

# Stay or go? What are my options?

## Staying home?

If you live in an area that is not being evacuated, staying home could be your best option. Staying at home also avoids the hardship of trying to re-enter the county after the storm, when bridges may be damaged and traveling limited.

Before the storm arrives, check on others in the neighborhood to make sure that they are ok and have what they need. If you know someone who may need special needs assistance, tell them to contact their local fire department or call

Emergency Management at (727) 464-3800.

If you can shelter at home, please consider being a host home by offering in advance to host friends, family, colleagues or others you know who need a place to shelter. Start a hurricane club with other people from your neighborhood, social group or place of worship. Companionship during a hurricane can be a great comfort, and teamwork to prepare and stock up for the event makes the work much easier.

## I may have to evacuate, where will I go?

Once you know you may have to evacuate you have several options: family and friends, host homes, leaving town, hotels and public shelters. Public shelter should be your last resort.

Remember, you only need to evacuate to higher ground. The best evacuation plan could be a 15-minute ride to one of your options. Think 10s of miles, not 100s.



## Host home

Not everyone has friends or family who live in non-evacuation areas or higher evacuation levels like levels D and E. Those with nowhere to go often are forced to stay in a public shelter, or worse, they stay at home, which could be a deadly decision. That is why the host home program is one of the greatest services that an organization can provide its members.

By using the tools provided on the Pinellas County website, you can match up people who have to evacuate with people who do not. Churches, civic groups, community organizations and other agencies can easily provide this service. Learn more at [www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/hosthomes.htm](http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/hosthomes.htm).

### Businesses can also consider opening up the facility to employees and families.

All host homes should consider welcoming pets. Be clear on the “rules” if you do so. Even if you require that they stay in a carrier, they will still be safe and the owner will be grateful. If you can’t host anyone but have room for pets, consider making the offer to shelter one or two. This would give the pet owner more options for their own evacuation plans.

If you are invited to stay at a host home for the duration of the hurricane, be a part of the preparations, helping to secure the house and yard, gather emergency supplies and even sharing the cost of a generator so that you can all be more comfortable in the days that follow a hurricane.

## Leaving town

If you decide to evacuate the county, plan to leave days ahead of the hurricane—generally before an evacuation order—to beat overbooked flights and jam-packed highways.

Plan on traveling to an area that is nowhere near the hurricane’s potential path. There are many examples of people evacuating to other parts of Florida, or to a state to the north, where the hurricane ends up hitting the hardest. The path of a hurricane changes—

often at the last minute—and a single storm can be hundreds of miles wide.

After the hurricane passes, you may not be able to get back into the county right away. Flights may be canceled, highways closed and bridges damaged. Traffic may be restricted until it is safe.

If you know you have to be available right after the storm, consider other options.

## Hotel

Be sure to make reservations early and call ahead to confirm. Look for pet-friendly lodgings for your cats and dogs and check pet policies. Check the evacuation level of the hotel you plan to use to make

sure it will not need to evacuate. Choose wisely and remember to leave early enough so that you can travel safely.

## How will I get there?

If you have to evacuate, be ready to leave your home early because all of these services will stop when conditions get dangerous.

- **If you are in need of transportation to a shelter,** PSTA buses run free to shelters during evacuations as long as it is safe. They also run regular routes. Buses will stop running just before the winds increase to give staff time to reach safety.
- **If you need transportation or have special medical needs,** call Emergency Management at (727) 464-3800 or your local fire department. They can pre-register you for a ride to a regular shelter

or for a special needs shelter. You also may register online at [www.pinellascounty.org/specialneeds](http://www.pinellascounty.org/specialneeds).

- **If you are driving to your safe place,** be sure to fill your gas tank as early as possible, get cash and bring your Go Kit. Your goal should be to have all preparations done by the time an evacuation order is issued so you can leave as soon as the order comes out.
- **If you plan to use taxis or other commercial transportation services, do so early.** These drivers may have to evacuate themselves and may stop providing transportation during an emergency.

## Why are shelters a last resort?

Think of a shelter as a lifeboat, not a cruise ship.



### What public shelters are:

- Safe places to go during dangerous weather.
- Located at public schools, community centers and churches.
- Crowded—in a major evacuation, each person could have a two-foot by five-foot space.
- Noisy, bright and busy.
- Uncomfortable, especially when they lose power.



### What public shelters are NOT:

- Quiet.
- Clean.
- They do not take reservations.
- They do not have cots or air mattresses or mats.
- Most do not have generators, expect it to get warm.
- They do not have much room so only bring your Go Kit with supplies we recommend (see page 11).

Be safe and take shelter during the storm. Consider other options first, but you will never be turned away if you go to an open shelter.



### What do I need to bring to a shelter?

- Change of clothes for three to five days.
- While food and water is supplied, you must bring your own food if you have any dietary needs (*Diabetes, gluten free, allergies, etc.*). Consider bringing some of your own comfort foods and snacks as well.
- Medication (*2 week supply*).
- Twin-size air mattress, chair or yoga mat to sleep on.
- Ear plugs, sleeping mask.
- Important papers.
- Flashlights.

**For special needs sheltering, please see additional items on page 8.**