

Life Sustaining Equipment

Care Provider Bulletin

Jan. 2019



Did you know?

- Some individuals require certain types of equipment to live.
- It is important to have a plan in place for power outages as this could result in equipment failure and death.
- You can prepare now.

Who is at increased risk?

Individuals on life-sustaining equipment such as:

- Ventilators
- Defibrillators
- Dialysis machines
- Suctioning devices
- Oxygen concentrator machines
- Ventricular assist devices (implanted heart pumps)
- Nebulizer machines
- IV and nutrition pumps
- CPAP/BIPAP machines



Individuals who use this equipment or need treatment may soon need help during power outages:

- Power wheelchairs
- Refrigerated medication, such as insulin
- Elevators (cannot manage stairs)
- Heat or cooling systems for body regulation

Prepare for emergencies

Back-up power source

- Obtain a back-up power source for all life-sustaining equipment. Make sure there is an audible/visual alarm to let you know it is on back-up power or has failed.
- The suggested back-up power source may vary depending on the equipment - refer to the manufacturer's instructions. Some equipment may require battery back-up, others may require a generator.
- Ensure that the backup source will power on immediately if power is lost so to avoid interruption.
- Check for a manual option such as a suction hand-pump or gravity-feeding system.
- Ensure all care providers know where to locate back-up equipment and they are readily available for use (e.g. fully charged, with gas, etc.).

Battery backup:

- Most new machines are equipped with battery backup.
- Determine if you can purchase an external battery pack.
- Charge batteries regularly even if not in use, and if expired, replace the battery.

Stay informed

- Sign up to receive weather/emergency alerts. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers a free smartphone app. You can receive alert notifications as well as emergency tips, resources for disasters. The app allows you to enter information about your own emergency plan.
- Register with the power company to receive alerts about outages and restoration. Many companies have free applications for mobile devices.
- Sign up for [Smart 911](#), a service that allows you to text 911. By signing up ahead of time, you can enter the address and other information (including medications and medical supplies used) for first responders.
- Talk with your community emergency planners if you support individuals with acute health care needs that cannot be met in general shelters.

Generators:

- Always have gas on hand.
- Determine how long the equipment can run on the generator. If only a few hours, consider a more powerful generator or additional fuel sources in case the power is out for several days or longer.
- Become familiar with operating the generator and any circuits that may need switching.
- NEVER run a generator indoors – see instructions for safe use.

Oxygen tanks or oxygen compressors:

- Ask oxygen suppliers to deliver tanks of oxygen and backup O2 compressors for emergency use. Check them frequently to ensure tanks are full.

Ventilators:

- Keep an appropriate-sized ambu/resuscitation bag on hand for emergencies. Staff must continue ventilations until relieved by responders or other medical staff.
- Ensure that the backup source will power on immediately to avoid interruption.

Prepare now

- Develop a plan to ensure equipment (i.e. generators) are in working order each month so they are prepared prior to any outages.
- Life-sustaining equipment should have a dedicated circuit that is clearly marked on the building's power panel (circuit breakers). Equipment should not be connected to other high-risk outlets such as kitchens, bathrooms or dryers.
- Know how to test other circuits in the home if they work, and be able to run an extension cord or move the person near a working outlet.
- Ensure equipment has auditory flashing light alarms in case the power to the device fails.
- Obtain a backup device in the event the primary equipment fails. Have the backup device nearby and ready to use.
- Some equipment may have manual options. For example, individuals requiring suctioning devices should have a hand-held suctioning machine as a backup.
- Individuals using life-sustaining equipment should be checked regularly at all hours of the day, including overnight, to ensure that machines are working.
- Consider regular drills in order to assess current safety measures and make improvements, if needed.
- If life-sustaining medical treatment is provided by other people (such as dialysis, oxygen, cancer treatment), know alternative locations just in case.
- Contact the power company:
 - Contact the power company if the person you support uses life-sustaining equipment and ask what can be expected during a power outage.
 - Many power companies have registries for individuals on life-sustaining equipment.
 - Ask the company to notify you of all pre-planned power outages.
- Make sure all care providers are trained on the emergency backup plan and are ready to act. Consider including neighbors and others in the event a caregiver is unable to respond to an emergency.
- Make sure all care providers know how to troubleshoot equipment and/or have instructions on how to operate when there are power outages or changes in the electrical circuits.
- Have an emergency contact sheet readily available for first responders in the event of an emergency. The contact sheet may include name, age, date of birth, medications used, allergies, emergency contacts, primary care/specialists contact information, hospital preference, and medical conditions which may impact care decisions.
- Use a [checklist](#) from the ADA National Network.

**Minutes lost
could result in
life lost.
You can help
save a life.**



Sources & Resources

- [Emergency Power Planning for People Who Use Electricity and Battery-Dependent Assistive Technology and Medical Devices](#), ADA National Network
- [Individuals with Disabilities](#), ready.gov
- [Plan Ahead for Any Emergency](#), Smart911
- [Disaster Safety for People with Disabilities](#), American Red Cross