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MENU



Earthquakes

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An earthquake is a sudden, rapid shaking of the ground caused by the shifting of rocks deep underneath the earth's surface. Earthquakes can cause fires, tsunamis, landslides or avalanches. While they can happen anywhere without warning, areas at higher risk for earthquakes include Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Puerto Rico, Washington and the entire Mississippi River Valley.

Prepare Before an Earthquake

The best time to prepare for any disaster is before it happens.

Practice **Drop, Cover, and Hold On** with family and coworkers.

Make an Emergency Plan: Create a [family emergency communications plan](#) that has an out-of-state contact. Plan where to meet if you get separated. [Make a supply kit](#) that includes enough food and water for several days, a flashlight, a fire extinguisher and a whistle.

Include non-perishable foods, cleaning supplies, and water for several days, in case services are cut off in your area. If you are able to, set aside items like soap, [hand sanitizer](#) that contains at least 60 percent alcohol, disinfecting wipes, and [general household cleaning supplies](#) that you can use to disinfect surfaces you touch regularly. After an earthquake, you may not have access to these supplies for days or even weeks.

Being prepared allows you to avoid unnecessary excursions and to address minor medical issues at home, alleviating the burden on urgent care centers and hospitals.

Remember that not everyone can afford to respond by stocking up on necessities. For those who can afford it, making essential purchases and slowly building up supplies in advance will allow for longer time periods between shopping trips. This helps to protect those who are unable to procure essentials in advance of the pandemic and must shop more frequently. In addition, consider avoiding WIC-labeled products so that those who rely on these products can access them.

Protect Your Home: Secure heavy items in your home like bookcases, refrigerators, televisions and objects that hang on walls. Store heavy and breakable objects on low shelves. Consider making improvements to your building to fix structural issues that could cause your building to collapse during an earthquake. Consider obtaining an [earthquake insurance policy](#). A standard homeowner's insurance policy does not cover earthquake damage.

Wear a mask when in public to slow the spread of COVID-19. You may not have time to put on a mask in the event of an earthquake. Wearing one regularly will allow you to be prepared to drop, cover, and hold on safely with those who are not a part of your household. Masks should not be worn by children under two, those who have trouble breathing, and those who are unable to remove them on their own.

Stay Safe During

If an earthquake happens, protect yourself right away:

If you are in a car, pull over and stop. Set your parking brake.

If you are in bed, turn face down and cover your head and neck with a pillow.

If you are outdoors, stay outdoors away from buildings.

If you are inside, stay and do not run outside and avoid doorways.

Protect Yourself During Earthquakes



1. Drop (or Lock)

Wherever you are, drop down to your hands and knees and hold onto something sturdy. If you're using a wheelchair or walker with a seat, make sure your wheels are locked and remain seated until the shaking stops.

2. Cover

Cover your head and neck with your arms. If a sturdy table or desk is nearby, crawl underneath it for shelter. If no shelter is nearby, crawl next to an interior wall (away from windows). Crawl only if you can reach better cover without going through an area with more debris. Stay on your knees or bent over to protect vital organs.

3. Hold On

If you are under a table or desk, hold on with one hand and be ready to move with it if it moves. If seated and unable to drop to the floor, bend forward, cover your head with your arms and hold on to your neck with both hands.

Using a Cane?



Using a Walker?



LOCK!



COVER!



HOLD ON!

Using a Wheelchair?



LOCK!



COVER!



HOLD ON!

Stay Safe After

After an earthquake, there can be serious hazards such as damage to the building, leaking gas and water lines, or downed power lines.

Wash your hands with soap and water after holding on to commonly touched surfaces or objects. If you are unable to wash your hands, use [hand sanitizer](#) that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.

Expect aftershocks to follow the main shock of an earthquake. Be ready to Drop, Cover, and Hold On if you feel an aftershock.

If you are in a damaged building, go outside and quickly move away from the building. Do not enter damaged buildings.

Maintain a distance of at least six feet between yourself and those who are not part of your household to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

If you are trapped, send a text or bang on a pipe or wall. Cover your mouth with your shirt for protection and instead of shouting, use a whistle. If possible, avoid directly touching your mouth to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

If you are in an area that may experience tsunamis, go inland or to higher ground immediately after the shaking stops. Note that there is no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted through water, however, you should avoid contact with floodwaters as they can contain chemicals, sewage, and debris.

Check yourself to see if you are hurt and help others if you have training. [Learn how to be the help until help arrives.](#)

If you are sick or injured and need medical attention, contact your healthcare provider for instructions. If you are experiencing a medical emergency, call 9-1-1 and let the operator know if you have, or think you might have or been exposed to, COVID-19. If you can, put on a mask and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth before help arrives.

Once you are safe, pay attention to local news reports for emergency information and instructions via battery-operated radio, TV, social media or from cell phone text alerts.

Register on the American Red Cross "[Safe and Well](#)" website so people will know you are okay.

Use text messages to communicate, which may be more reliable than phone calls.

Be careful when cleaning up. Wear protective clothing, including a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, work gloves and sturdy thick-soled shoes. Do not try to remove heavy debris by yourself. Wear a mask and maintain a physical distance of at least six feet while working with someone else. Use an appropriate mask if cleaning [mold or other debris](#). People with [asthma and other lung conditions and/or immune suppression](#) should not enter buildings with indoor water leaks or mold growth that can be seen or smelled. Children should not take part in disaster cleanup work.

Engage virtually with your community through video and phone calls. Know that it's normal to feel anxious or stressed. Take care of your body and talk to someone if you are feeling upset. Many people may already feel fear and anxiety about the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). The threat of an earthquake can add additional stress. Follow CDC guidance for [managing stress during a traumatic event](#) and [managing stress during COVID-19](#).

Additional Resources

Videos

- [When the Earth Shakes](#)
- [Earthquake Preparedness: How to Stay Safe](#)
- [Earthquake Safety Video Series](#) (Great ShakeOut Earthquake Drills)
- [Pablo y Paola Terremoto](#)

Social Media and Graphics

- [Earthquake Preparedness Graphics](#)

Tip Sheets

- [Earthquake Informational Poster](#) (PDF)
- [How to Prepare for an Earthquake](#) (PDF)
- [How to Prepare Your Organization for an Earthquake](#) (PDF)
- [Earthquake Preparedness: What Every Childcare Provider Should Know](#) (PDF)
- [Earthquake Safety at Home](#) (PDF)
- [Resources for People With Disabilities](#) (Earthquake Country Alliance)

More Information

- [The Great ShakeOut: Earthquake Drills](#)
- [U.S. Geological Survey Earthquake Hazards Program](#)
- [American Red Cross](#)
- [Earthquake Country Alliance](#)
- [National Science Foundation](#)
- [National Institute of Standards and Technology](#)
- [Protective Actions Research for Earthquake](#)

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Disasters and Emergencies

All Hazards

Emergency Alerts

Attacks in Public Places

Avalanche

Bioterrorism

Chemical Emergencies

Cybersecurity
