SKILL GUIDE · PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

Go-Bags & 72-Hour Kits

A pre-packed kit of essentials, ready to grab, so a household isn't scrambling to gather things during an actual emergency. This guide isn't tied to one manual chapter, because a real kit is really just Water, Food, Medical Care, and a few other chapters, repacked into one bag instead of spread across the house.

Same kit, different names

"Go-bag" and "72-hour kit" describe the same core idea, and the contents below work for either. The difference is emphasis, not substance:

- **72-hour kit** is the term most familiar in Utah specifically, taught for decades through LDS Church emergency-preparedness lessons and the state's own "Be Ready Utah" campaign. It anchors to a fixed duration: the classic emergency-management baseline that a household should be able to get through the first three days on its own before outside help reliably arrives. Even Be Ready Utah's own current guidance has moved past a strict three-day window, now recommending "three days, five days, or longer" and treating the exact "72-hour" figure as somewhat dated, though the name has stuck around in everyday use.
- **Go-bag** is the more nationally-used term, and it emphasizes grab-and-go speed and portability over any fixed time window. It's also used more loosely: this site's own Document Go-Bag guide is a go-bag too, just a narrower one scoped to paperwork alone, not the full kit below.

Two related terms worth knowing, since they show up elsewhere and aren't quite the same thing: a **bug-out bag** implies leaving home entirely for an extended stay somewhere else, so it's typically bigger and more self-sufficient than the kit below. A **get-home bag** is kept in the car or at work, sized only to get you home from wherever you happen to be, not to shelter you once you're there.

What actually goes in it

Category	What to pack	Notes
Water	1 gallon/person/day, at least 3 days	See Water Purification for making more once the kit runs dry
Food	3-5 days, non-perishable, no-cook or minimal-prep	Rotate it into your regular pantry use so it's never actually expired when you need it
Health	First aid kit, a few days of any prescription meds, spare glasses or contacts, basic OTC medication	See Medical Kits: What Actually Goes in Each One for exactly what belongs in this bag's kit, and First Aid Basics for how to use it
Light & power	Flashlight or headlamp, extra batteries, a NOAA weather radio, phone charger or power bank	See Family Communication Plan & Emergency Radio
Tools	Multitool, whistle, dust mask, duct tape, plastic sheeting, a wrench or pliers for utility shutoff, manual can opener	The whistle and mask are the two items households most often skip
Warmth & clothing	A full change of clothes, sturdy closed-toe shoes, an emergency blanket or lightweight sleeping bag	Broken-in, not brand new; see Physical Readiness
Sanitation	Wet wipes, a couple of small garbage bags, hand sanitizer, a little toilet paper	Doesn't need to be a full kit, just enough to get through a few days
Documents & cash	Copies of ID, insurance, and medical records; small-bill cash	The real version of this belongs in its own fireproof kit; see Document Go-Bag & Digital Backup and Financial Preparedness Basics
Household-specific	Infant formula or diapers, pet food and a leash, backup power for a medical device	See Pet Evacuation & First Aid Basics and Backup Power for Medical Equipment & Caregiving

Size it to how it'll actually be carried

One go-bag per person for personal items (clothes, meds, documents), plus a shared household bag or tote for the bulkier items that don't need duplicating, water jugs, tools, a larger first aid kit. If

there's any real chance of walking with it, the bag itself matters: a properly fitted backpack that carries weight on the hips, not a plastic tote or a bag that was never actually tried on loaded. See Physical Readiness for what a well-fitted pack actually looks like.

As a real weight target once it's packed: keep a loaded bag at roughly **10-20% of the carrier's own body weight**, toward the lower end for a child, an older adult, or anyone without the physical-readiness base the linked guide describes; heavier than that measurably slows pace and raises injury risk over any real walking distance. A too-heavy bag that never gets carried isn't actually more prepared than a lighter one that does.

Fill in your own numbers. Each line combines with the one above it; a rule marks a line that's an answer, and a plain number with no blank is a fixed part of the formula, not something to look up.

