



# The First 72 Hours

A fill-in playbook for the window that decides everything. Work through it once, in about 20 minutes, with a pencil — then tape it inside a cupboard door.

## By the last page you will have

- your household water number — counted, not guessed
- a 0–72 hour action map you can follow half-awake
- your three written “we leave” triggers + a 15-minute exit
- a packed-bag checklist with a weight budget
- a family rally + comms plan that fits a wallet
- the water, rehydration and bleeding basics, readable

## Inside

1 · The 72-hour map 2 · Your mind 3 · Signal scoring 4 · Stay or go 5 · The 15-minute exit 6 · Water baseline 7 · The bag 8 · Caught away from home 9 · Family plan 10 · Medical minimum 11 · Sources & next steps

**12 PAGES · 7 WORKSHEETS · ABOUT 20 MINUTES WITH A PENCIL**

**How to use this.** Print it (US Letter, double-sided is fine). Use a pencil. Fill the grey boxes before anything happens — a plan written during a crisis is a worse plan. Emergency number in your region: **911**.

## Something happening right now? The first 30 minutes

**1 · Stop.** Freeze; breathe in 4 – hold 4 – out 6, three rounds. **2 · Account for everyone.** Where is each household member right now? **3 · Score the signals** (page 4) — two verified facts, one official source. **4 · Make the stay-or-go call** (page 5). **5 · First action:** staying › fill every container with mains water now; leaving › run the 15-minute exit (page 6).

**Calm day today?** Then start with the companion guide — **Before the Crisis**, the household baseline audit. Measure first, so this playbook has something to work with. Both free at [systemsfaillab.com](https://systemsfaillab.com).

## The starter kit — four pieces, all free

1 · This playbook	2 · Before the Crisis — the baseline audit	3 · Resilience Score, online	4 · The Thursday Briefing
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A free starter from Systems Fail Lab — calm, source-cited household resilience for US households. The full domain-by-domain system lives at [systemsfaillab.com](https://systemsfaillab.com). Drawn from public guidance: FEMA/Ready.gov, CDC, American Red Cross, NWS, WHO. Educational reference, not professional advice. v2.1 · June 2026.

## PART 1 · THE CORE

# The 72-hour map

Four windows close in sequence. Most critical errors are made by waiting — do the window you are in, then stop and rest. Tick as you go.

**0–6 HOURS — VERIFY AND TOP UP, DON'T DRIVE**

- Confirm what actually happened: official alerts, NOAA Weather Radio, local AM/FM — two independent sources, not social media.
- If mains water still runs: fill bottles, pots and the bathtub now. It costs nothing if this turns out minor.
- Charge every phone and power bank; switch phones to power-saving.
- Cash check: if queues are short, withdraw enough for ~3 days (\$100-200, small notes).
- Walk the home once: heating/cooling, fridge, locks, torch within reach. Do not start a long drive into the unknown.

**6–24 HOURS — THE TOP-UP WINDOW**

- One calm shop run if streets are normal: water, no-cook food, batteries, hygiene — needs, not hoarding.
- Medication check for every household member — is there 7+ days of anything critical?
- Set an information rhythm: check news at fixed times (e.g. 08:00 / 14:00 / 20:00), stay off the feed between.
- Agree the family rally plan (page 10) with everyone who lives with you.
- Eat from the fridge first, freezer second, shelf last — keep both doors closed otherwise.

**24–48 HOURS — SETTLE INTO A RHYTHM**

- Re-score the situation (page 4). Better, worse, or same as yesterday?
- Check on one neighbour who may need it — most sustained crises are survived together.
- Water discipline: drinking first, cooking second, washing last. Note your remaining gallons.
- Rotate phone use; one device can stay off as a reserve.
- Sleep properly. A tired brain makes the bad version of every decision on this page.

**48–72 HOURS — REASSESS, DECIDE, DON'T DRIFT**

- Run Stay-or-Go honestly (page 5) — conditions, not feelings.
- If staying: inventory food, water, meds, cash. Plan the next 72 hours on paper.
- If leaving: leave early in the day, tank above half if possible, route + backup route written down.
- Tell your out-of-area contact your status and your plan, however short.

