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## A Message for All Iowans

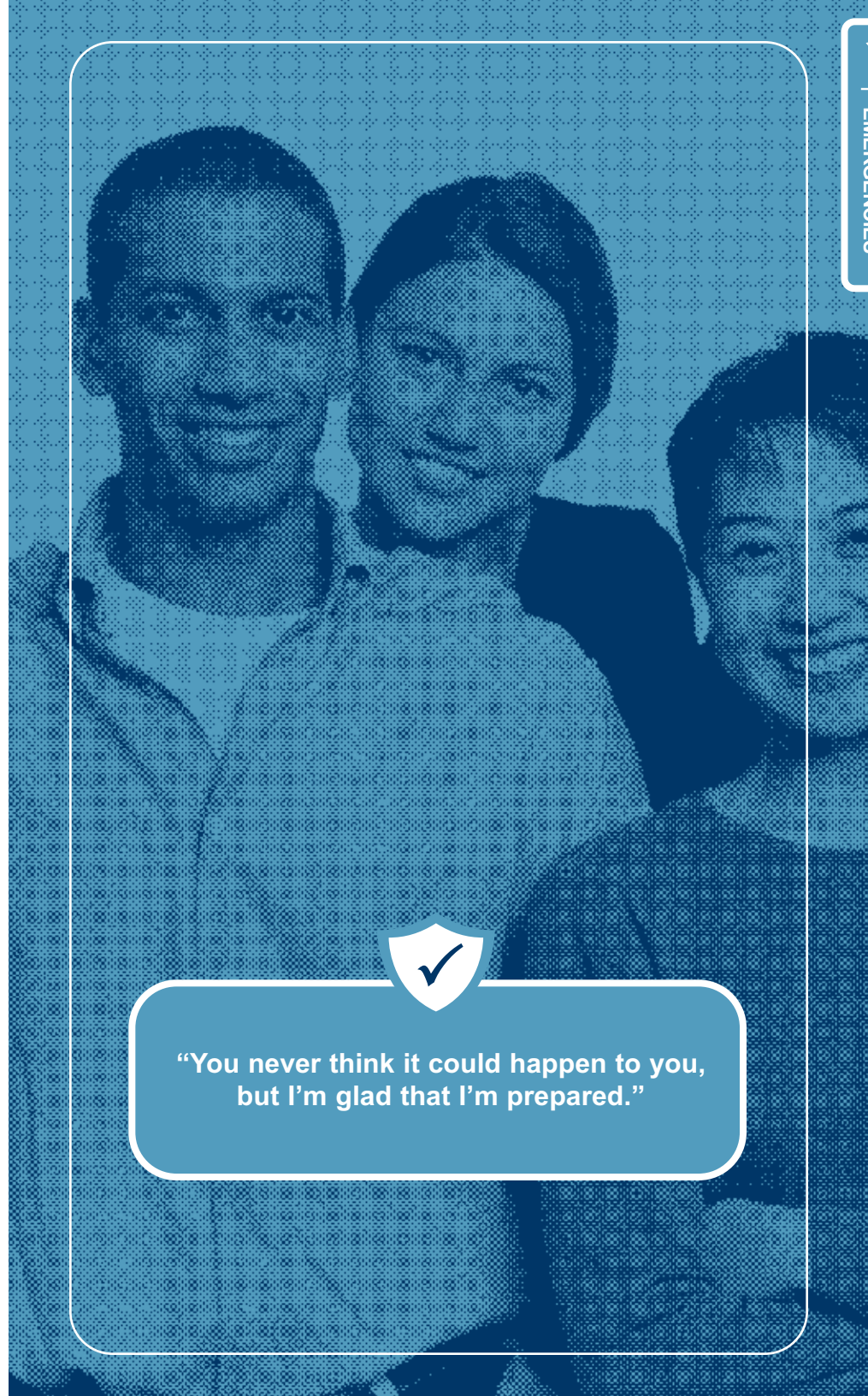
Since the first meeting of the state board of health in 1880, Iowa's organized public health system has continually addressed ways to protect the health of Iowans. For nearly 125 years, public health has defended against smallpox, whooping cough, influenza, and most recently the emergence of the West Nile Virus. However, since the tragic events of 9/11, new public health threats have emerged to include bioterrorism or other health threats.

The Iowa Department of Public Health works with local, state and federal partners in developing plans and creating systems to increase the state's ability to respond to bioterrorism, infectious disease outbreaks and other public health emergencies.

