In case of EMERGENCY...

Instructions and checklists to prepare you for emergency situations

COURTESY OF
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Basic Preparedness

The best way to protect yourself and your family in an emergency is to prepare for one. This section offers things you should do to prepare for any emergency.

Design a Family Plan

Emergencies strike quickly and without warning. They can force you to evacuate your home or neighborhood or trap you in it. Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away. Listed on this page are basic steps you can follow to prepare for such events.

Find Out What Could Happen to You

1. Contact your local American Red Cross chapter or emergency management office before a disaster occurs — be prepared to take notes. Ask what types of disasters are most likely to happen. Request information on how to prepare for each.

2. Learn about your community's warning signals: what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them.

3. Find out about the disaster plans at your workplace, your children's school or day care center, and other places where your family spends time.

Create a Family Plan

1. Meet with your family and discuss why you need to prepare for disaster. Explain the dangers of fire, severe weather and other disasters to children. Discuss what to do in case of an evacuation. Plan to share responsibilities and work together as a team.

2. Make a family communications plan. Pick two places to meet. One should be right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire. The other should be outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Also, pick a friend or relative who lives out-of-state to be your family contact. After a disaster, family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Make a contact card for each family member that lists your meeting places and family contact's telephone number. You may want to send a contact card to school with each child to keep on file.

If evacuation is necessary ...

Always:

- Keep a full tank of gas in your car if evacuation seems likely.
- Make transportation arrangements with friends or local government if you do not own a car.
- Listen to a battery-powered radio and follow local evacuation instructions.
- Leave early enough to avoid being trapped by severe weather.

If time permits:

- Wear sturdy shoes and clothing that provide some protection, such as long pants, long-sleeved shirts and a cap.
- Secure your home by locking doors and windows, and unplugging electrical equipment (only unplug refrigerators and freezers if there is a risk of flooding).
- Let others know where you are going.

COMPLETE THIS CHECKLIST

The following tasks will prepare your family and your home for emergency situations.

- ❑ Post emergency telephone numbers by phones (fire, police, family contact, etc.). Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local Emergency Medical Services number for emergency help.

- ❑ Show each family member how and when to turn off the utilities (water, gas and electricity) at the main switches. See sidebar at right.

- ❑ Check if you have adequate insurance coverage. Obtain property, health and life insurance if you do not have them.

- ❑ Get training from the fire department for each family member on how to use the fire extinguisher.

- ❑ Install smoke detectors on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms (but not in them).

- ❑ Take a Red Cross first aid and CPR class.

- ❑ Determine the best escape routes from your home. Find two ways out of each room. Draw a floor plan of your home and illustrate the escape routes. Make sure children understand the drawings. Post a copy of the drawings at eye level in each child's room.

- ❑ Find the safe places in your home for each type of disaster. Discuss them as a family.

- ❑ If you or a member of your family have special needs, find out about assistance that may be available in your community. The American Red Cross, www.redcross.org, offers an excellent guide to preparing for disasters for people with disabilities.

- ❑ Inventory your home possessions and protect important documents.

- ❑ Consider saving money in an emergency savings account that could be used in any crisis (i.e. at a bank not located in your area so it would be unlikely to experience the same disasters as you). It is advisable to keep a small amount of cash or traveler's checks at home in a safe place where you can quickly access them in case of evacuation.

TURNING OFF UTILITIES

WATER

Shutting off the water traps the clean water already in your pipes, which you may need for drinking. Locate the shutoff valve for the water line that enters your house. Make sure the valve can be completely shut off. Replace the valve if necessary.

GAS

There are different gas shutoff procedures for different gas meter configurations, so it is important to contact your local gas company for guidance. Turn off the gas using the outside main valve if you can. If you turn off the gas for any reason, however, a qualified professional MUST turn it back on.

ELECTRICITY

Locate your electricity circuit box. Always shut off all the individual circuits before shutting off the main circuit breaker.

IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS

1. Make a record of your personal property, for insurance purposes. Take photos or a video of the interior and exterior of your home. The *Household and Personal Property Inventory Book* from the University of Illinois can help you record your possessions. Download it for free at www.ag.uiuc.edu/~vista/abstracts/ahouseinv.html.

2. Store original copies of important documents such as insurance policies, deeds and property records in a safe place, such as a safety deposit box away from your home. Make copies of important documents to keep at your home for reference.

Assemble Emergency Supplies

You may need to survive on your own after a disaster. This means having your own food, water and other supplies in sufficient quantity to last for at least three days. An emergency supplies kit is a collection of basic items your family may need in the event of a disaster. Keep your supplies in one or two easy-to-carry containers, such as an unused trashcan, camping backpack or duffel bag. Pack individual items in airtight plastic containers or bags. Rethink your needs every year and update your kit as your family's needs change. Make sure everyone in the household knows where the emergency supplies are stored.

Include these items in your kit:

- ❑ Portable, battery-powered radio or television and extra batteries.
- ❑ Flashlight and extra batteries.
- ❑ Whistle – to signal for help.
- ❑ First aid kit and manual.
- ❑ Sanitation and hygiene items (such as moist towelettes, toilet paper and waterless hand sanitizer).
- ❑ Matches in a waterproof container.

- ❑ A three-day supply of nonperishable food for entire family. Choose foods that do not require refrigeration or cooking, and avoid foods that will make you thirsty. Be sure to include a manual can opener. Replace stored food every six months.
- ❑ A three-day supply of water – one gallon per person, per day. The safest emergency supply of water is commercially bottled water. Keep bottled water in its original container and do not open it until you need it. Replace stored water every six months.
- ❑ Kitchen accessories and utensils, and a trash bag to collect your trash.
- ❑ Extra clothing – Be sure to include one complete change of clothing and shoes per person. Choose long pants, long-sleeved shirts and sturdy shoes for protection from the elements. For the winter months, also include a coat, hat, mittens, scarf and sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person.
- ❑ Photocopies of credit and identification cards along with a small amount of cash and coins (for making phone calls).
- ❑ Special needs items such as prescription medications, eye glasses, contact lens solution and hearing aid batteries. Replace prescription medications every six months.
- ❑ Items for infants, such as formula, diapers, bottles and pacifiers.

Caring for Your Animals

Animals also are affected by emergency situations. Use the information on this page to prepare a plan for caring for pets and large animals.

Household Pets

- ❑ Ensure your pet has proper ID tags and up-to-date veterinarian records.
- ❑ Make an emergency supplies kit for your pet. It should be in a waterproof container and should include:
  - A three-day supply of pet food (include a can opener if necessary) and water.
  - Any medications your pet takes and copies of their veterinary records.
  - A sturdy leash, harness and/or carrier.
  - Current photos of your pet in case they are lost.
  - Your veterinarian's name and phone number.
- ❑ If you need to evacuate your home, the most important thing is to TAKE YOUR PET WITH YOU. Leaving pets behind, even if you try to create a safe place for them, is not the best action. However, pets cannot go with you to an American Red Cross emergency shelter (unless they are service animals), so you need to plan ahead. Find out which local hotels and motels allow pets and where pet boarding facilities are located. Be sure to research options outside your local area in case local facilities close.

Large Animals

- ❑ Ensure all animals have some form of identification.
- ❑ Evacuate animals whenever possible. Make available vehicles and trailers needed for transporting and supporting each type of animal. Also make sure you have experienced handlers and drivers to assist with the evacuation.
- ❑ Ensure destinations have food, water, veterinary care and handling equipment.
- ❑ If evacuation is not possible, animal owners must decide whether to move large animals to shelter or turn them outside.

Severe Weather Safety

There are a number of severe weather situations we are likely to face in Indiana. This section offers safety tips for each type of severe weather emergency.

