

## BE Prepared: Backpack

By definition an emergency is “a sudden, urgent, usually unexpected occurrence or occasion requiring immediate action”. No one knows when an emergency will strike. It is unexpected. However, immediate action is easier if we are prepared.

Children, teens and adults can be better able to handle any “unexpected occurrence” by being prepared. Every school year, the school sends home emergency forms for parents to complete. The school knows an emergency can occur at school or during the school day. The emergency can be anything from an accident on the playground or an early school closure. Either way, the form lets the school know how to reach a child’s guardians. It assures them that those guardians have plans in place for their child’s care. However, emergencies can happen when your child is away from home and not in school, or when you are away from home. Is your family prepared? Do they know who to call, what to do?

Children should carry basic contact information with them. Phone numbers for their parents or guardians, at home, at work, cell phone numbers. Many children have a hard time remembering numbers, and may have a harder time in a stressful situation.

It is important for families to have emergency contacts in town, people that they can rely upon to help with their children in an emergency. It is also important that children understand who these people are. Who are the persons that are allowed to pick them in case of an emergency? Do they know not to go with anyone else? Do **they** have phone numbers to contact those people in the event that something happens to you while they are away from home?

It is also essential that families have out of town contacts. What if phone lines in town are down? What if you are separated from your child in a disaster, as happened to many families involved in Katrina? If they have the number of an out of town contact to call, that person can serve to reconnect you.

This vital information should be in **your and your child’s** backpack, purse, or wallet, wherever it will be with him. If you also have this information with you, you will not need to find it. You will also not have to try to remember if you gave your child “Uncle Bob’s” or “Aunt Penny’s” number to call.

There are additional items that could be included in a backpack to help you and your child be ready for “unexpected” events: a bottle of water, high-energy snacks, hand sanitizer, alcohol swabs, band aids, a flashlight, and sunscreen or hand warmers, depending on the season. If you and your child get in the habit of being prepared for even small events, you will both feel more confident. You will be more prepared when any occasion “requiring immediate action” takes place.

For more information on keeping your family safe and healthy, call Aitkin County Health & Human Services at 927-7200 or 800-328-3744 or visit [Ready.gov](http://Ready.gov).