

## How to Prepare for a Zombie Apocalypse

Blog post from the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC)



There are all kinds of emergencies out there that we can prepare for. Take a zombie apocalypse for example. That's right, I said z-o-m-b-i-e a-p-o-c-a-l-y-p-s-e. You may laugh now, but when it happens, you'll be happy you read this. And, hey, maybe you'll even learn a thing or two about how to prepare for a real emergency.

### A Brief History of Zombies

Many of us have seen at least one movie about flesh-eating zombies taking over, but where do zombies come from, and why do they love eating brains so much? The word *zombie* comes from Haitian and New Orleans voodoo origins. Although its meaning has changed slightly over the years, it refers to a human corpse mysteriously reanimated to serve the undead. Through ancient voodoo and folklore traditions, TV shows like *The Walking Dead* were born.

In movies, TV shows, and literature, zombies are often depicted as being created by an infectious virus, which is passed on via bites and contact with bodily fluids. Harvard psychiatrist Steven Scholzman wrote a (fictional) medical paper on the zombies presented in the zombie classic *Night of the Living Dead* and refers to the condition as Ataxic Neurodegenerative Satiety Deficiency Syndrome caused by an infectious agent. *The Zombie Survival Guide* identifies the cause of zombies as a virus called solanum. Other zombie origins shown in films include radiation from a destroyed NASA Venus probe (as in *Night of the Living Dead*), as well as mutations of existing conditions such as mad-cow disease, measles, and rabies.

The rise of zombies in pop culture has made the idea that a zombie apocalypse could actually happen almost believable. In such a scenario, zombies would take over entire countries, roaming city streets, eating anything living that got in their way. The spread of this idea has led many people to wonder, “How do I prepare for a zombie apocalypse?”

Well, we’re here to answer that question for you, and hopefully share a few tips about preparing for real emergencies, too!

### **Better Safe Than Sorry**

So what do you need to do before zombies—or hurricanes or pandemics, for example—actually happen? First of all, you should have an emergency kit in your house. This should include things like water, food, and other supplies to get you through the first couple of days before you can locate a zombie-free refugee camp (or in the event of a natural disaster, it will buy you some time until you are able to make your way to an evacuation shelter or until utility lines are restored).

Below is a list of items that should be included in your emergency kit:

- Water (1 gallon per person per day)
- Food (non-perishable items)
- Medications (prescription and non-prescription meds.)
- Tools and Supplies (utility knife, battery-powered radio, duct tape, etc.)
- Sanitation and Hygiene Supplies (household bleach, soap, towels, etc.)
- Clothing and Bedding (a change of clothes for each family member and blankets)
- Important Documents (copies of your driver's licence, passport, and birth certificate, to name a few)
- First Aid Supplies (Although you're a goner if a zombie bites you, you can use these supplies to treat basic cuts and lacerations that you might get during a tornado or hurricane.)

Once you've made your emergency kit, you and your family should come up with an emergency plan. This includes where to go and who to call if zombies start appearing on your doorstep. You can also enforce this plan if there is a flood, earthquake, or other emergency.

1. Identify the types of emergencies that are possible in your area. Besides a zombie apocalypse, this may include floods, tornadoes, or earthquakes. If you are unsure, contact your local Red Cross chapter.
2. Pick a meeting place for your family to regroup in case zombies invade your home ... or your town evacuates because of a hurricane. Pick one place right outside your home for sudden emergencies and one place outside of your neighbourhood in case you are unable to return home right away.

3. Identify your emergency contacts. Make a list of local contacts like the police, fire department, and your local zombie response team. Also identify an out-of-state contact that you can call during an emergency to let the rest of your family know you are OK.
4. Plan your evacuation route. When zombies are hungry, they won't stop until they get food (i.e., brains), which means you need to get out of town fast! Plan where to go and which routes to take ahead of time so that the flesh eaters don't have a chance! This is also helpful when natural disasters strike and you need to evacuate in a hurry.

### **Never Fear—CDC Is Ready**

If zombies did start roaming the streets, CDC would conduct an investigation much like any other disease outbreak. CDC would provide technical assistance to cities, states, or international partners dealing with a zombie infestation. This assistance might include consultation, lab testing and analysis, patient management and care, tracking of contacts, and infection control (including isolation and quarantine). It's likely that an investigation of this scenario would seek to accomplish several goals: determine the cause of the illness and the source of the infection/virus/toxin; learn how it is transmitted and how readily it is spread; learn how to break the cycle of transmission and thus prevent further cases; and determine how patients can best be treated. Not only would scientists be working to identify the cause and cure of the zombie outbreak, but CDC and other federal agencies would send medical teams and first responders to help those in affected areas. (I will be volunteering the young nameless disease detectives for the field work.)