THUNDERSTORMS

All thunderstorms are dangerous. About 10 percent of thunderstorms are classified as severe – meaning they produce hail at least three-quarters of an inch in diameter, have winds of 58 miles per hour or higher, or produce a tornado.

To prepare for a thunderstorm you should:

- Regularly remove dead or rotting trees and branches on your property that could fall and cause injury or damage during a severe thunderstorm.
- When severe weather is in the forecast, secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage, shutter windows and secure outside doors. If shutters are not available, close window blinds, shades or curtains.
- Remember the 30/30 lightning safety rule: Go indoors if, after seeing lightning, you cannot count to 30 before hearing thunder. Then, stay indoors for 30 minutes after hearing the last clap of thunder.

During a thunderstorm you should:

- Postpone outdoor activities and get inside a building or hard-top automobile. While you may be injured if lightning strikes your car, you are much safer inside a vehicle than outside.
- Remember, rubber-soled shoes and rubber tires provide NO protection from lightning. However, the steel frame of a hard-top vehicle provides increased protection if you are not touching metal.
- Unplug appliances and turn off air conditioners to avoid damage from power surges.

Where to seek shelter from a storm

If you are:	You should:
In a forest	Seek shelter in a low area under a thick growth of small trees.
In an open area	Go to a low place such as a ravine or valley. Be alert for flash floods.
Anywhere you feel your hair stand on end, which indicates lightning is about to strike	Squat down on the balls of your feet. Make yourself the smallest target possible and minimize your contact with the ground. Place your hands over your ears and your head between your knees. DO NOT life flat on the ground.

LIGHTNING

The associated dangers of thunderstorms are lightning, tornadoes, strong winds, hail and flash flooding. Every thunderstorm produces lightning. In the United States, an average of 300 people are injured and 80 people are killed each year by lightning.

Facts about lightning

- Lightning's unpredictability increases the risk to individuals and property.
- Lightning often strikes outside of heavy rain and may occur as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall.
- "Heat lightning" is actually lightning from a thunderstorm too far away for thunder to be heard. However, the storm may be moving in your direction.
- Although most lightning victims survive, people struck by lightning often report a variety of long-term, debilitating symptoms. Lightning strike victims carry no electrical charge and should be attended to immediately.

Things to avoid when there is lightning:

- Natural lightning rods such as a tall, isolated object (like a tree) in an open area.
- Hilltops, open fields, the beach or a boat on the water.
- Isolated sheds or other small structures in open areas.
- Anything metal – tractors, farm equipment, motorcycles, golf carts, golf clubs and bicycles.
- Avoid showering or bathing. Plumbing and bathroom fixtures can conduct electricity.
- Use cordless and cellular telephones. Corded telephones should only be used for emergencies during a thunderstorm.

If someone is struck by lightning:

- Call 911 for medical help immediately.
- If breathing has stopped, begin mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
- If the person has no heartbeat, begin CPR.
- If the person has a pulse and is breathing, look for other injuries such as burns where the lightning entered and left the body, broken bones, and hearing or eyesight loss.

Tornadoes

Tornadoes are nature's most violent storms. Spawned from powerful thunderstorms, tornadoes can cause fatalities and devastate a neighborhood in seconds. A tornado appears as a rotating, funnel-shaped cloud that extends from a thunderstorm to the ground with whirling winds that can reach 300 miles per hour.

Facts about tornadoes

- Tornadoes may strike quickly, with little or no warning.
- Tornadoes generally occur near the trailing edge of a thunderstorm.
- Tornadoes are most likely to occur between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m., but can occur any time.
- Before a tornado strikes, the wind may die down and the air may become very still.
- Signs a tornado may strike soon are large hail; a dark, greenish sky; a large, dark, low-lying cloud (particularly if rotating); and a loud roar similar to the sound of a freight train.