We invite you to be a part of our preparedness effort. In this publication, you'll find information on how to make a plan for communicating with your loved ones and coordinating their actions if a public health emergency occurs. There's also information on making an emergency kit to assure your safety during a public health emergency.

Please take the time to read this guide and share this information with your friends and relatives. Taking action now will help make sure you are ready for the unexpected.

Mary Mincer Hansen, R.N., Ph.D.  
Director  
Iowa Department of Public Health



**"You never think it could happen to you,  
but I'm glad that I'm prepared."**



## Facing the Possibilities

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The purpose of this guide is not to frighten you; however, the variety of threats in our everyday lives has increased. Recent incidents show our world has become more dangerous and we need to take the best actions to be prepared for any potential danger.

There are many types of emergencies that can affect the public's health. Public health emergencies range from man-made threats such as bioterrorism to natural disasters like floods and tornadoes.

Since 9/11, the Iowa Department of Public Health, local public health officials and hospitals have worked to improve the state's response to a public health emergency. Some examples include:

- Expanded public health and hospital laboratory capacity for testing
- Enhanced public health and hospitals' ability to communicate with each other through the Health Alert Network and an 800 MHz radio system
- Established Public Health Response Teams that can help communities during an emergency
- Trained public health, healthcare and EMS professionals
- Implemented decontamination systems at all hospitals
- Established clinic locations for vaccination and medication dispensing during an emergency

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As individuals, we must be aware of our health and safety risks and recognize we have a large measure of control over our own lives. Iowans can rely on public health officials to bring expertise to the front line when dealing with potential public health emergencies.

Any of us could find our health, safety or both in jeopardy during a public health threat or emergency.

There are four important steps to take during a public health emergency:

- Remain calm and have patience
- Use your personal communication plan
- Follow the advice of local and state public health officials
- Listen to your radio or television for additional information





## Public Health Emergencies

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While the spread of many infectious diseases has been controlled through vaccination and other public health efforts, terrorist acts worldwide have raised concerns about the possibility of a biological attack. It is important to understand what can and would be done to protect the public from the spread of infectious diseases.

The public can be infected with diseases in three ways:

- Passed from animals or insects to humans
- Passed from human to human
- Passed from contaminated water or food to humans

Diseases spread from human to human are called contagious and generally pose the greatest risk to the public's health.

### Biological

Biological agents are bacteria, viruses or toxins that can cause deadly diseases in people, livestock and crops.

It is important to know that only a small number of biological agents could be used as terrorist weapons. Most potential agents cannot survive outside of narrow temperature ranges, and are too rare or hard to grow.

## Nuclear or Radiation

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Although a radiological incident is unlikely, everyone should educate themselves on these potential threats and how to deal with them. "Dirty bombs" or radiological dispersal devices mix explosives, such as dynamite, with radioactive materials. "Dirty bombs" are not nuclear weapons and would not create a nuclear explosion. Radiation spread in this manner is likely to be quickly dispersed and reduced to relatively low concentrations.

A nuclear blast is an explosion with intense light and heat, a damaging pressure wave, and widespread radioactive material that can contaminate the air, water and ground surfaces for miles.

