

# Biden-Harris Administration Urges People in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to Stay Alert to Risks from Tropical Storm Ernesto

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WASHINGTON -- Yesterday, President Joseph R. Biden approved an emergency declaration for Puerto Rico. This action authorizes FEMA to provide assistance to save lives and protect property, public health and safety.

As Tropical Storm Ernesto continues to affect Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, FEMA is encouraging people in the storm's path to stay safe, follow the advice of local officials and be prepared for possible extended power outages.

Tropical Storm conditions are expected for the eastern side of Puerto Rico, Culebra, Vieques and the U.S. Virgin Islands through this evening. Those in the storm path may experience high winds and flooding rain, which may prompt evacuations and rescues.

Residents and visitors may experience extensive, long duration power outages. People should avoid travel unless told to evacuate and keep emergency supplies like flashlights, batteries and non-perishable food nearby. Take inventory of the items you need that rely on electricity and plan for alternative power sources like batteries, a portable power charger or power bank. Additionally, it's important to store potable drinking water and have enough non-perishable food.

FEMA's priority is the safety and wellbeing of everyone in the storm's path. A FEMA distribution center in Caguas, Puerto Rico, is ready to mobilize commodities if requested. Additional supplies are pre-staged in St. Thomas on the U.S. Virgin Islands. FEMA personnel, including Mobile Emergency Response Support vehicles and an Urban Search and Rescue Team are in Puerto Rico. Additionally, a US. Army Corps of Engineers Temporary Power Team is deployed to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Response



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Organization team and other personnel are ready to support restoration efforts in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands as needed.

## **FEMA Encourages People in the Storm's Path to Follow These Tips to Stay Safe**

**Be prepared for power outages.** Keep charging your devices as long as you have power. If the power goes out, use only flashlights or battery-powered lanterns for emergency lighting. NEVER use candles during a blackout or power outage due to extreme risk of fire. If you have medications that need refrigeration or rely on medical equipment that requires power, make immediate plans on where you can go to stay safe and healthy. Turn off or disconnect appliances, equipment or electronics. Power may return with momentary surges or spikes that can cause damage.

**Consider your medical needs.** Talk to your medical provider about a power outage plan for medical devices powered by electricity and refrigerated medicines. Find out how long medication can be stored at higher temperatures and get specific guidance for any medications that are critical for life.

**Use generators safely.** Always use generators outdoors and at least 20 feet from windows, doors and attached garages. Make sure to keep the generator dry and protected from rain or flooding.

**Keep food safe.** Keep freezers and refrigerators closed, as this will keep food cold in a refrigerator for about four hours. A full freezer will keep the temperature for about 48 hours.

**Have a plan.** Know how you will keep yourself, your family and your pets safe from flooding and power outages. Make sure you consider your family's unique needs, including anyone who needs medicine or medical equipment. Know how you'll contact one another and reconnect if you aren't together when flooding starts. Visit [Ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) or [Listo.gov](https://www.listo.gov) in Spanish language for more information on how to stay safe before, during and after floods.

**Stay safe during flooding.** Do not walk, swim or drive through flood waters water as it may be contaminated and contain dangerous debris. Additionally, underground or downed power lines can electrically charge the water. Turn



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Around, Don't Drown! Remember, just 6 inches of moving water can knock you down and one foot of moving water can sweep your vehicle away. Stay off bridges over fast-moving water. Never drive around barricades. Local responders use them to safely direct traffic out of flooded areas.

**Be ready to evacuate.** Excessive rainfall may cause waters to rise rapidly or mudslides, so you may need to evacuate with little notice. Having an evacuation plan in place and avoiding unnecessary travel, particularly on roads that may become flooded or damaged. Residents and visitors should pay attention to local officials and heed any guidance, warnings or instructions as risk of flooding continues over the coming days. To find an open shelter, text the word SHELTER and your zip code to 43362 to search for shelters near you. Spanish speakers can text REFUGIO and their zip code to 43362.

**Keep important documents safe.** Having your financial and medical records and important contact information will be crucial to help you start the recovery process quickly. Keep important documents in a waterproof container on a high shelf or upper level of your home. Create password-protected digital copies and move valuables to higher levels.

You can find more information on how to stay safe during and after the storm at [Ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) or [Listo.gov](https://www.listo.gov) in Spanish language. You can also [download the free FEMA App](#) to locate open shelters and receive alerts for up to five areas.

