

DISASTER PREPARATION FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

ASSEMBLE A KIT FOR YOUR CHILDREN. Some suggested items:

- A few favorite books, crayons and paper
- Puzzles, a board game, deck of cards
- Two favorite small toys, such as a doll or action figure, a stuffed animal
- Favorite blanket, pillow
- Pictures of family and pets
- Other special items that will comfort children

Children's fears can stem from their imaginations, and adults should take these feelings seriously. Words and actions can provide reassurance to a child who feels afraid. When talking to your child, be sure to present a realistic picture that is both honest and manageable. Be aware that after a disaster, children most fear that:

- They will be separated from family.
- The event will happen again.
- Someone will be injured or killed.
- They will be left alone.

Children's immunizations should be up-to date as early in life as possible to protect from vaccine-preventable diseases, including an unexpected outbreak during a disaster.

- Keep a copy of your children's complete immunization histories in your disaster kit attached to the family emergency information.
- All family members should also record the date of their last Tetanus-diphtheria shot in this record as well.

ADVICE ON COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT DISASTER

In response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offered some advice on communicating with children and adolescents during times of crisis.

It is important to communicate to children that the family circle is strong. Children need to be assured by their parents that the family is safe. Adolescents, in particular, can be hard hit by this type of disaster. Parents may watch for signs such as sleep disturbances, fatigue, lack of pleasure in activities previously enjoyed, and illicit substance abuse.

Overexposure to the media can be traumatizing. It is best not to let children or adolescents repeatedly view footage of traumatic events. Children and adolescents should not view these events alone.

Adults need to help children understand the emergency or disaster. Discussion is critical. In the event of a man-made disaster, stress that a terrorist act is one of desperation and horror. Explain it to your children in a simple way like, "There are bad people out there who do bad things. But no one group of people is all bad."

More information is available at www.aap.org. For more information, contact the Department of Children and Family Services at (850) 488-4855.