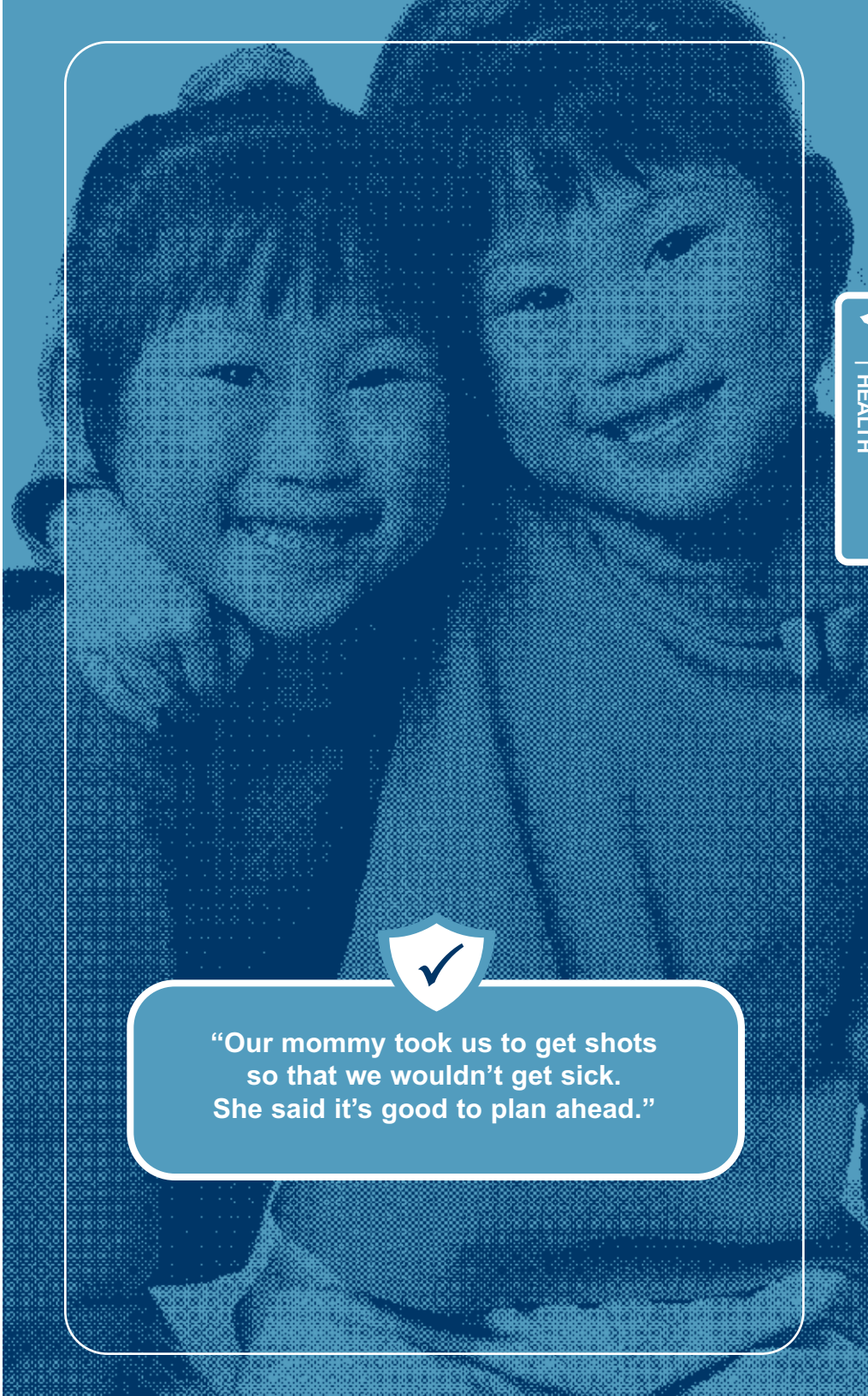
### Chemical Agents

A chemical emergency occurs when a hazardous chemical is released in the air.

Chemical agents are poisonous vapors, aerosols, liquids or solids that have toxic effects on people, animals and plants.

If public health officials detect a biological, nuclear, radiation or chemical threat, they will provide the public with information based on the specific incident. In the meantime, begin using your personal communication plan and emergency kit as necessary.

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“Our mommy took us to get shots so that we wouldn’t get sick. She said it’s good to plan ahead.”



## Prevention

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Vaccines have reduced or eliminated many infectious diseases that once killed or harmed infants, children and adults. If we stop or do not keep up with recommended vaccinations, there is a potential for diseases that have been reduced or even eliminated to come back. More people could get sick and potentially die.

Vaccinations are one of the best ways to put an end to the serious effects of certain diseases.

You can also decrease the spread of disease by taking these six easy steps:

- Update your immunization records
- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
- Stay home and avoid close contact with others if you are sick
- Use bug spray with DEET to repel insects
- Report suspicious activity to law enforcement

### Disease Monitoring and Detection

An important link in public health officials' ability to detect and respond to emergencies is monitoring disease cases and obtaining laboratory results.

Healthcare professionals report infectious diseases to public health officials. Infectious diseases are defined as those spread by a blood-borne route or skin-to-skin contact.

Public health officials monitor health events in the state and track potentially exposed individuals to detect early symptoms.

Monitoring infectious disease is critical to reducing a public health emergency. The purpose for monitoring is to identify the disease and prevent it from spreading.

An important part of detecting an infectious disease is the testing done by our state public health laboratory. During the past three years, Iowa has expanded and improved public health and hospital laboratory testing capabilities.

### Investigations

Once an infectious disease is detected, public health officials are responsible for investigating. The investigation is done to identify those who may have been exposed in order to prevent and control the spread of the infectious disease.



## Control

### Decontamination

If individuals are exposed to biological or chemical agents or radioactive material, they may need to be decontaminated. Decontamination is like taking a shower, washing from head to toe with soap and water. Almost 90% of the contamination can be removed by simply taking your clothes off. Decontamination is an easy, three-step process:

- Remove contaminated clothing
- Wash body
- Cover body with replacement clothing

### Quarantine and Isolation

Two ways that may be used by public health officials to control the spread of infectious disease are quarantine and isolation.

