



FACT SHEET

Facts About Sheltering in Place

What “sheltering in place” means

Some kinds of chemical accidents or attacks may make going outdoors dangerous. Leaving the area might take too long or put you in harm’s way. In such a case it may be safer for you to stay indoors than to go outside.

“Shelter in place” means to make a shelter out of the place you are in. It is a way for you to make the building as safe as possible to protect yourself until help arrives. You should not try to shelter in a vehicle unless you have no other choice. Vehicles are not airtight enough to give you adequate protection from chemicals.

How to prepare to shelter in place

Choose a room in your house or apartment for your shelter. The best room to use for the shelter is a room with as few windows and doors as possible. A large room, preferably with a water supply, is desirable—something like a master bedroom that is connected to a bathroom. For chemical events, this room should be as high in the structure as possible to avoid vapors (gases) that sink. This guideline is different from the sheltering-in-place technique used in tornadoes and other severe weather, when the shelter should be low in the home.

You might not be at home if the need to shelter in place ever arises, but if you are at home, the following items would be good to have on hand. (Ideally, all of these items would be stored in the shelter room to save time.)

- First aid kit
- Food and bottled water. Store 1 gallon of water per person in plastic bottles as well as ready-to-eat foods that will keep without refrigeration at the shelter-in-place location. If you do not have bottled water, or if you run out, you can drink water from a toilet tank (*not* from a toilet bowl).
- Flashlight, battery-powered radio, and extra batteries for both.
- Duct tape and scissors.
- Towels and plastic sheeting.
- A working telephone.

How to know if you need to shelter in place

- You will hear from the local police, emergency coordinators, or government on the radio and on television if you need to shelter in place.
- If there is a “code red” or “severe” terror alert, you should pay attention to radio and television broadcasts to know right away whether a shelter-in-place alert is announced for your area.
- If you are away from your shelter-in-place location when a chemical event occurs, follow the instructions of emergency coordinators to find the nearest shelter. If your children are at school, they will be sheltered there. Unless you are instructed to do so, do not try to get to the school to bring your children home.

Facts About Sheltering in Place

(continued from previous page)

What to do

Act quickly and follow the instructions of your local emergency coordinators. Every situation can be different, so local emergency coordinators might have special instructions for you to follow. In general, do the following:

- Go inside as quickly as possible.
- *If there is time*, shut and lock all outside doors and windows. Locking them may provide a tighter seal against the chemical. Turn off the air conditioner or heater. Turn off all fans, too. Close the fireplace damper and any other place that air can come in from the outside.
- Go in the shelter-in-place room and shut the door.
- Tape plastic over any windows in the room. Use duct tape around the windows and doors and make an unbroken seal. Use the tape over any vents into the room and seal any electrical outlets or other openings. Sink and toilet drain traps should have water in them (you can use the sink and toilet as you normally would). If it is necessary to drink water, drink the stored water, not water from the tap.
- Turn on the radio. Keep a telephone close at hand, but don't use it unless there is a serious emergency.

Sheltering in this way should keep you safer than if you are outdoors. Most likely, you will be in the shelter for no more than a few hours. Listen to the radio for an announcement indicating that it is safe to leave the shelter. After you come out of the shelter, emergency coordinators may have additional instructions on how to make the rest of the building safe again.

How you can get more information about sheltering in place

You can contact one of the following:

- State and local health departments
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Public Response Hotline (CDC)
 - Public Response Hotline (CDC)
 - English (888) 246-2675
 - Español (888) 246-2857
 - TTY (866) 874-2646
 - Emergency Preparedness and Response Web site at (www.bt.cdc.gov/)
 - E-mail inquiries: cdcresponse@ashastd.org
 - Mail inquiries:
Public Inquiry c/o BPRP
Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Planning
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Mailstop C-18
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

This fact sheet is based on CDC's best current information. It may be updated as new information becomes available.

Last reviewed on 05/21/03.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) protects people's health and safety by preventing and controlling diseases and injuries; enhances health decisions by providing credible information on critical health issues; and promotes healthy living through strong partnerships with local, national, and international organizations.

May 21, 2003

Page 2 of 3

Facts About Sheltering in Place
(continued from previous page)

For more information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (Español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY)