

A National Report Card on Protecting Children During Disasters

2012



Is America Prepared to Protect Our Most Vulnerable Children in Emergencies?



Save the Children®



“We as a nation have a moral obligation to protect those who are most vulnerable during disasters. Children — especially those who are too young to protect themselves or who have disabilities that require additional assistance — are counting on us to ensure their safety and well-being. And yet, emergency preparedness regulations in more than half of the states fail to account for the needs of those who are most at risk of injury, exploitation, and neglect. That’s simply unacceptable.”

— Mark Shriver, Senior Vice President, Save the Children’s U.S. Programs

State Success: Louisiana

Residents of Louisiana will never forget the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, and state officials are making sure schools and child care centers are ready to protect children should another disaster strike. In the seven years since Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast, Save the Children has worked with Louisiana’s policymakers, emergency professionals, and other child-focused organizations to help ensure that children’s needs are an integral part of national, state, and local emergency response plans.

In 2008, when Save the Children conducted its initial review of disaster preparedness standards for child care facilities and K–12 schools in all 50 states, Louisiana met none of the standards. But progress was evident in our 2010 report, which showed that Louisiana then required a multi-hazard disaster plan for schools. This year, Louisiana emerged as a national leader in ensuring children’s well-being during emergencies. Louisiana has revised its regulations to require that all regulated child care centers and homes have written disaster plans for evacuation and relocation and for parent-child reunification following a disaster as well as specific plans to meet the needs of children with disabilities and those with access and functional needs during emergencies. Louisiana joins a list of only 17 states that meet all four disaster preparedness standards.

“The changes made by the state of Louisiana this year to help ensure its youngest residents are safe during emergencies represent a significant step forward.”

—Jeanne-Aimée De Marrais, Advisor, Save the Children’s Domestic Emergencies Programs. De Marrais is a national expert in child care preparedness and recovery and the protection of children in emergencies.



Jeanne-Aimée De Marrais assists a child as part of Save the Children’s response to Hurricane Katrina.

Many States Remain Unprepared to Protect Our Most Vulnerable Children

Ninety-four percent of American children live in communities at risk of natural disasters. This year's wildfires, which destroyed hundreds of homes and displaced thousands of families in Colorado, Montana, and other states across the western United States, put emergency preparedness in the nation's spotlight. Disasters are on the rise: during the first half of 2012 alone, the federal government declared 17 major disasters in as many states.

When last summer's earthquake shook the eastern United States without warning, it served as a powerful reminder that a major disaster can strike anywhere at any time. Sending shockwaves through our nation's capital and other East Coast cities just before 2 p.m. on Tuesday, August 23, 2011, the earthquake demonstrated that emergencies, natural or manmade, can and do take place during the workday, a time when our nation's youngest, most vulnerable citizens are at school or in child care.

During normal working hours—which total more than 2,000 hours a year—the safety of nearly 68 million of our country's children is in the hands of school officials and caregivers. Most parents assume that when they drop their kids off for the day, they will be safe if disaster strikes. But two-thirds of our nation's states do not require basic emergency preparedness regulations for child care facilities and schools.

In addition to evaluating every state's basic emergency preparedness plan for children, this year's report highlights a critical standard that every state should have in place to address the needs of the most vulnerable children in child care. These children include at least 2 million infants and toddlers as well as thousands of children with disabilities and those with access and functional needs. More than half of the states fail to account for these children in their emergency preparedness plans. This major gap puts many of our most vulnerable children at risk every day. (For a state-by-state summary of this year's report card, see page 10.)

Q: What children fall under the categories of children with disabilities and children with access and functional needs?

A: Any child requiring special assistance during an emergency or evacuation including:

- children needing assistive technology devices and services,
- children with visual or hearing impairments,
- children with physical, emotional, behavioral or mental health challenges, and
- infants, toddlers, and other young children requiring additional support.



Four Standards of Practice to Protect Children in Emergencies

Save the Children works with national, state, and local policymakers across the United States to ensure that disaster plans address the needs of every child. We also hold each state accountable for setting standards by updating our National Report Card every year.

For the fifth consecutive year, our report assesses all 50 states and the District of Columbia on four basic disaster preparedness and safety standards for children in child care and at school. The first three standards are for child care facilities and the fourth is for schools.

1

A Plan for Evacuating Children in Child Care

The state requires all regulated child care facilities to have a written plan for evacuating and moving kids to a safe location for multiple types of disasters. The plans must go beyond the provisions of a basic fire drill.

If your local community floods, does your child's child care center have plans for moving kids to higher ground or another safe place?



2

A Plan for Reuniting Families after a Disaster

The state requires all regulated child care facilities to have a written plan to notify parents of an emergency and reunite parents with their kids.

Does your child's child care program have an emergency communication and reunification plan, including multiple emergency contact numbers for you and an alternate, in the event of an emergency?



3

A Plan for Children with Disabilities and Those with Access and Functional Needs

The state requires all regulated child care facilities to have a written plan that accounts for any special assistance an infant, toddler, or child with physical, emotional, behavioral or mental health challenges may need.

If there is a fire, does your child care program have a plan for evacuating and transporting infants or children in wheelchairs?



4

A Multi-Hazard Plan for K–12 Schools

The state requires all K–12 schools to have a disaster plan that accounts for multiple types of hazards.

Does your child's school have plans that address the multiple kinds of disasters your community might encounter, such as earthquakes, wildfires, or gun violence?



The Results Are In

Over the last five years, the number of states meeting all four standards has increased from four in 2008 to 17 in 2012. (For a complete 2012 National Report Card summary, see page 10.) While such progress is significant, many states continue to fall short when it comes to protecting children in emergencies. Since last year, one state changed its regulations to meet all four preparedness standards, while three other states made slower, but nevertheless important, headway. Overall, only one-third of the country meets all four standards for emergency preparedness for children.

State Success

✓ Louisiana this year passed regulations that now ensure children are protected in all four basic preparedness standards.

Steady Strides

- One state—Wyoming—made significant progress, adopting three standards in the last year. It previously met none.
- Two states—Indiana and Virginia—now meet the family-child reunification standard. Virginia meets three of the four standards while Indiana meets two.

Still Stalled

- ✗ While 17 states now meet all four basic preparedness standards; 33 states and the District of Columbia still do not.
- ✗ Twenty-seven states do not require all regulated child care facilities to have a plan that accounts for kids with disabilities and those with access and functional needs.
- ✗ Twenty states do not require all regulated child care facilities to have an evacuation and relocation plan.
- ✗ Eighteen states still do not require all regulated child care facilities to have a family-child re-unification plan.



✗ Nine states still do not require K-12 schools to have multi-hazard plans that have provisions for multiple types of disasters.

✗ Five states—Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, and Montana—fail to meet any of the preparedness standards for regulated child care facilities or schools, putting children at risk.

✗ While Tennessee in recent years seemed to be making progress toward meeting all preparedness standards, the state is one standard short of achieving all four.

Protecting Our Youngest, Most Vulnerable Kids

Some States Do It Right

Maryland

One typically warm sunny afternoon in August 2011, the ground under the YMCA in Bowie, Maryland, began to tremble, shaking awake the kids during nap time at the My Place child care center. Before they had time to realize they were experiencing an earthquake—a rare occurrence on the East Coast—nurse administrator Judy Tribby and other staff members were already in emergency response mode. They knew exactly what to do.

They rushed to move the crying children—many of them still half-asleep—away from the windows. Placing infants and toddlers in evacuation cribs, they grabbed ready-to-go emergency bags for each child and quickly

escorted everyone into the hallway, as they had done during numerous emergency drills. The staff at the child care center had to follow additional steps, as prescribed by the facility's written emergency plan, to account for any special needs of the children during the evacuation process. Among the nearly 40 children were several infants and a number of children with disabilities, such as speech and language delays, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy.

The state of Maryland made emergency preparedness a priority following a series of devastating events—the terrorist attacks on September



In the event of an emergency, infants like Santiago Anderson-Ervin, pictured in the arms of YMCA child care specialist Christine Bennett, are placed in special evacuation cribs so that they can be safely and quickly removed from the building.

11, an F4 tornado that struck La Plata, Md., on April 28, 2002, and the Washington, D.C. area sniper shootings in 2002. As a result when the earthquake struck last year, disaster regulations were in place to safeguard children in school and child care facilities, including those with disabilities and special needs.

"Children with special needs are vulnerable during a disaster on many levels," said Tribby, a registered nurse, who for the past four years has worked at the YMCA child care center as a nurse administrator. Tribby's position is supported by The Arc of Prince George's County, an organization dedicated to helping adults and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"Children who are dependent on equipment that runs on batteries are vulnerable to prolonged power failures," she said. "If they have a breathing condition, such as asthma, changes in weather can affect their breathing, so being stuck without medication can be dangerous."

The YMCA-Arc child care center is an inclusive child care facility for children with and without disabilities, ranging in age from infancy to five years old. When enrolling a child at the center, parents are required to bring any special equipment, supplies, medication, and food to be stored in emergency bags custom-packed for children.

"At the child care center, we make sure that we are aware of each and every child's needs. We keep any equipment a child may depend on plugged in so it's fully charged if something should happen," Tribby said. "Our emergency plans are in writing. We have frequent emergency drills. And hopefully we are ready to deal with whatever emergency may arise."



Judy Tribby tends to 19-month-old McKenzie who relies on special equipment for walking and feeding and, as a result, is particularly vulnerable in the event of an emergency.

Alaska: Another Model for Success

The successful evacuation of the YMCA-Arc child care center in Maryland—a state that now meets all four disaster preparedness standards—was the direct result of rigorous emergency planning. Not all children are so fortunate as to live in states that require child care facilities to have such high standards.

While most states have some form of emergency preparedness regulations in place, a majority of states do not require child care facilities to have specific plans accounting for children with disabilities and those with access and functional needs. To meet that key requirement, states should take a cue from Alaska's regulatory language that takes into account the needs of the most vulnerable children at child care facilities.



"Written plan must describe the procedures that will be followed for the complete evacuation of the facility and explain your plan to evacuate everyone within 150 seconds, including children under 30 months of age, children with limited mobility, and children who otherwise may need assistance in an emergency, including a child who is mentally, visually, or hearing impaired."

Source: Alaska's Department of Health and Social Services, Child Care Program Office.

Giving Voice to the Most Vulnerable

An Expert's Perspective

Q&A with Mary Funk, Deputy Executive Director, The Arc of Prince George's County, Maryland



Mary Funk has worked as a mentor and advocate for families of individuals with disabilities for 28 years. Through her position at the Prince George's County's division of The Arc, a nationwide organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, she oversees family services programs at child care centers and other facilities.

Save the Children: Why are children with disabilities and those with access and functional needs particularly vulnerable in the event of a disaster?

Mary Funk: Some children are physically vulnerable. They may be in wheelchairs or rely on feeding tubes. Others have intellectual and/or emotional challenges such as autism.

Any disruption in their routines can pose serious challenges. If a disaster strikes, these children are the most vulnerable, least able to protect themselves.

Save the Children: If you are a parent of a child with disabilities or special needs, what should you do to make sure your child care facility can protect your child in the event of a disaster?

Mary Funk: When parents visit a child care facility and consider enrolling their child, they should ask to see the facility's disaster response plan and look for provisions in the plan for children with disabilities and special needs. If there is no plan or the plan is deficient, parents might consider going elsewhere. Or they might strongly encourage the child care facility to develop such a plan.

Save the Children: Why is it so important that states require child care facilities to address the needs of children with disabilities and those with access and functional needs in their emergency plans?

Mary Funk: It's a safety issue. Disaster plans need to account for the safety of every child, and children with disabilities and special needs often require more assistance in the event of an emergency. Even a fire alarm going off is enough to upset some children with special needs. While some veteran caregivers may know how to help these children in an emergency situation, many caregivers, including substitutes and new aides, are not well prepared. That's why every child care facility has to have a written emergency plan, so everyone knows what to do. Caregivers need to know, for example, that loud noises can be disruptive for children with autism or other types of disabilities. Even flashing lights can trigger a certain behavior. All of these possibilities need to be accounted for.



Parents, Experts Speak Up

“Every child care center should be able to meet the needs of all children, especially those who are too vulnerable to meet their own needs independently. Every child care center should have written plans that include the needs of children with medical or any other special need. It is a shame that (my home state of) South Carolina has not made this a fully mandated and monitored requirement for child care centers. I wish all parents could have the peace of mind I had when they are enrolling their precious children with special needs (in a child care facility).”

—Jennifer Daspit, Aiken, S.C. When Daspit enrolled her daughter Jessica in child care, she made sure that the facility had a written emergency plan to accommodate her child’s speech and ambulatory challenges.



“With every natural disaster that happens around the world, I grieve for the victims, I pray for a speedy recovery, and I think of my son, Max. He has cerebral palsy, due to a stroke at birth, and he is on anti-seizure medication. As a parent of a child with special needs, I have particular concerns about his well-being in the case

of an emergency. My son is an amazing child who, in many ways, is like any other child—except that he is medically more vulnerable. After reading the National Report Card on Protecting Children During Disasters, I was alarmed to discover that the majority of states do not require child care facilities to account for the special needs of all children in their emergency preparedness plans. This should be standard operating procedure, to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable kids and to give parents peace of mind.”

— Ellen Seidman, New York, N.Y. As the mother of 10-year-old Max, who has cerebral palsy, Seidman writes about being a parent of a child with special needs in her award-winning blog, Love That Max, as well as for a number of online and print publications.



“Children with special needs, whether physical or emotional, require more time, more effort and more assistance. In the event of a disaster, child care facilitators are going to have to take extra precautions for children with these needs. Each child should have his or her own specific plan, created on an individual basis, and the child care facilitator and the parent need to be in communication about what’s best for each child. Preparedness is important. It provides a support system

not only to the child, but also to the parent and child care facility. Preparedness brings a peace of mind.”