- Quarantine may be used for those who may have been exposed to an infectious disease but may or may not be ill.
- Isolation may be used for those who are known to be ill with an infectious disease.

When someone is exposed to an infectious disease and it is not known if they have caught it, they may be **quarantined** or separated from others not exposed to the disease. For example, the individual(s) may be asked to stay home (home quarantine) to stop potential spread of the infectious disease. They receive special instructions to watch for early symptoms of disease.

When someone is known to be ill with an infectious disease, they may be placed in **isolation** and receive special care (such as in a hospital). Precautions are taken to protect uninfected people from exposure to the infectious disease.

### Medications and Vaccines

During a public health emergency such as a terrorist attack or an infectious disease outbreak, Iowa may need access to large amounts of

medicine and medical supplies. Few states or local governments have the resources to create stockpiles of these supplies; therefore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). The SNS is a large collection of medicine and medical supplies. If SNS supplies are needed in Iowa, they should be delivered within one day.

State and local public health agencies have plans to receive and distribute SNS supplies to communities as quickly as possible. If medication or a vaccine is necessary for preventing or controlling the spread of an infectious disease, you may get information from public health officials on how to protect you and your loved ones—by watching TV, listening to the radio, reading the newspaper, or checking the community web site.

### Are there people in my community who can respond quickly?

People in an affected community will be the first to feel the effect of a public health emergency. Your local health department, hospital or doctor may be the first to recognize the problem and will respond.

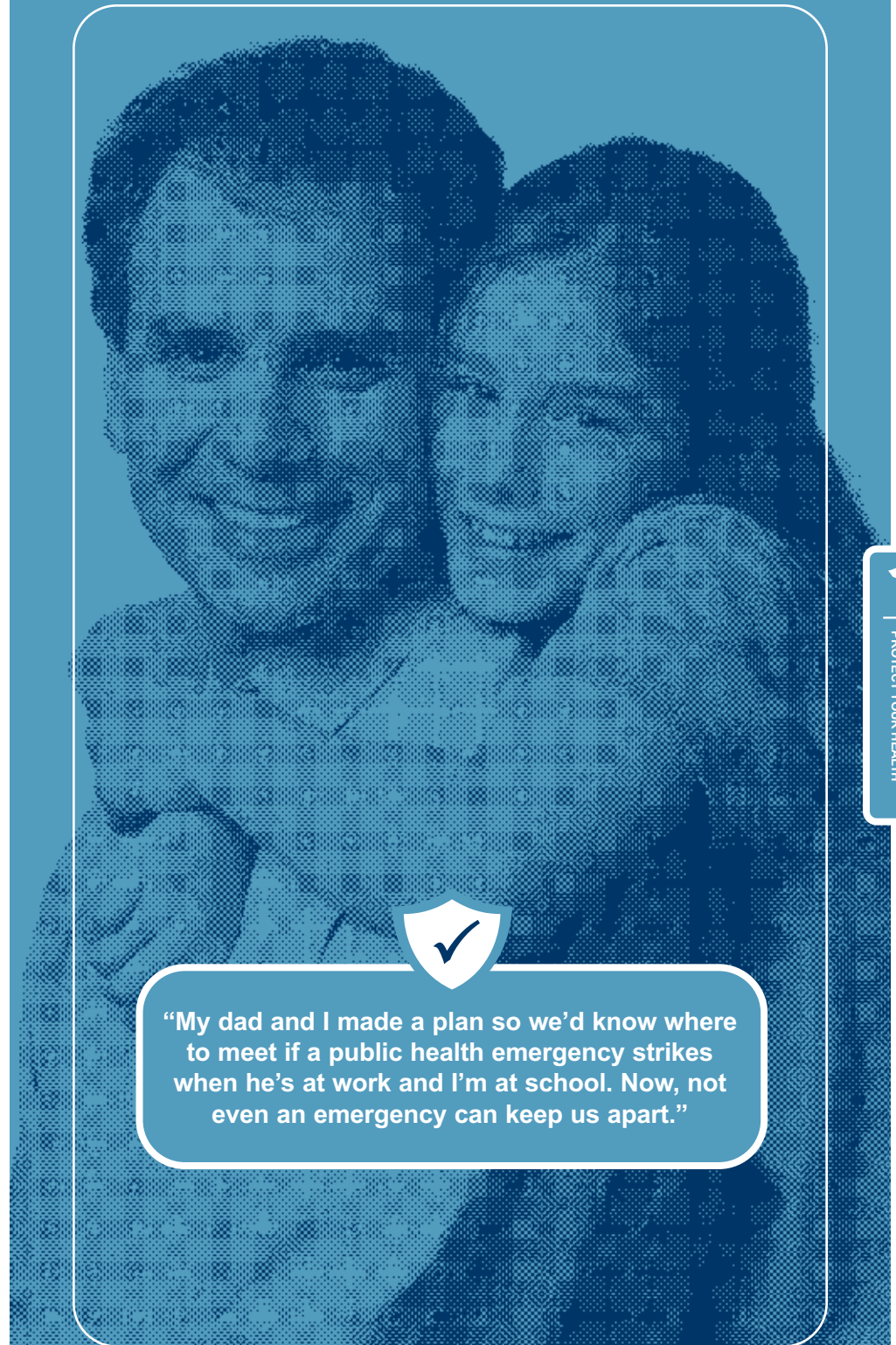
In addition to local resources, the state created Public Health Response Teams (PHRT) to provide medical, public health and environmental health expertise.

