FREE CHECKLIST

72-hour power outage checklist

Tick these off before an outage, and use the list during one. Ready.gov and FEMA say to plan for "several days". The CDC and the Red Cross use three days as a minimum, so this list is built around three days.

Last updated November 9, 2026

Water

Plan on one gallon per person per day.

- [ ] Store at least 1 gallon of water per person per day for 3 days. (CDC, Water Supply)
- [ ] Try to store a 2-week supply if you can. (CDC, Water Supply)
- [ ] Do not ration drinking water unless authorities tell you to. (Ready.gov, Water)
- [ ] If tap water is in doubt, use bottled, boiled or treated water. (CDC, Safe Water)
- [ ] To boil water, hold a rolling boil for 1 minute, then let it cool. (CDC, Safe Water)
- [ ] Never drink water from radiators or boilers in a home heating system. (CDC, Safe Water)

Food safety

The clock starts when the power goes out.

- [ ] Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed. (CDC, Food Safety)
- [ ] A closed fridge keeps food safe about 4 hours. (CDC, Food Safety)
- [ ] A full freezer holds about 48 hours. A half-full one holds about 24. (CDC, Food Safety)
- [ ] At 4 hours, move perishable food to a cooler with ice or gel packs. (CDC, Food Safety)
- [ ] Eat fresh, perishable food first. (Red Cross, Power Outage)
- [ ] Never taste food to check it. When in doubt, throw it out. (CDC, Food Safety)
- [ ] Keep a manual can opener with your canned food. (Ready.gov, Build A Kit)

Light

- [ ] Have a flashlight for every household member. (Ready.gov, Power Outages)
- [ ] Keep extra batteries for flashlights and radios. (Ready.gov, Build A Kit)
- [ ] Use battery flashlights and lanterns, not candles. (CDC, Power Outage)
- [ ] If you must use a candle, keep it away from things that burn. (CDC, Power Outage)
- [ ] Stay near any lit candle. (CDC, Power Outage)

Heat and cooling

- [ ] Check with local officials for open heating and cooling locations. (Ready.gov, Power Outages)
- [ ] If heat or cold is extreme, go to a community location with power. (Ready.gov, Power Outages)
- [ ] Do not use a gas stove or oven to heat your home. (Ready.gov, Power Outages)
- [ ] Do not rely only on fans to keep cool. (CDC, Power Outage)
- [ ] Keep a sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person. (Ready.gov, Build A Kit)
- [ ] Leave if the home is too hot or cold, or if medical devices need power. (Red Cross, Power Outage)

Carbon monoxide and generators

Carbon monoxide has no color or smell.

- [ ] Run a generator outdoors only, at least 20 feet from windows, doors and vents. (CPSC)
- [ ] Point the exhaust away from the home. (CPSC)
- [ ] Never run a generator in a garage, even with the door open. (CDC)
- [ ] Never use a grill or camp stove inside a home, tent or camper. (CDC, Power Outage)
- [ ] Have battery-powered CO alarms on every level of the home. (CPSC)
- [ ] Never plug a generator into a wall outlet. (Red Cross)
- [ ] Keep the generator dry, and let it cool before you refuel. (Ready.gov, Power Outages)
- [ ] If you feel sick or dizzy, go outside to fresh air, then call 911. (CPSC)

Phones and power

- [ ] Charge phones and devices fully before severe weather. (Ready.gov, Get Tech Ready)
- [ ] Keep a portable charger or power bank charged. (Ready.gov, Power Outages)
- [ ] Use low power or airplane mode to save battery. (Ready.gov, Get Tech Ready)
- [ ] Dim the screen and close apps you do not need. (FEMA, Communication Plan)
- [ ] Try texting. Texts may go through when calls do not. (Ready.gov, Get Tech Ready)
- [ ] Keep a phone charger in your car. (Ready.gov, Get Tech Ready)
- [ ] If you charge in a car, use a ventilated area, not a closed garage. (FEMA, Communication Plan)
- [ ] Keep a non-cordless home phone if you can. Cordless ones need power. (Red Cross, Power Outage)

Information

- [ ] Keep a battery-powered or hand crank radio with NOAA Weather Radio. (Ready.gov, Build A Kit)
- [ ] Keep a paper copy of your contact list. (Red Cross, Power Outage)
- [ ] Write down numbers for utilities, doctors and emergency services. (FCC, Emergency Tips)
- [ ] Keep local maps with your supplies. (Ready.gov, Build A Kit)
- [ ] Keep emergency reference material, such as a first aid book. (Ready.gov)
- [ ] Keep cash. (Ready.gov, Build A Kit)
- [ ] Keep your car gas tank at least half full. (Red Cross, Power Outage)
- [ ] Call 911 only for emergencies. (FCC, Emergency Tips)

Medical needs

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist ahead of time. This list does not replace their advice.

- [ ] Ask your medical provider for an outage plan for powered devices and cold medicine. (Ready.gov, Power Outages)
- [ ] Tell your electric company and fire department about any powered medical device. (FDA, Medical Devices)
- [ ] Keep a cooler and ice or gel packs for medicine that needs to stay cold. (FDA, Medicine)
- [ ] After a day without power, discard refrigerated medicine unless the label says otherwise. (CDC, Power Outage)
- [ ] Keep a 7-day supply of medications and medical items. (Red Cross, Kit)
- [ ] Pack a first aid kit, and glasses or contact lens solution. (Ready.gov, Build A Kit)
- [ ] Do not plug in a device or cord that is wet. (FDA, Medical Devices)
- [ ] When power returns, check that device settings did not reset. (FDA, Medical Devices)

This list is general guidance gathered from the official sources named beside each line. It is not medical or legal advice. Follow the instructions of your local officials. In an emergency, call 911.