

# What are “special needs” shelters?

Pinellas County’s special needs shelter program is intended for those who need transportation and/or require MINIMAL medical assistance. Registration is required for those needing transportation.

## Three ways to register for a special needs shelter:

- 1) Fill out a form at [www.pinellascounty.org/specialneeds](http://www.pinellascounty.org/specialneeds).
- 2) Call Pinellas County Emergency Management at (727) 464-3800.
- 3) Call your nearest fire department. If you have a home health care provider, discuss this with them.

Once you are registered, a medical needs review will determine your eligibility for a special needs shelter. If you do not qualify, other options will be discussed with you.



The county has three special needs shelters for residents. Plan ahead and communicate with friends, family or caregivers if you will need extra help

evacuating and sheltering during a storm.

If you have your own transportation, registration is NOT required but is strongly recommended.

If you make other arrangements after you register, you are not obligated to go to the shelter.

Keep in mind that the shelter will be inside a school and will likely be crowded and noisy. It will be safe, but it is not for everyone.

If you live in a nursing home or assisted living facility, contact the administrator about emergency plans. Let friends/family know the plan and share important contacts with them.

If you are homebound or receive home health services, discuss your plans with your caregiver.

## Important things to know when going to a special needs shelter:

- It is recommended that you bring a family member or a caregiver with you to the shelter.
- Personnel from Pinellas County Schools and Florida Department of Health provide staffing at special needs shelters.
- Assistance is limited to medical monitoring, oxygen and some backup electricity.
- Oxygen is available, but the shelter could lose air conditioning in a power outage.
- Bedding is not available in large amounts. Bring a twin-sized air mattress. Residents who are unable to sleep on the floor should consider a hotel or a host home. (See page 6.)
- Bring your “Go Kit.”
- Let an out-of-town contact know where you are going.
- Wear comfortable clothes and sturdy shoes.
- Service animals that are trained to assist a person with a disability are allowed in any shelter, hotel or motel—no registration required. Remember to pack their supplies too.

Your pets will not be allowed to be with you in the special needs shelter. It is important to make prior arrangements for your pets. Dogs and cats with no arrangements will be cared for by Pinellas County Animal Services, who will bring your pet to the Pinellas County shelter and return them to you when you return home.

### What to take to a special needs shelter:

- Any durable medical equipment or supplies you may need such as:
  - Portable oxygen.
  - Eyeglasses.
  - Nebulizer.
  - Wheelchair, walker or cane.
  - Hearing aids with batteries.
  - Oxygen concentrator.



- Medications in the original container (2-week supply). During a state of emergency, there is no time requirement for refills.
- Printed updated list of prescriptions/dosages. (Ask your pharmacist.)
- Wearable medical alert tag.
- Blanket, pillow, cot, folding chair or air mattress. (Special needs shelter cots are limited in number.)
- Complete change of clothing for several days.
- Activities (cards, games, books).
- Special dietary items (sugar-free, low sodium, gluten-free, etc.) with can opener if required.
- Personal hygiene items (toothbrush, wipes, soap, hairbrush, adult diapers).
- Talking or braille clock.
- Pen and paper.
- Flashlight and batteries.
- Portable radio and batteries.
- Phone and backup battery.
- Earplugs, headphones, sleep mask.
- Important papers, valid ID, insurance card.
- Printed list of contacts.
- Written instructions or orders regarding your care.



## How do I prepare for my pets?

Just like other members of the family, pets need to be part of your disaster plan. If you have to evacuate, do you know if pets are allowed where you are planning to stay? If you are staying home, what will your pet need if your family must survive without basic necessities after a storm?



### Sheltering With Your Pet

- If you will evacuate during a storm, make sure the host home, hotel or shelter where you are going accepts your type of pet.
- Call Visit St. Pete/Clearwater at (727) 464-7200 for options or search the web for pet-friendly hotels in the area. Some hotels have emergency policies to take pets in an evacuation.
- Do not assume a kennel will take your pet in an emergency. Call ahead to find kennels in non-evacuation zones that could take your pet. Kennels require proof of vaccinations.
- Animal shelters, such as Pinellas County Animal Services or SPCA Tampa Bay, CANNOT accept your pets during an emergency.
- If you plan to stay with a family member or friend outside the evacuation zone, ask them now whether you can bring your pet.

### Horses.

- There are no public park areas to leave horses during an evacuation, so it is important to make arrangements in advance. More information is available from the University of Florida/IFAS

Extension <https://vetmed-extension.sites.medinfo.ufl.edu/files/2011/10/Hurricane-planning-for-horse-farms.pdf>

### Build a go kit for your pet.

- Download the county’s pet identification form at [www.pinellascounty.org/animalservices](http://www.pinellascounty.org/animalservices), fill it in and tape it to your pet’s kennel.
- Immunization records.
- County rabies tag.
- Food & water with bowls (two-week supply) – can opener if needed.
- Carrier or portable kennel (with room to stand and turn around).
- Muzzle, collar and leash.
- Medications.
- Toys/blanket.
- Cat litter, pan and scoop.
- Plastic waste bags.
- Disinfectant.
- Paper towels.
- Take a photo of your pet to keep with you.

Remember, if you must evacuate, you may have to care for your pet for an extended period of time. Plan accordingly.

**If you do not yet have a carrier for your pet, purchase one now.** They may not be available later in the season.

### Post-disaster lost pets

After a storm, stray animals will be picked up and taken to temporary collection sites and then transferred to more permanent sites that will be announced to the public. If you lose your pet, look in the area around your home or call Animal Services at (727) 582-2600.

### Volunteer for pet pickup

Residents who will be brought to special needs shelters will have their pets cared for by Animal Services. Can you help the county transport pets for citizens with special needs during an evacuation? Call Animal Services at (727) 582-2600 for more information.

## Should I involve my kids?

Definitely! Make plans with the whole family.

- Let children help build your emergency preparedness kit (see page 11).
- Use matter-of-fact language to discuss safety steps you will take.
- Play “let’s pretend” games with young children to help them work out “what if” situations.

### Helpful Links

Becoming Storm Smart • Pinellas County Emergency Management <https://youtu.be/qtNhzrm-fEo>

Pinellas County Hurricanes for Kids Activity Book [www.pinellascounty.org/kids](http://www.pinellascounty.org/kids)

Kids Get a Plan • Florida Division of Emergency Management [www.kidsgetaplan.com](http://www.kidsgetaplan.com)

Owlie Skywarn • National Weather Service [www.weather.gov/owlie](http://www.weather.gov/owlie)

Ready for Kids • National Hurricane Center [www.ready.gov/kids](http://www.ready.gov/kids)

Weather Wiz Kids [www.weatherwizkids.com/weather-hurricane.htm](http://www.weatherwizkids.com/weather-hurricane.htm)