There are two teams of expertise:

- Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (IA-DMAT)
- Environmental Health Emergency Response Team (EHERT)

The IA-DMAT provides medical care and public health services to public health emergency victims during the first 24–72 hours after an incident. IA-DMAT members are volunteer doctors, nurses, physician assistants, paramedics and pharmacy technicians who can help overburdened local medical/public health personnel at or near the emergency.

The Environmental Health Emergency Response Team (EHERT) is a partnership between local and state organizations to provide volunteer environmental health services. EHERT is able to assist in areas such as private/public water supplies, wastewater treatment, food safety, air quality, solid waste and mass shelter.



“My dad and I made a plan so we’d know where to meet if a public health emergency strikes when he’s at work and I’m at school. Now, not even an emergency can keep us apart.”



## Taking Action

Taking action to help loved ones, friends and the community after an emergency makes one feel better. Depending on the emergency, lending a hand is done in many ways such as donating blood, filling sandbags or checking on the elderly. Listen to local and state officials about what help they need from the public.



## Make a Plan

Being prepared can reduce fear, anxiety and losses during a disaster. A key part is having a *plan* for what to do in case of an emergency. You need to be ready to react to any situation and take the necessary steps to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Meet with your loved ones to discuss why you need to prepare for a public health emergency. Plan to work together as a team and share responsibilities. Practice and maintain your plan throughout the year.

### Develop a communications plan

Your loved ones may not be together when an emergency strikes. So, you need to establish a plan of communication to keep in close touch, discuss your options and make decisions together.

- Designate a primary place to meet and then choose a backup location outside your neighborhood.
- Designate an emergency contact.

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- Be prepared to use a landline phone or a cell phone.
- Post emergency numbers by all phones in your home.
- Teach all household members how and when to call 911 for emergency assistance.
- Ask an out-of-state friend or relative to be a contact. It's sometimes easier to call out-of-state if local service is disrupted.
- Discuss what to do with your pets.

## At school or work

Talk to your children's schools about their emergency preparedness plans. Find out how they will communicate with you during an emergency.

- Make sure you authorize someone nearby to pick up your children from school in case you are unable to do so yourself during or after an emergency.
- Discuss with your neighbors how you can work together and help each other if an emergency strikes.
- At work, find out what kind of emergency preparedness and communication plans are in place.



## Special considerations

### Elderly or people with disabilities

An elderly person or someone with disabilities may face special challenges if an emergency

strikes. Learning about the challenges and being prepared ahead of time will enable you to better cope with an emergency and recover more quickly.

- Establish a personal support network made up of individuals who will check with you in an emergency.
- You and your personal support network should notify each other when you are going out of town and when you will return.
- Have emergency supplies packed and ready in one place before an emergency hits. Make sure you have enough supplies to last at least three days, including prescription medications. Store them in an easy-to-carry container such as a backpack or duffel bag.
- Be sure your bag and any equipment you need such as a wheelchair, cane or walker has an ID tag.



### **Make an Emergency Supply Kit**

During or after an emergency, you won't have time to search for supplies. There's also a chance stores may not be open to fill even basic needs.