	_____	lbs	carrier's body weight
×	0.10-0.20		target range: lower end for a child, older adult, or anyone without a fitness base (fixed)
=	_____	lbs	**target loaded-bag weight**

Worked example: a 150 lb adult. 150 × 0.10-0.20 = a target range of **15-30 lbs** once packed.

Enter each household member's weight below to run the same math instantly, one at a time.

Carrier's body weight (lbs)

e.g. 150

Calculate

Keep a separate, smaller version in each vehicle too, sized as a get-home bag rather than a full kit: your car is one of the more likely places to actually be stranded away from home, and a kit that only lives in the garage closet doesn't help there.

Check it twice a year, not once and done

Water and food need rotating, batteries corrode, kids outgrow clothing and shoe sizes, and prescriptions expire. Pair the check with something already on the calendar, a clock change, a birthday, so it actually happens instead of becoming the thing that was "ready" three years ago.

Write your own plan, in one sentence

A too-heavy bag that never gets carried isn't actually more prepared than a lighter one that does. Finish this sentence with your own real plan:

"The next time *I do our clock-change gear check* , I will actually *weigh our go-bags and check them against the 10-20% target* ."

Know someone this guide would actually help? Being the person who's ready includes being the person who says something.

Send them this page ›

Sources

- Ready.gov, "Build A Kit": Ready.gov
- Be Ready Utah, "Get a Kit: Family": Be Ready Utah
- Loaded-pack weight as a percentage of body weight, and injury/pace risk above it: Ultimate Survival Tips

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Using AI to Plan Your Preparedness

An AI assistant can't stock your pantry or test your water filter. What it's genuinely useful for is the part every chapter on this site asks you to do yourself first: figuring out where your household actually stands and what to do about it next. This guide isn't tied to one manual chapter, because it applies to all fifteen equally.

Want this already built instead of building it yourself?

AI Prep Coach is a ready-to-paste version of this exact approach: one prompt that interviews you across all 17 categories, and, used on the site, builds a full plan by browsing this site's live pages automatically. The prompts below are for narrower, one-off asks, budget priority, a scenario walkthrough, meal planning from an exact pantry, once you already have a plan, or if you'd rather write your own instead of using a pre-built one.

What this is actually good for

Every category in this manual starts with the same kind of work: turn a vague situation into a specific list, turn a fixed budget into a priority order, turn "we should probably do something about this" into an actual plan. That's exactly the kind of task an AI assistant is good at, not because it knows your household, but because it's fast at organizing information once you give it the specifics. It replaces the blank page you'd otherwise be staring at before you start, not the hands-on skill, the professional advice, or the primary sources this manual cites throughout.

Where to find it: any general-purpose AI assistant works for this. The one you're already using is fine.

One trick works with all eight prompts below: name the specific guide or manual chapter for your state or topic before you ask, or paste its link if you're reading this online. Most AI assistants can work from either, which means the answer gets built on this site's own verified sourcing instead of the assistant's general, and possibly outdated, knowledge.

Eight prompts to start with

1. Household gap assessment

The same audit this site's own Tier structure assumes you've already done. Give it your real numbers, not a generic household. AI Prep Coach is the fuller, ready-made version of this exact idea, across all 17 categories instead of a single prompt; use the version below if you'd rather write your own or just want one quick pass.

> *"Here's my household: [ages, health needs, pets, vehicles, location]. Here's what we currently have stored: [list]. Compare this against a 2-week emergency supply standard and tell me our top 5 gaps, ranked by how fast each would become a real problem."*

2. Budget-constrained shopping priority

Useful when the honest answer to "where do I even start" is "I have $50, not $500."

> *"I have $50 to spend this month on emergency prep for a household of [size] with [specific needs]. What should I prioritize buying first, and why?"*

3. Scenario walk-through

A cheap way to find the gap you wouldn't have thought to look for, before it finds you.

> *"Walk me hour-by-hour through what would actually happen in my house if we lost power for 72 hours in [month], given [household details]. Where would we run into trouble first?"*

4. Family communication plan drafting

A starting draft for the same plan the Family Communication Plan guide walks through, including the out-of-town contact FEMA's own planning material recommends specifically because local phone lines can jam while long-distance calls and texts often still get through.

> *"Help me draft a wallet-card contact sheet for a family of [N], including an out-of-town contact, two meeting points, and each person's key medical info. Leave placeholders where I need to fill in real details myself."*

5. Meal planning from what you actually have

Turns a pantry inventory into a real plan instead of a guess.

> *"Here's our current food storage inventory: [list]. Build a 14-day meal plan using only these items,*

> *accounting for [allergy or dietary need], and tell me what's missing to make it nutritionally complete."*

6. Plain-language skill explainer

A supplement to a guide like this site's own, not a replacement for practicing the skill itself.

> *"Explain how to purify water using [method] in language a 14-year-old could follow, and tell me what could go wrong if a step is skipped."*

7. Local law or hazard research, as a starting point

A first pass to figure out what to ask an official source, not a substitute for asking one.

> *"What are the current rainwater harvesting rules in [state]? Give me your best understanding, but flag anything I should double-check directly with [state agency], since laws change."*

8. Multi-household coordination

Useful for extended family, not just the people under your own roof: aging parents, siblings scattered across town, a relative in another state.

> *"Help me draft a short, non-alarming message to my parents and siblings proposing we agree on an out-of-town relay contact and a check-in plan if a disaster hits our area."*

What not to hand over

Describe it, don't paste it

Don't paste Social Security numbers, full account numbers, passwords, or exact medication and dosage details into a general-purpose AI chat. Describe things in relative terms instead, "a family member takes a daily heart medication" rather than naming the drug, the dose, and the pharmacy account. Consumer guidance on this is consistent: treat an AI chatbot the way you'd treat a stranger who's just offered to help you organize your files, useful for the organizing, not a safe place for anything you wouldn't hand a stranger directly.

Check whether your conversations are used to train the model, and turn that off if you'd rather they weren't

Most major AI assistants use your chat history to improve their models by default, on both free and paid plans, unless you actively opt out in the app's privacy or data-control settings. This isn't the same risk as pasting a Social Security number, but a full household inventory, floor plan, and family member details is still real information you may not want retained past the conversation itself. Check your specific assistant's data settings once, the exact menu differs by provider, before you paste in the more detailed prompts below.

Why you still have to check its work

AI assistants produce confident, fluent answers whether or not the underlying information is correct, a well-documented failure mode researchers call hallucination. Measured rates vary widely by model and topic, but the pattern is consistent across every study of it: a wrong answer reads exactly as convincingly as a right one. Nothing about how confident an answer sounds tells you whether it's accurate.

Treat it as a draft, the same way this site treats a single source

This site's own standard, stated on every state and skill page, is that a claim isn't trustworthy until it's checked against a primary source. Hold an AI assistant's answers to that same bar, especially anything with a real safety, legal, medical, or financial consequence. Ask it directly for its sources, and treat "you should verify this" as the correct answer, not a failure of the tool.

Three things AI specifically doesn't replace here: professional advice for anything medical, legal, or financial; official guidance from FEMA, Ready.gov, or your local emergency management agency, which this manual itself is built on; and hands-on practice. It can draft the water-purification steps; it can't tell you whether your actual filter works until you've actually run water through it.

Write your own plan, in one sentence

A wrong AI answer reads exactly as convincingly as a right one, which is exactly why checking its work is the actual skill here. Finish this sentence with your own real plan:

"The next time *I sit down to actually plan our prep* , I will actually *run the household gap assessment prompt with our real numbers, not a generic household* ."

Know someone this guide would actually help? Being the person who's ready includes being the person who says something.

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Sources

- Out-of-town contact and family communication plan doctrine: Ready.gov; FEMA Family Emergency Communication Plan
- What not to share with an AI chatbot: AARP
- Default AI chat-data training practices and how to opt out by provider: TrustScan
- AI hallucination and verifying AI-generated answers: Forbes

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Preparing Without Relying on Official Systems

This site's Filing Claims and financial guides assume a household that can call the police, file an insurance claim, and apply for FEMA aid without a second thought. That's not everyone's real situation: undocumented immigrants, mixed-status households, and anyone with a founded reason to be cautious around official channels face a genuinely different set of choices. This guide is those choices, stated directly rather than assumed away.

