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As part of National Preparedness Month, the West Virginia Departments of Health (DH), Health Facilities (DHF), and Human Services (DoHS) are encouraging West Virginians to take part in the annual campaign focused on preparing for emergencies and disasters to keep families and communities safe. This year’s theme, “Start a Conversation,” focuses on the need for open discussions about disaster preparedness.

“National Preparedness Month is a timely reminder for everyone to take proactive steps in emergency planning,” said Cynthia Persily, Ph.D., Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Human Services. “This year’s theme, ‘Start a Conversation,’ highlights the importance of discussing potential emergencies with family and friends. These conversations can significantly improve our preparedness and resilience.”

DH Secretary Sherri Young, D.O., MBA, FAAFP, emphasized the importance of talking about potential disasters, even if those conversations may be uncomfortable. “Engaging in these conversations can help families make informed decisions and take necessary actions to prepare for emergencies.”

DHF Secretary Michael Caruso added, “Effective preparedness starts with dialogue. By initiating these critical conversations, we empower ourselves and our communities to face emergencies with confidence and clarity. It’s about building a culture of preparedness that starts in our homes and extends to our neighborhoods.”

The Ready Campaign’s focus for 2024 is to encourage all communities, especially those often underserved, to build resilience through conversation and preparedness. Simple steps can be taken to initiate these important discussions:

- Set Aside Time: Choose a calm, relaxed moment to discuss emergency plans with family members.
- Gradual Discussions: Spread out the conversations to avoid rushing decisions and to make everyone feel comfortable. It may be too late to discuss when the emergency occurs. Take time now.
- Share Preparedness Steps: Discuss the steps you have taken and encourage others to ask questions and share their preparedness actions. It may be too late to discuss when the emergency occurs. Take time now.

- Take those discussions and put them into action: Walk through the steps you have discussed. See if they are logical and will work for your situation. Acquire the simple tools you need to protect yourself. Example a flashlight is great, but without the batteries is it that useful?

The ready.gov (<http://ready.gov/>) website provides user-friendly templates and contact cards for children, which include essential family information for them to carry at school in case of an emergency. Creating a family emergency plan can be a quick and engaging process that involves all family members, making it both efficient and collaborative.

For more resources and information on creating a Family Emergency Plan, visit ready.gov (<http://ready.gov/>) or the Center for Threat Preparedness’s website at (<http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/healthprep>)[dhhr.wv.gov/healthprep/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/healthprep/Pages/default.aspx) ([/healthprep/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/healthprep/Pages/default.aspx)). (<http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/healthprep>)

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