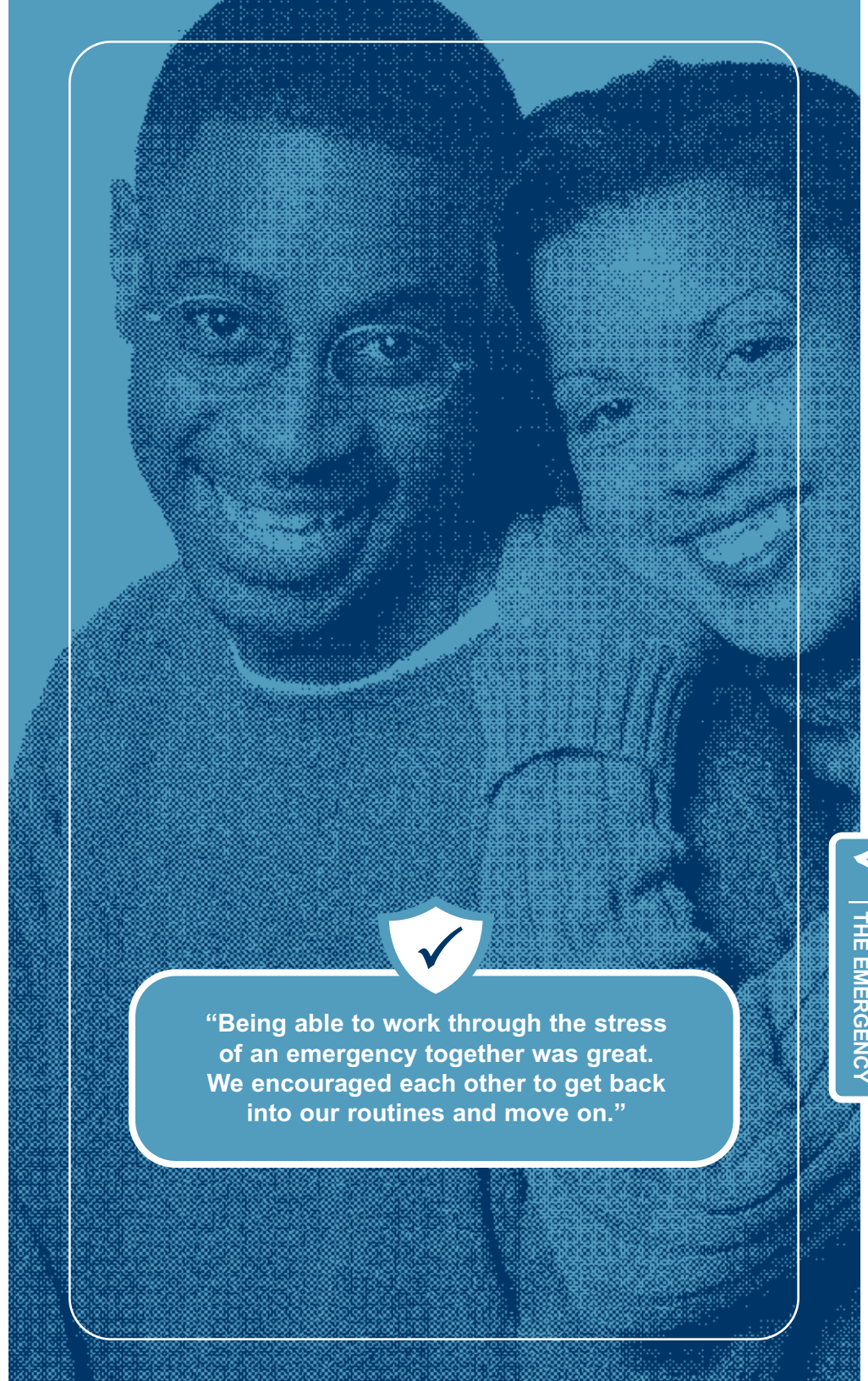
An emergency supply kit, containing necessary items you would need for survival, should be prepared in advance. Keep the kit in an accessible place where you can reach it quickly in case of an emergency—whether you remain at home or evacuate to a safe place. Recommended supplies to include in a basic emergency supply kit:

- Water, at least one gallon per person per day for at least three days, stored in a plastic container
- Food, at least a three-day supply of nonperishable food  
TIP: Don't forget those with special diets such as diabetics.
- A first-aid kit
- Prescription medications—watch for expiration dates
- Battery-powered radio, flashlights and extra batteries
- Can opener
- Bedding for each person
- Personal hygiene items
- Dust mask or cotton T-shirt for each person to help filter the air
- A whistle to signal for help
- A waterproof container—to store important documents such as drivers license, birth certificates, copies of medical prescriptions, insurance policies

### **AFTER ASSEMBLING YOUR KIT**

- Store the kit in a place known to all household members.
- Review the contents of your kit periodically to make sure food and water are fresh and prescription medicines are up-to-date.

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“Being able to work through the stress of an emergency together was great. We encouraged each other to get back into our routines and move on.”



COPING WITH  
THE EMERGENCY



## **Coping/Recovering from an emergency**

### **Returning to “normal”: How to deal with stress and anxiety after an emergency**

Everyone who knows about or directly experiences an emergency is touched by it. Even if an emergency produces little physical damage, it can bring fear, confusion and uncertainty into everyday life.

People are usually able to recover quickly from difficult experiences. If you have problems getting back to normal after an emergency, state and local resources will be available to help.

After an emergency, you and your loved ones are encouraged to take these steps to feel better by reducing stress:

- Avoid watching extended news coverage of the emergency. However, continue to keep tabs on announcements by public health officials.
- Increase physical activity; doing things like talking walks, bike riding, or even housecleaning can help.
- Talk with friends, relatives, teachers or leaders of your faith community about your reaction to the incident.
- Eat healthy foods and get plenty of rest.
- Recognize that stress may make you want to use or abuse tobacco, alcohol or drugs; don't, as they will only make things worse.
- Return to daily routines as soon as possible, especially for children.
- Ask for help when you need it.

If you continue to experience stress symptoms—not sleeping regularly, nervousness, getting tired easily, and a lost interest in what you once felt was important—seek medical help.

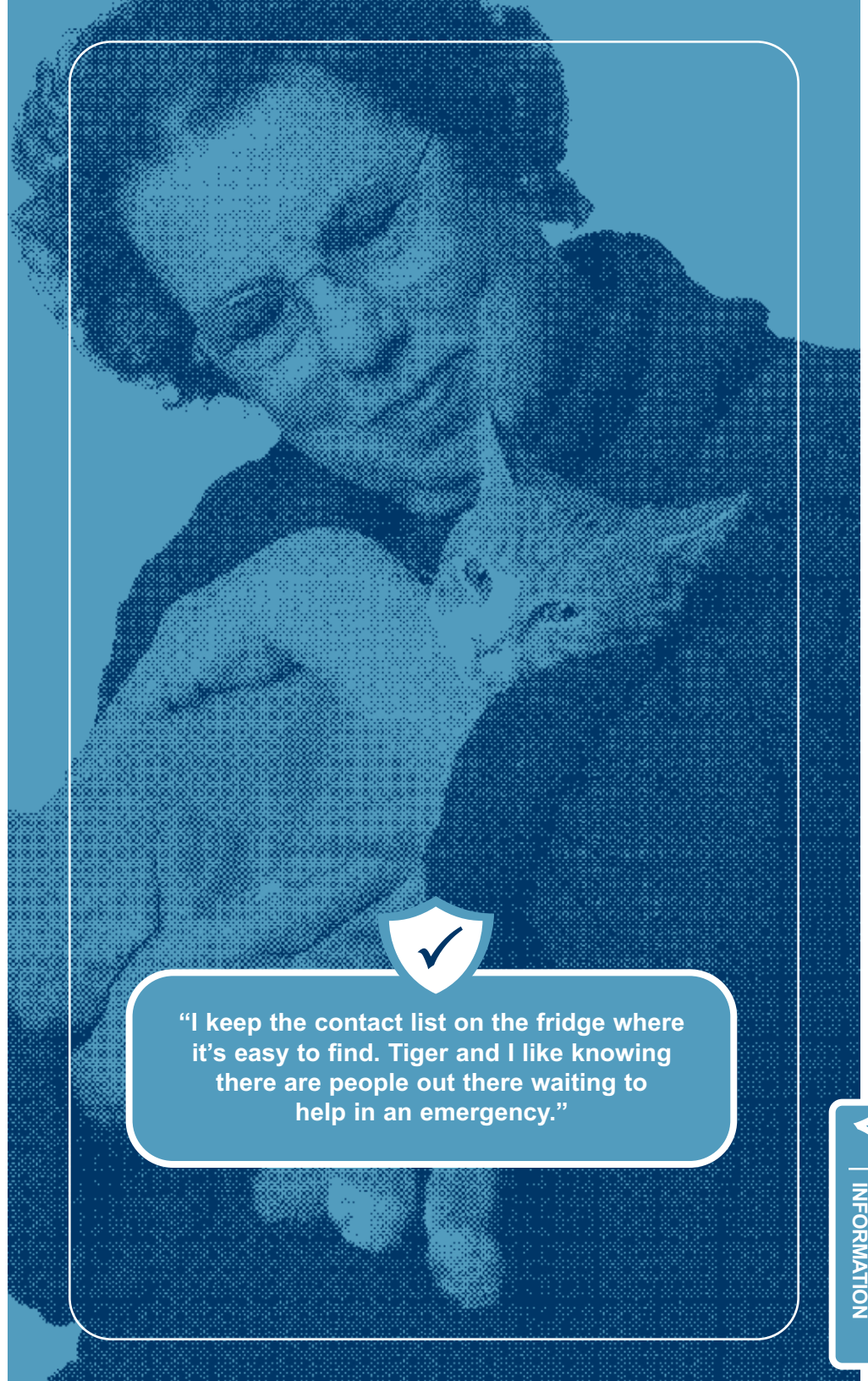
### **Helping children cope with an emergency**