Field rule: act on the window you are in. If you skipped one, do not catch up in panic — start where you are.

**Incident log — anchor your timeline, in pencil**

When I first noticed something wrong (date / time)	
What confirmed it (two sources)	
Which window we are in right now	

## PART 1 · THE CORE

# Your mind is the first enemy

When something major hits, the first obstacle is not the event — it is normalcy bias. The brain insists “this is temporary” precisely when acting is cheap and options are open. The first three days decide your options; for most of those hours you should assume no outside help.

**KEY PRINCIPLE.** Postponing the decision is itself a decision — usually the wrong one. Act while the window is open: shops stocked, fuel available, roads clear, head clear.

## The STOP protocol — four steps, fixed order

For the moment your pulse is up and your thinking narrows. Five seconds for the first step, two minutes for the last.

<b>S</b>	<b>Stop physically.</b> Freeze in place. Do not pack, post, or call anyone yet — stop the body first, the mind follows.
<b>T</b>	<b>Take 4-second breaths.</b> In 4, hold 4, out 4 — three rounds. This is mechanical, not spiritual: it slows the heart enough to think.
<b>O</b>	<b>Observe.</b> What do I actually <i>see and hear</i> — not what do I fear? Two facts you can verify. Then one official source.
<b>P</b>	<b>Plan one step.</b> The next 30 minutes only, not the whole crisis. Then return to the 72-hour map.

## The four windows that close

<b>0–12 h</b>	Shops open, ATMs work, fuel available — everything is still cheap and easy.
<b>12–36 h</b>	Queues, first empty shelves, first frictions — the same actions cost more nerve.
<b>36–72 h</b>	Shops closing, fuel scarce, cash only — late movers compete for what is left.
<b>72 h +</b>	The window is shut. You live on what you secured in the first three days.

## Fill in now — your 3 a.m. defaults

At 3 a.m. to a fire alarm or a blackout, you will not invent a plan. Decide it here:

If I wake to an alarm, the first thing I do is	
Our torch / headlamp lives at (exact spot)	
The grab-bag lives at (exact spot)	
First official source I check	

## Three failure modes — name them and they lose power

“It will pass” (normalcy bias)	Antidote: act on conditions, not hope — the signal table on page 4.
“We’ve already invested in staying”	Antidote: sunk costs don’t vote. Only the next 72 hours do.
“The neighbours aren’t leaving”	Antidote: they are watching you too. Follow your written triggers (page 5).

## PART 2 · WORKSHEETS

## Worksheet 1 · Signal scoring

Not every warning needs action, and not every threat comes with a warning. Score five domains; three independent signals pointing the same way almost always justify action — one rarely does. Read the band, not the number.

Domain	1–3 · WATCH	4–6 · RISK	7–9 · CRITICAL	My score
Power	Short local outages	Rolling cuts announced	Multi-day outage, no ETA	
Comms	Slow data	Calls failing intermittently	Mobile network down	
Banking	One ATM empty	Card payments refused in places	ATMs offline / withdrawal limits	
Supply	Gaps on some shelves	Staples rationed	Shops closed / fuel gone	
Civil order	Tense news, calm streets	Demonstrations, police cordons	Curfew / violence nearby	

## TOTAL 15 OR LESS

Monitor. Live normally; re-score tomorrow.

## 16 – 30

Prepare. Run the 6–24 h top-up window now, while it is cheap and calm.

## 31 +

Act. Execute the map, run Stay-or-Go today, brief the household.

## My go-to information sources — fill in now, not during an incident

Official alert channel (e.g. Wireless Emergency Alerts, county alert sign-up)

National / local broadcaster (works on a battery radio)

Utility / grid operator status page

Neighbourhood / community channel (group chat, noticeboard)

**The single-signal trap.** One dramatic signal — a viral video, one empty shelf — is how panic starts, not how decisions are made. Three boring signals pointing the same way beat one loud one. Score the table, not your feed.