— Camille Midcap, Children’s Team Leader of the Healing Joplin Project, Ozark Center, Joplin, MO.

2012 National Report Card

Does Your State Have a Disaster Plan for Children?

	Evacuation/ Relocation Plan	Family-Child Reunification Plan	Children with Special Needs Plan	K-12 Multiple Disaster Plan
Alabama	✓	✓	✓	✓
Arkansas	✓	✓	✓	✓
California	✓	✓	✓	✓
Connecticut	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawaii	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kentucky	✓	✓	✓	✓
Louisiana	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maryland	✓	✓	✓	✓
Massachusetts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mississippi	✓	✓	✓	✓
New Hampshire	✓	✓	✓	✓
New Mexico	✓	✓	✓	✓
New York	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vermont	✓	✓	✓	✓
Washington	✓	✓	✓	✓
West Virginia	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wisconsin	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alaska	✓		✓	✓
Delaware	✓	✓		✓
District of Columbia	✓	✓	✓	
Missouri	✓	✓	✓	
North Carolina	✓		✓	✓
Ohio	✓	✓		✓
Oklahoma	✓	✓		✓
Pennsylvania	✓	✓		✓
Tennessee		✓	✓	✓
Texas	✓	✓		✓
Utah	✓	✓		✓
Virginia	✓	✓		✓
Wyoming	✓	✓	✓	
Colorado		✓		✓
Florida*		✓		✓
Indiana		✓		✓
Minnesota		✓		✓
Nevada	✓			✓
Rhode Island			✓	✓
South Carolina		✓		✓
Arizona				✓
Georgia				✓
Illinois				✓
Maine				✓
Nebraska				✓
New Jersey				✓
North Dakota	✓			
Oregon				✓
South Dakota				✓
Idaho				
Iowa				
Kansas				
Michigan				
Montana				

All 4 standards met

3 standards met

2 standards met

1 standard met

0 standards met

Research was conducted by Brown Buckley Tucker and reflects action in relevant state administrative offices and state legislatures as of July 2012.

The asterisk* signifies that regulations are under revision and a draft of the proposed regulations was reviewed and met criteria.

BACKGROUND

Save the Children commissioned Brown Buckley Tucker (BBT) to determine how well-prepared child care facilities and K–12 schools are to respond to the needs of children in the event of natural disasters and emergencies, such as tornadoes, earthquakes, or industrial accidents, which can occur at any time, including during school hours. BBT researched the child care licensing laws and regulations for all 50 states and the District of Columbia to determine whether they included the standards considered essential for disaster planning in schools and child care facilities. Since the initial research, the number of states that meet all four standards has increased from four in 2008 to 17 in 2012.

METHODOLOGY

Definitions and Applications for Save the Children's Report Card Standards

In Save the Children's annual National Report Card on Protecting Children During Disasters, a state is not considered to meet a particular standard unless (1) the substance of the standard meets national guidelines; (2) the standard is mandated; and (3) all regulated child care providers—or in the case of standard No. 4, all schools—are subject to the standard. Substantive descriptions of the standards are presented below. A rule is considered mandated if it is (1) in statute, (2) in regulation, or (3) provided by the relevant agency as mandatory guidance. Mandatory guidance includes forms, templates, and technical assistance that are provided to child care providers and are required to be completed or implemented.

Standard 1: A Plan for Evacuating Children in Child Care

The state must require that all child care providers have a written plan for evacuating and safely moving children to an alternate site. The plan must include provisions for multiple types of hazards. Many states have different licensing requirements and regulations for different kinds of providers. To meet the standard, a requirement must be in place for all categories of child care providers.

Standard 2: A Plan for Reuniting Families after a Disaster

The state must require that all child care providers to have a written plan for emergency notification of parents and reunification of families following an emergency. Again, a state may have multiple classes of child care with separate regulations and the standard must apply to all regulated child care providers.

Standard 3: A Plan for Children with Disabilities and Those with Access and Functional Needs

The state must require that all child care providers have a written plan that accounts for children with disabilities and those with access and functional needs. This standard must go beyond specific classes of special needs that may exist elsewhere in state code — it must include a specific requirement indicating how all children with special needs will be included in the emergency plan. The requirement must apply to all regulated child care providers.

Standard 4: A Multi-Hazard Plan for K–12 Schools

The state must require that all schools have a disaster plan that addresses multiple types of hazards and covers a number of responses, including evacuation, shelter-in-place, and lock-down situations. Mandating fire or tornado drills alone is not sufficient for states to meet the standard since these activities do not address other types of hazards. The state standard should apply to all schools, including public charter schools as well as private schools.





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For more information about this report, including methodology or background materials, please contact Save the Children's U.S. Programs at 202-640-6600.

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