Children are influenced by behaviors and will react based on how they view parents and other adults responding to the emergency.

Here are steps you can take to help children cope with an emergency:

- Reduce their exposure to TV and radio coverage of the situation.
- Listen to their concerns and don't deny what is happening.
- Briefly share facts about the event and use language they understand.
- Encourage them to express feelings by painting or drawing.
- Reestablish their daily routine; it brings stability back to their lives. Children cope better if they are back in school or in daily activities, sharing with peers their experience instead of being kept at home.

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“I keep the contact list on the fridge where it’s easy to find. Tiger and I like knowing there are people out there waiting to help in an emergency.”



## Contacts/Resources

### Emergency Contact Numbers

Ambulance \_\_\_\_\_

Law Enforcement \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital \_\_\_\_\_

Local Public Health \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Iowa Department of Public Health

[www.idph.state.ia.us](http://www.idph.state.ia.us)

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

### U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

[www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)

### Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management

[www.iowahomelandsecurity.com](http://www.iowahomelandsecurity.com)

### Disaster Help

[www.disasterhelp.gov](http://www.disasterhelp.gov)

### American Red Cross

[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

### U.S. Department of Homeland Security

[www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)

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## My Emergency Information

Use this guide to record your personal information:

My Name \_\_\_\_\_

My Cell Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Height/Weight \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor Name & Number \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies \_\_\_\_\_

Medications \_\_\_\_\_

Past Medical History \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Fill out the following information for each household member and keep it up-to-date:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Height/Weight \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor Name & Number \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies \_\_\_\_\_

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Medications \_\_\_\_\_

Past Medical History \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Height/Weight \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor Name & Number \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies \_\_\_\_\_

Medications \_\_\_\_\_

Past Medical History \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Height/Weight \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor Name & Number \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies \_\_\_\_\_

Medications \_\_\_\_\_

Past Medical History \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Complete the following based on the places where your loved ones spend the most time:**

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Neighborhood Meeting Place \_\_\_\_\_

My Work \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Evacuation Location \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Work Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Cell Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Evacuation Location \_\_\_\_\_

School Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Children's Cell Phone Numbers \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Evacuation Location(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Daycare Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Evacuation Location \_\_\_\_\_

Other Place(s) You Frequent \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Evacuation Location \_\_\_\_\_

Other Place(s) You Frequent \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Evacuation Location \_\_\_\_\_

**Other important information:**

Pharmacy \_\_\_\_\_

Homeowners/Renters Insurance \_\_\_\_\_

Policy # \_\_\_\_\_

Claims Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Vehicle Insurance \_\_\_\_\_

Policy # \_\_\_\_\_

Claims Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_



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**Glossary**

**Aerosol:** A gaseous suspension of fine solid or liquid particles.

**Bacteria:** Potentially harmful organisms that live in soil, water and the bodies of plants and animals.

**Bioterrorism:** Terrorist activities that use biological agents to harm or kill victims.

**Contagious:** A disease that can be spread by contact.

**Decontamination:** To clean the area that is contaminated.

**Immunization:** To make immune or protect against a specific disease.

**Infectious:** Capable of causing infection.

**Natural disaster:** Widespread destruction caused by nature—floods, hurricanes, tornadoes.

**Nonperishable:** Food that does not spoil.

**Nuclear:** An atomic explosion.

**Public health emergency:** Anything that poses an urgent threat to the public's health.

**Radiation:** The spreading of usually harmful energy waves—most often referring to nuclear energy.

**Toxin:** A poisonous substance.

**Vaccine:** A substance used for protecting humans against deadly diseases such as smallpox.

**Vapor:** Barely visible or cloudy diffused matter.

**Virus:** An infection that can cause illness in humans and animals.



Produced by the  
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
Acute Disease Prevention & Emergency Response

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