## Score log — run it today for a calm-day baseline, then whenever things feel off

Date	Power	Comms	Banking	Supply	Civil	TOTAL
today (baseline)						

## PART 2 · WORKSHEETS

## Worksheet 2 · Stay or go

The single most important decision in any major disruption — and the one most people get wrong by waiting. Decide cold, on paper, across conditions. If leaving will only get harder from here, go. Re-score every 12–24 hours.

### STAY — shelter in place when...

- Home structurally sound
- Utilities at least partly working
- Supplies at least 3 days in hand
- Medical needs covered
- No advancing threat

### GO — evacuate when...

- Threat is advancing toward you
- Utilities failing with no estimate
- Official evacuation order for your zone
- Roads still passable outward
- Destination confirmed + vehicle fuelled

More ticks on the right than the left › go. Tied › re-score in 12 hours, and prepare to go.

### My three “we leave” triggers — write them while calm

Infrastructure (e.g. power out > 24 h AND below 32 °F / above 95 °F indoors)

Safety (e.g. mandatory evacuation order for our zone)

Health (e.g. air quality hazardous AND vulnerable member)

### Where we would go — both tested within the last 12 months

Destination	Distance	Route + backup	Contact there
A (near, ~30 miles)			
B (far, ~300 miles)			

### Re-score log — every 12–24 hours, in pencil

Date / time	Ticks STAY	Ticks GO	Decision

## PART 2 · WORKSHEETS

## Worksheet 3 · The 15-minute exit

A practised 15-minute evacuation is faster, calmer and more complete than an unpractised 45-minute one. Map who does what once, then time the household against it — one calm weekend run, treated like a fire drill.

Minute	Do	Who
0–1	Confirm the go decision <b>out loud</b> to the household. One short call to the out-of-area contact.	
1–3	Grab the bag (page 7), medications, documents wallet. They are pre-packed — this is lifting, not deciding.	
3–5	Gas and electricity off — only if safe and you already know where the shut-offs are.	
5–8	Load the car (or shoulder the bags). Head count. Every phone charged and on a person.	
8–12	Verify route and backup route. Fuel check. Text the destination to the out-of-area contact.	
12–15	Pets, keys, one last sweep. Note on the door: time, destination, who is with you.	
<b>GO</b>	Primary route. If it is blocked, switch to the backup once — do not improvise a third on the move.	

**Time yourselves this week.** If you cannot reach the 8-minute mark loaded and counted, that stage is your bottleneck — fix that one thing first.

## Destination and route — fill in while calm

Primary destination (address)	
Primary route (road names)	
Backup destination if primary unavailable	
Backup route	
Distance to primary · fuel needed	

**What you do not take:** anything you can re-buy in a week. The trap is not forgetting things — it is packing for a holiday while the window closes. Bag, documents, meds, people, pets. Done.

## Practice log

Date	Time to loaded + counted	Bottleneck found	Fixed?

Pairs with Stay-or-go (page 5): the triggers decide *when*, this page decides *how*.

## PART 2 · WORKSHEETS

## Worksheet 4 · Water baseline

Water is the only resource where running out causes problems within 24 hours — everything else gives you days. Planning figure: **1 gallon per person per day** for drinking and basic cooking (WHO emergency minimum), × 3 days. Count what you actually have — bottled, filtered, stored tap water. Tap in the kettle does not count.

Household size	72-hour target	I have now	Gap to buy/store
Household of 1	<b>3 gal</b>		
Household of 2	<b>6 gal</b>		
Household of 3	<b>9 gal</b>		
Household of 4	<b>12 gal</b>		
Household of 5	<b>15 gal</b>		
Household of 6	<b>18 gal</b>		

Mark the fill date on containers with a permanent marker; rotate every 6 months.

### Making suspect water drinkable — in order of preference

<b>1 · BOIL</b>	Rolling boil for <b>1 minute</b> (3 minutes above ~2,000 m / 6,500 ft). Kills everything biological. Does nothing for chemicals.
<b>2 · CHLORINE</b>	Unscented household bleach 5–6%: <b>2 drops per quart</b> of clear water (double if cloudy), mix, wait <b>30 minutes</b> . Faint chlorine smell = correct dose.
<b>3 · TABLETS / FILTER</b>	Purification tablets per pack instructions, or a 0.2-micron portable filter. Filter first if the water is murky — cloth or coffee filter works.