During a tornado

- If you are in a building, go to a predesignated shelter area such as a safe room, basement, storm cellar or the lowest building level. If there is no basement, go to the center of an interior room (possibly a closet or hallway) on the lowest level away from corners, windows, doors and outside walls.
- Put as many walls as possible between you and the outside. Get under a sturdy table or lay in a bathtub if possible. Use your arms to protect your head and neck.
- If you are in a vehicle, trailer or mobile home, get out immediately and go to the lowest floor of a sturdy, nearby building or storm shelter. Mobile homes, even if tied down, offer little protection from tornadoes.
- If you are outside with no shelter, lie flat in a nearby ditch or depression and cover your head with your hands. Do not get under an overpass or bridge.
- Watch out for flying debris. Flying debris from tornadoes causes more fatalities and injuries than the actual tornado itself.

Know the terms

Tornado watch
This term indicates tornadoes are possible. Remain alert for approaching storms. Watch the sky and stay tuned to NOAA Weather Radio, television or commercial radio for more information.

Tornado warning
This term signals a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. Take shelter immediately!

FLOODS

Floods are one of the most common hazards in the United States. Some floods develop slowly over a period of days, while flash floods develop in a matter of minutes. Be aware of flood hazards, especially if you live in a low-lying area, near water or downstream from a dam.

Preparing for a flood

- Contact your county geologist or county planning department to find out if your home is located in a flash flood-prone area.
- Learn about your community's emergency plans, warning signals, evacuation routes and locations of emergency shelters.
- Buy and install sump pumps with backup power.
- For drains, toilets and other sewer connections, install backflow valves or plugs to prevent floodwater from entering.

If you are under a flood watch or warning:

- Listen to the radio or television for more information.
- Bring outdoor possessions, such as lawn furniture, grills and trash cans inside or tie them down securely.
- Gather your emergency supplies kit and review the contents to make sure nothing is missing.
- Never ignore evacuation orders if they are given in your community. If you must evacuate, turn off the gas, electricity and water (see "Complete this Checklist" page in the *Basic Preparedness* section for instructions). Also, disconnect appliances to prevent electrical shock when power is restored. DO *NOT* TOUCH ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT IF YOU ARE WET OR STANDING IN WATER. If you have time, move essential items to an upper floor of your home.

FLOOD FACT

Moving water is *extremely* dangerous. **DO NOT walk or drive through moving water.** A foot of water will float most vehicles. If you must walk in water, walk where the water is not moving.

WINTER STORMS

Winter storms are considered deceptive killers, because most deaths are indirectly related to the storm. Most people who die in winter storms die from traffic accidents on icy roads or from hypothermia because of prolonged exposure to cold.

Preparing for a winter storm

Primary concerns are the potential loss of heat, power, telephone service and a shortage of supplies if storm conditions continue for more than a day. Prepare your home or workplace by having available:

- ❑ Flashlight and extra batteries
- ❑ Battery-powered radio to hear weather and emergency reports
- ❑ Extra food and water to provide your body with energy for producing its own heat and to prevent dehydration.
- ❑ Heating fuel and an emergency heat source, such as a fireplace or space heater.

During a winter storm

• Eat and drink regularly, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.

• Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow, which could lead to a heart attack.

• Watch for frostbite. Signs include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, ear lobes and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, seek medical help immediately.

• Watch for hypothermia. Symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion. If symptoms are detected, get the victim to a warm location, remove wet clothing, warm the center of the body first and give warm, non-alcoholic beverages if the victim is conscious. Seek medical help as soon as possible.

• Conserve fuel by temporarily closing off heat to some rooms, covering cracks under doors with towels and covering windows at night. However, always properly ventilate when using alternative heat sources.

• Wear layers of loose fitting, lightweight, warm clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent. Wear a hat and mittens, which are warmer than gloves, and cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.

Winter Vehicle Safety

The best way to protect yourself from winter vehicle hazards is to plan your travel wisely and check weather reports to avoid the storm. It is also important to fully check and winterize your vehicle before the winter storm season begins. Have a mechanic check all fluids and filters; the battery, thermostat, heater and defroster; tires and brakes; and lights and windshield wipers. Also, try not to travel alone and keep others informed of your schedule and route.

Keep these items in your vehicle in the winter:

- ❑ Blankets and extra clothing to keep warm and dry
- ❑ Flashlight with extra batteries
- ❑ High-calorie, non-perishable food (such as dried fruits, nuts and granola bars) and a small metal can with waterproof matches to melt snow for drinking water.
- ❑ Tissues and paper towel for sanitary purposes
- ❑ Shovel and windshield scraper

If you are stranded in a vehicle:

• Remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you. Do not set out on foot. Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna or window. At night, turn on the inside light or your flashlight so rescuers can see you.

• Run the engine and heater for 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. To protect yourself from carbon monoxide poisoning, periodically check that no snow is blocking your exhaust pipe and open an upwind window slightly for ventilation.

• Exercise from time to time by vigorously moving arms, legs, fingers and toes to keep blood circulating, which will help keep you warm.

• If you are trapped with others, huddle together with other passengers to keep warm. Also, take turns sleeping so one person is always awake to look for rescue crews.

EXTREME HEAT

Preparing for extreme heat

- Install window air conditioners and check ducts for proper insulation.
- Install temporary window reflectors between windows and drapes, such as aluminum foil-covered cardboard, to reflect heat back outside.
- Cover windows that receive morning or afternoon sun with drapes, shades, awnings or louvers. Outdoor awnings or louvers can reduce the heat that enters a home by up to 80 percent.

During a heat emergency

- Stay indoors as much as possible and limit exposure to the sun.
- Stay on the lowest floor out of the sunshine if air conditioning is not available.

NEVER
leave children or pets alone in closed vehicles.

- Spend the warmest part of the day in public buildings such as libraries, schools, movie theaters, shopping malls or other community facilities.
- Eat well-balanced, light and regular meals, and drink plenty of water. (Avoid caffeine and alcoholic beverages.)
- Dress in loose fitting, lightweight and light-colored clothes that cover as much skin as possible. Protect your face and head by wearing a wide-brimmed hat.
- Check on people who do not have air conditioning and spend much of their time alone.
- Avoid strenuous work during the warmest part of the day. Use a buddy system when working in extreme heat and take frequent breaks.

First Aid for Heat-Induced Illnesses

Heat cramps: Symptoms include leg and stomach spasms, heavy sweating. Get the victim to a cooler location, slowly give sips of cool water and massage muscles to relieve spasms.

Heat exhaustion: Symptoms include heavy sweating but skin may be cool, pale or flushed; fainting, dizziness, nausea or vomiting. Get the victim to lie down in a cool place, loosen or remove clothing, slowly give sips of cool water and seek medical help if vomiting occurs.

Heat stroke: Symptoms include high body temperature; hot, red, dry skin; rapid shallow breathing; possible unconsciousness. Call 911 or seek medical help immediately, then move victim to cooler environment, lay a cool, wet sheet over their body and watch for breathing problems.

Other Emergencies

Many additional emergency situations could arise in your lifetime and it is best to be prepared for all of them. This section explores some other emergencies and offers specific tips for each.

FIRE

To protect yourself, it is important to understand fire spreads quickly. There is no time to gather valuables or make a phone call. In just five minutes, a residence can be engulfed in flames.

Heat and smoke from fire can be more dangerous than the flames. Inhaling the scorching-hot air can sear your lungs. Also, fire produces poisonous gases that make you disoriented and drowsy. Instead of being awakened by a fire, you may fall into a deeper sleep. Asphyxiation is the leading cause of fire deaths, exceeding burns by a three-to-one ratio.

Preparing for a fire

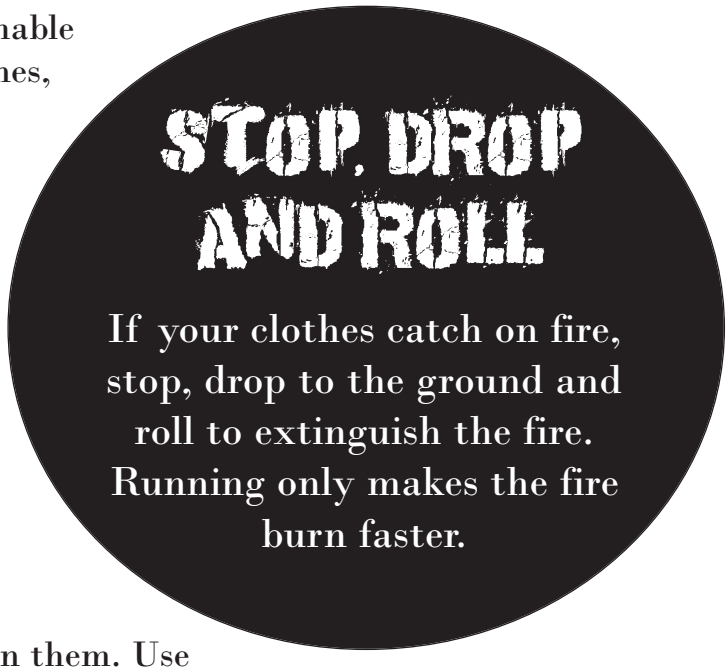
• Install smoke alarms on every level of your home. Place them outside bedrooms on the ceiling or high on the wall (4-12 inches from ceiling), at the top of open stairways or at the bottom of enclosed stairways, and near, but not in, the kitchen.

• Review escape routes with your family. Practice escaping from each room.

• Clean out storage areas. Do not let flammable items, such as old newspapers and magazines, accumulate.

• Never use gasoline or similar flammable liquids indoors. Never smoke near flammable liquids. Discard all rags or materials that have been soaked in flammable liquids in an outdoor metal container.

• Keep matches and lighters away from kids by storing them out of reach or in a locked cabinet.



To escape a fire:

Check closed doors for heat before you open them. Use the back of your hand to feel the top of the door, the doorknob, and the crack between the door and door frame before you open it. Never use the palm of your hand or fingers to test for heat – burning those areas could impair your ability to escape.

HOT DOOR – Do not open. Escape through a window. If you cannot escape, hang a white or light-colored sheet outside the window, alerting firefighters to your presence.

COOL DOOR – Open slowly to make sure fire and/or smoke are not blocking your escape route. If the escape route is blocked, shut the door immediately and escape through a window. If the escape route is clear, leave immediately and close the door behind you. Crawl to the exit, because the air is clearer and cooler near the floor.

TERRORISM

Acts of terrorism include threats of terrorism; assassinations; kidnappings; hijackings; bomb scares and bombings; cyber attacks (computer-based); and the use of chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological weapons.

Staying safe in an explosion

• Get under a sturdy table or desk if things are falling around you. When they stop falling, leave the building quickly. Once outside, move away from buildings and stay off of streets to allow emergency workers access to the area.

• If you are trapped in debris, cover your nose and mouth with anything you have (clothing, mask, etc.). If possible, use a whistle or flashlight to signal rescuers, or tap on a pipe or wall. Shout only as a last resort as it could cause you to inhale dangerous amounts of dust.

Staying safe in a biological attack

• Biological agents can be spread by air, by infecting animals, and by contaminating food and water supplies. During a biological attack, watch television or listen to the radio for news and information. Also, use common sense and practice good hygiene.

• If you are exposed to a biological agent, remove and bag your clothes and personal items. Wash yourself with soap and water. Put on clean clothes, and then seek medical assistance.

• HEPA filters are useful in biological attacks. If your central heating and cooling system has a HEPA filter, turn it on. If you have a portable HEPA filter, take it with you to an internal room and turn it on.

