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Public Information Director July 26, 2007

The Henry and Stark County Health Department notes that, in coordination with state and federal offices, and the Department of Homeland Security, they are working hard to strengthen our Nation's and local communities' security; and thereby, reduce our vulnerability to emergencies of all kinds. September is National Preparedness Month. Therefore, the Health Department staff offers the latest in a series of articles aimed to help keep our area residents up-to-date on the latest information on emergency preparedness. Today, we focus on emergency preparedness suggestions for families.

All Americans should begin a process of learning about potential threats so we are better prepared to react during an attack, natural disaster or other emergency. While there is no way to predict what will happen, or what your personal circumstances will be, there are simple things you can do now to prepare yourself and your loved ones. Some of the things you can do to prepare for a disaster, such as assembling a supply kit, and developing a family communications plan, are the same for both a natural or man-made emergency. With a little planning and common sense, you can be better prepared for the unexpected.

**Emergency Supply Kits.** Just like having a working smoke detector in your home, having emergency supply kits will put the tools you need at your fingertips. Be prepared to improvise and use what you have on hand to make it on your own for at least three days, maybe longer. While there are many things that might make you more comfortable, think first about fresh water, food, and clean air. Remember to include, and periodically rotate, medications you take every day such as insulin and heart medicine. Plan to store items in an easy-to-carry bag, such as a shopping bag, backpack or duffle bag. Consider two kits. In one, put everything you will need to stay where you are and make it on your own. The other should be a lightweight, smaller version you can take with you if you have to get away.

You should plan in advance what you will do in an emergency. Be prepared to assess the situation, use common sense and whatever you have on hand to take care of yourself and your loved ones.

**Develop a Family Communications Plan.** Your family may or may not be together when disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another and review what you will do in different situations. Consider a plan where each family member calls, or e-mails, the same friend or relative in the event of an emergency. It may be easier to make a long distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-town contact may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members.

**Deciding to Stay or Go.** Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the disaster, the first important decision is whether you stay put or get away. You should understand and plan for both possibilities. Use common sense and available information, including what you are learning here, to determine if there is immediate danger. You should watch TV, listen to the radio or check the Internet often for information or official instructions as it becomes available. If you're specifically told to evacuate or seek medical treatment, do so immediately.

**Staying Put and Shelter-in-Place.** Whether you are at home, work or elsewhere, there may be situations when it's simply best to stay where you are and avoid any uncertainty outside. In fact, there are some circumstance where staying put and creating a barrier between yourself and potentially contaminated air outside, a process known as sheltering-in-place and sealing the room, is a matter of survival. Plan in advance where you will take shelter in this kind of an emergency. Choose an interior room or one with as few windows and doors as possible.

**Getting Away.** There may be conditions under which you will decide to get away, or there may be situations when you are ordered to leave. Plan in advance how you will assemble your family and anticipate where you will go.

Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency.

**Working Together.** Schools, daycare providers, workplaces, neighborhoods and apartment buildings, like individuals and families, should all have site-specific emergency plans. Ask about plans at the places where your family spends time: work, school and other places you frequent.

The Health Department reminds area residents that in all cases, remain calm. Be prepared to adapt this information to your personal circumstances and make every effort to follow instructions received from authorities on the scene. Above all, stay calm, be patient and think before you act. With these simple preparations, you can be ready for the unexpected.

The Henry and Stark County Health Departments advise area residents, wanting more information on emergency preparedness to call the Health Department at 852-7273 or go to [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).