

Emergency Preparedness and School Safety for K-12 Schools



Take a comprehensive approach to school emergency planning by using the five preparedness mission areas.

Families and communities expect schools to keep their children safe from a range of emergency events, including natural disasters, crime-related incidents, and accidents. Emergency planning is a key component of school safety that can include large-scale actions or everyday activities that help build a safe school environment.

Elements of emergency planning include creating a comprehensive school Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), holding tabletop exercises to test procedures and protocols, and conducting developmentally appropriate drills so that all members of the school community can practice the actions they would take before, during, and after an emergency. Though emergencies can happen at any time, schools can often limit their impact through effective emergency planning, and a comprehensive approach that effectively integrates the five preparedness mission areas – prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery.

Preparedness Mission Areas

The five preparedness mission areas are all connected and directly address the greatest risks of an emergency event.



Prevention

Prevention is the action schools take to prevent a threatened or actual incident from occurring and includes the capabilities necessary to avoid, deter, or stop an emergency. Efforts to prevent emergencies may include a range of activities, including assessing and addressing the safety, security, and maintenance of school facilities and grounds; educating students and school staff on appropriate behaviors; and fostering a positive school climate, supporting student mental health, and addressing bullying.



Protection

Protection means the capabilities to secure schools against acts of violence and man-made or natural disasters. Protection focuses on ongoing actions that protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, networks, and property from a threat or hazard. Even if a school is at a high state of readiness, there will always be a need for continued emergency management. Schools may consider establishing policies that help create a safer and more secure campus; training the school community on appropriate response activities; conducting exercises and drills; and maintaining relevant supplies to support emergency response.





Mitigation

Mitigation means the capabilities necessary to eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage by lessening the impact of an event or emergency. No matter how much a school prepares, some incidents cannot be prevented. To support mitigation efforts, schools can conduct assessments to reduce or eliminate potential hazards and identify areas for improvement; conduct exercises to practice emergency response and strengthen internal and external partnerships; and take measures to protect against injury and/or damage to the school environment.



Response

Response means the capabilities necessary to stabilize an emergency once it has already happened or is certain to happen in an unpreventable way; to establish a safe and secure environment; to save lives and property; and to facilitate the transition to recovery. A response can be faster and more effective through pre-planning. To respond to an emergency, schools should consider activating their EOP; providing directives for taking immediate protective actions; notifying and coordinating with first responders; documenting actions taken; and communicating regularly with their communities.



Recovery

Recovery means the capabilities necessary to assist districts and schools affected by an event or emergency in restoring the learning environment. Emergencies can disrupt the worldview of students, staff, and family members, so thoughtful planning for the recovery process is key in restoring the mental, academic, physical, and social well-being of those affected. In the wake of an emergency, schools can repurpose facilities for instruction or adopt a blended learning framework, offer expanded mental health services, and request emergency funding to help facilitate a smoother recovery. Schools can also embark on after action activities to review the effectiveness of their EOPs, and to make necessary updates using lessons learned.

Sources: rem.s.ed.gov/ | fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness | schoolsafety.gov/emergency-planning | rem.s.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf



For additional information and resources on emergency planning and school safety, visit SchoolSafety.gov.

For technical assistance, guidance, training, and other products and services related to emergency operations planning for education agencies, visit the [Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools \(REMS\) Technical Assistance \(TA\) Center](https://SchoolSafety.gov/Readiness-and-Emergency-Management-for-Schools-REMS-Technical-Assistance-TA-Center).

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