What FEMA aid actually covers, regardless of immigration status

Cash assistance through FEMA's Individuals and Households Program does require the applicant to be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or "qualified alien" (a category that includes lawful permanent residents, refugees, asylees, and several other specific statuses). But that's only part of what's actually available, and the part that isn't cash-limited is broader than most people expect:

- **Non-cash emergency aid is available to everyone, regardless of citizenship or immigration status.** Crisis counseling, disaster legal services, disaster case management, emergency food assistance, shelter, and emergency medical care are all real, in-kind programs FEMA and partner organizations provide without an immigration-status requirement.
- **Mixed-status households can still access cash assistance.** A parent can apply for FEMA's Individuals and Households Program on behalf of a minor child who is a U.S. citizen or qualified alien, living in the same household, without providing information about the parent's own immigration status or signing anything regarding it.

Public charge rules are changing right now, not just a hypothetical future risk

Federal disaster assistance under the Stafford Act, which is what FEMA's individual assistance program operates under, along with other short-term, in-kind emergency disaster relief, has traditionally been excluded from public charge consideration, and this has been a source of real, harmful confusion that keeps eligible households from applying out of fear it will hurt a future immigration case. But treat "traditionally" as doing real work in that sentence right now: DHS finalized a new public charge rule in July 2026 that rescinds the 2022 regulation this page used to cite and broadens which benefits a case officer can weigh, taking effect September 18, 2026, with several states already suing to block it. Disaster relief and emergency medical care are among the categories that have stayed excluded even under past, stricter versions of this rule, but during an active rule change like this one, a real immigration attorney (see below) can confirm the actual current rule far more reliably than any page, including this one, that can't be updated in real time as litigation moves.

Where to find it: apply at disasterassistance.gov or 1-800-621-3362; see Filing Claims After a Disaster for the full application process once you've confirmed what you're eligible for.

Real legal help that doesn't start with your immigration status

ImmigrationLawHelp.org is a free, national directory of more than 1,000 nonprofit immigration legal service providers across all 50 states, searchable by zip code, with no cost and no requirement to disclose anything before finding a real local option. Every organization listed either has BIA-recognized accreditation or attorneys on staff, not a directory of unvetted listings. This is the first call to make before a disaster, not during one, so you already know who to contact when something happens.

Alternatives to a system built around insurance and bank accounts

Cash, barter, and community reciprocity all work without a credit check, a Social Security number, or a bank account behind them. See Barter & Local Trade Systems for what actually holds up when normal financial systems aren't accessible, and keep a real cash reserve for exactly this reason; see Financial Preparedness Basics.

Community networks that don't gate on documentation

Mutual Aid Hub, covered in full in Finding Your Local Prep Community, is built around informal, community-organized mutual aid specifically, not a government or insurance-adjacent program, and most local mutual aid networks exist precisely to fill the gap for anyone official systems don't reach. Community-based organizations, immigrant resource centers, and faith communities in your own area are often the fastest, least bureaucratic path to real help after a disaster, faster than a federal application in many cases, and worth identifying before you need them, the same logic behind this site's own "pick one real connection" advice throughout.

Write your own plan, in one sentence

ImmigrationLawHelp.org is the call to make before a disaster, not during one. Finish this sentence with your own real plan:

"The next time *I have internet access and ten quiet minutes* , I will actually

look up a real legal aid contact through ImmigrationLawHelp.org before we need one

."

Know someone this guide would actually help? Being the person who's ready includes being the person who says something.

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Sources

- FEMA citizenship and immigration status eligibility for disaster assistance, non-cash aid availability regardless of status, and mixed-status household applications: FEMA; FEMA
- 2026 public charge rule (rescinds the 2022 regulation, effective September 18, 2026) and its treatment of disaster relief: Federal Register; Immigrant Legal Resource Center
- ImmigrationLawHelp.org, national free/low-cost immigration legal aid directory: ImmigrationLawHelp.org
- Disaster relief guidance for immigrant communities: National Immigration Law Center; Texas Law Help