### Counts / doesn't count

<b>Counts:</b> sealed bottled water · filtered water in clean closed containers · tap water stored in food-grade bottles with a fill date	<b>Doesn't:</b> whatever is in the kettle · open jugs · pond or pool water (untreated) · juice and fizzy drinks (hydration tax)
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### Reserves you already own — most households forget all three

Hot-water tank / boiler	30–80 qt of usable water. Turn off power to the tank first, let it cool, drain from the valve.
Toilet cistern (the tank, not the bowl)	5–9 qt, fine for washing; drink only if no cleaning blocks are used, after treatment.
Ice, frozen food drip, kettle, pipes	Small amounts — but in a real shortage every quart counts. Melt, filter, boil.

### My storage spots

Main store (cool, dark, off the floor)	
Backup (car / cellar / workplace)	

Sources: WHO household water guidance; EPA emergency disinfection figures.

## PART 2 · WORKSHEETS

## Worksheet 5 · The bag

A grab bag is a mobility kit, not a hoard — its only job is to get you from here to somewhere safer. Target **18–26 lb (8–12 kg)** total. Pack weight low and close to your back. The test: walk 3 miles at a brisk pace with it. If you can't, it's too heavy.

Item	Have	Packed
<b>CORE</b>		
Water: 2 qt + a compact filter or tablets		
Food: 3 days, no-cook, calorie-dense (nuts, bars, tinned fish)		
Personal medication 7 days + copy of prescriptions		
First-aid: gloves, gauze, tape, dressings, painkillers		
<b>WARMTH &amp; SHELTER</b>		
Bivy bag or emergency blanket		
Hat + one full dry layer, sealed in a zip bag		
Rain shell or poncho		
<b>LIGHT &amp; POWER</b>		
Headlamp + spare batteries		
Power bank (charged, checked monthly) + cables		
<b>DOCUMENTS &amp; MONEY</b>		
IDs / passports (or certified copies) in zip bag		
Insurance + key records, paper + USB scans		
Cash \$100–200 in small notes		
Spare house + car keys		
<b>COMMS &amp; NAVIGATION</b>		
Paper map of your region + written contact card		
Whistle; small battery/crank radio if you have one		
<b>HYGIENE</b>		
Soap, toothbrush, small towel, spare zip bags		
<b>OFTEN FORGOTTEN</b>		
Work gloves + FFP2/N95 masks (dust, smoke, crowds)		
Duct tape (small roll) + permanent marker		
Per child: one comfort item + snack they actually like		
Phone numbers on paper (when the battery dies, so does the contact list)		

Once packed: weigh it, walk the test distance, then put it at the exact spot you wrote on page 3. Re-check batteries and meds every 6 months.

## PART 2 · WORKSHEETS

## Worksheet 6 · Caught away from home

Most plans quietly assume everyone is at home when something goes wrong. Often you will not be — you at work, children at school, partner in transit. This page is for that day.

**THE 30-MINUTE RULE.** If you cannot confirm contact within 30 minutes of an incident, everyone goes to the agreed meeting point. Nobody travels *towards* anybody: two people moving towards each other on disrupted routes pass each other. A fixed point does not move.

### Where is everyone on a normal weekday?

Person	Usual location	Distance home	Route home with no transport

### Children — the school protocol

School + emergency contact number	
School's emergency collection policy	
Backup collector (authorised with the school in advance)	
Walking route school › home / meeting point	

### The walk-home kit — lives at the workplace or in the car

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comfortable flat shoes<br><input type="checkbox"/> Small torch + spare battery<br><input type="checkbox"/> Power bank, kept charged<br><input type="checkbox"/> Paper map of your area | <input type="checkbox"/> Cash \$20-50 in small notes<br><input type="checkbox"/> