee, gives you a secure, password-protected cards that can supply any hospital with all of your medical records in seconds, allowing any physician to treat you with your medical history and special needs in mind, even if you're away from home. www.emedic.com

Cap Med's Personal Health Key is a flash drive specifically designed to hold your entire medical record, allowing it to be viewed in a hospital or doctor's office. This is great for people who see many doctors and can help keep everything in sync among all your care providers. It also keeps patients from having to tote around their records or explain the same points over and over again.

For the seniors in your life, make a plan for you and your relatives to take turns checking in with them every other day, to make sure everything is all right. You might want to invest in an emergency monitoring system with a button they can press in case of a fall or other emergency.

For Alzheimer's, dementia or the mentally disabled you might have to use several of these tips. A Shoewallet would provide emergency ID in a place the patient won't be able to disturb. The Alzheimer's Association has a wonderful program called "Safe Return, which provides a bracelet and special tips in protecting patients who wander. And signing the person up on the Next of Kin Registry, gives an extra layer of protection in case they become lost or hurt.

Making Hospitals Safer

As much as they try, hospital emergency rooms don't always have time to call unconscious patient's next of kin as quickly as they'd like. For hospitals and emergency department personnel, there's a great tool to use, to help them find emergency contact information and make notification calls quickly and easily – in seven steps. The Seven Steps to Successful Notification Kit. It's being distributed free of charge to health care professionals. To help the effort financially, or to purchase Seven Steps products please visit the web site: <http://clik.to/7steps> .

A piece of healthcare legislation called the Next of Kin bill (HR 2560) has just been introduced into Congress, that will ensure hospitals will make a reasonable effort to contact unconscious patient's next of kin within 24 hours. For ways you can help make this bill a law, go to www.nokep.org .

For more information, go to the Finding the Missing Piece web page