Staying safe in a chemical attack

• Chemical agents are poisonous vapors, aerosols, liquids and solids that are released into the environment. While potentially lethal, chemical agents are difficult to produce and deliver in lethal concentrations.

• To prepare for a chemical attack, designate an internal room without windows on the highest level to take shelter in. Make sure your emergency supplies kit includes a roll of duct tape and scissors; and plastic for doors, windows and vents for the room you will take shelter in (premeasure and precut for each opening to save time).

• A person affected by a chemical agent requires immediate medical attention from a professional. If medical help is not immediately available, decontaminate yourself before assisting others. To decontaminate, cut off contaminated clothing and seal in plastic bags, wash with soap and water, and change into uncontaminated clothing (such as clothes from your emergency kit or clothes stored in drawers or closets).

Pandemic Influenza

An influenza (flu) pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of flu disease that occurs when a new type of influenza virus appears that people have not been exposed to before (or have not been exposed to in a long time). The pandemic virus can cause serious illness because people do not have immunity to the new virus. We cannot predict how severe the next pandemic will be or when it will occur, but being prepared may help lower the impact of an influenza pandemic on you and your family.

Preparing for a pandemic

A pandemic would touch every aspect of society, so every part of society must begin to prepare. You and your family should plan your response to the following situations:

- ❑ Stores may close or have limited supplies. Use the checklists at **www.pandemicflu.gov** to determine what items you should stockpile to help you manage without these services. Some medical supplies you should keep on hand include a thermometer, medicines for fever (such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen), anti-diarrheal medication, vitamins and fluids with electrolytes.

- ❑ Transportation services may be disrupted. Consider that the ability to travel, even by car if there are fuel shortages, may be limited.

- ❑ Widespread illness may result in the shutdown of ATMs and banks. Keep a small amount of cash or traveler's checks in small denominations in your emergency supplies kit for easy use.

- ❑ Being able to work may be difficult or impossible. Ask your employer how business will continue during a pandemic. Plan for possible loss of income if you are unable to work or the company you work for temporarily closes.

- ❑ Schools, from preschools to universities, may close to limit the spread of flu in the community. Plan for children staying home for extended periods of time. Have learning and recreational activities planned, such as reading, playing board games and coloring.

- ❑ Hospitals and doctors' offices are likely to be overwhelmed. Make sure you have necessary medical supplies for chronic conditions, including a continuous supply of prescription medications. If you receive ongoing medical care, talk to your doctor about plans to continue care during a pandemic.

Preventing a pandemic

These steps may help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses such as the flu:

• Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue away immediately after use.

• Wash your hands often with soap and water. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

• Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others, stay home from work or school, and avoid social gatherings.

THE FLU SHOT

While it will not protect you from pandemic flu, the Indiana State Department of Health recommends flu shots to guard against common flu strains that are in circulation.

What about bird flu?

Avian influenza (bird flu) is a disease of wild and farm birds caused by viruses. Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but since 1997 there have been a number of confirmed cases of human infection from bird flu viruses. Most of these resulted from direct contact with infected birds.

The spread of bird flu viruses from an infected person to another person has been reported very rarely and has not been reported to continue beyond one person. A worldwide pandemic could occur if a bird flu virus were to change so that it could easily be passed from person to person. Here are common questions and answers about bird flu:

• **IS IT SAFE TO EAT POULTRY?** Yes, it is safe to eat properly cooked poultry. Cooking destroys germs, including bird flu viruses. Use a food thermometer to ensure poultry has reached an internal temperature of at least 165°F.

• **IS THERE A VACCINE AVAILABLE?** A vaccine probably would not be available in the early stages of a pandemic, or would be available in very limited amounts. Once a potential pandemic strain of influenza virus is identified, it usually takes at least six months before a vaccine will be widely available.

• **HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM BIRD FLU?** Follow the steps listed at the top of this page under "Preventing a Pandemic." During a pandemic it is especially important for people to stay home from work or school and seek medical care for all types of illnesses.