AFTER THE IMMEDIATE DANGER

Surviving the First Days

The reflexes and decisions on During an Emergency cover the first three hours. This page picks up from there: the shift from reacting to actually operating, from the three-hour mark through the 72-hour mark, where a real plan needs to be running instead of a string of reactions. It's still short on sleep and short on certainty, but it's no longer only about staying alive in the next five minutes.

The first 24 hours: take inventory

By now there's enough calm to actually look at what you have, rather than what you assumed going in.

Walk the house and count what's actually there

Water, food, first aid, documents, power. Not a mental estimate, an actual walkthrough. The Household Preparedness Assessment is built for exactly this: a fill-in-by-hand worksheet that turns "we're probably fine" into real numbers.

Check on nearby family

In person if it's close and safe to do, or by the same text-first method covered on the During an Emergency page, per your Family Communication Plan. If your household comes first, this is where that ordering hands off to the people you'd check on next.

If there's property damage, document before any cleanup begins

Photos and video now are the evidence a claim depends on later, and once cleanup starts that evidence is gone. If you're returning to a structure that's been damaged, the order matters as much as the documentation itself: exterior checks, gas and electrical hazards, and structural red flags all come before you're inside taking pictures. See Safely Re-Entering a Damaged Home for that walkthrough in full.

Stand up sanitation now if the toilet isn't reliable

Waiting until it becomes urgent means solving it under worse conditions, with less patience, possibly at night. See Bathroom & Hygiene Without Running Water for the actual setup: a two-bucket system, hand hygiene, sponge bathing, and laundry by hand.

Make a first honest guess at duration

Is this resolving in the next few days, or could it run longer? You don't need to be right, you need a working assumption the next stage can plan around. You'll get another, better chance to answer this at the 72-hour mark.

The first 3 days: settle in

This is the rule-of-threes water threshold: by roughly 72 hours, "we'll figure out water" has to stop being an acceptable answer. By this mark, you should be executing a plan, not still reacting to the event.

A real rationing plan is active

Not just stored supplies sitting there, an actual known daily draw. Most households have never actually calculated what they need beyond the bare 1 gallon/person/day floor, and that floor assumes no laundry and no toilet flushing. See the Storing Water Correctly guide's water-budget breakdown for what your specific household, especially if anyone's pregnant, nursing, sick, or doing hard physical work, actually needs.

FIFO rotation tracking has started

On whatever you're drawing down, so you're not discovering three weeks in that half the stock quietly expired before you got to it.

Communication check-ins are scheduled, not ad hoc

With your out-of-area contact and nearby family, on an actual cadence rather than whenever someone happens to think of it.

If anyone is sick, isolation is actually in place

Not just discussed as a good idea. See Isolating a Sick Household Member for the actual setup: a dedicated space, dedicated dishes and towels, and a cleaning routine, since disease spreading

through the whole household is a bigger risk at this point than almost anything else.

Reassess duration

Are utilities, roads, or outside help starting to return? This answer shapes the decision at the 14-day mark more than anything else that's happened so far.

> **If this is already resolving**
>
> Not every event needs what comes next. If things are genuinely wrapping up, roads clear, power's back, the immediate danger has passed, skip ahead to Recovery instead. Most events don't resolve this fast, but some do.

The skill guides for this stretch

Twelve of this site's skill guides apply directly to these first few days: things you're actually doing, not things you needed to have already built beforehand. Grouped by category, same order as the rest of the site.

Water

- Water Purification
- Measuring Your Water Intake

Food

- Food Safety After a Power Outage

Sanitation & Hygiene

- Bathroom & Hygiene Without Running Water
- Household Trash & Pet Waste Disposal

Medical Care

- Isolating a Sick Household Member

Energy & Heat

- Staying Warm Without Power

Shelter & Structural Safety

- Emergency Shelter Basics

Mental Health

- Psychological First Aid
- Substance Withdrawal: What's Actually Dangerous

Post-Disaster Recovery & Rebuilding

- Filing Claims After a Disaster
- Safely Re-Entering a Damaged Home

Where to go from here

- The First 24 Hours and The First 3 Days: the original chapters this page is drawn from, part of Surviving's full chronological sequence.
- Extend or Stand Down: the 14-day decision point that comes right after this.
- When No Help Is Coming: if that decision points toward extending, this is what running that looks like.
- During an Emergency: back to the first three hours, if that's actually where you are.
- Ready, Set, Ready: if none of this is built yet, start there instead.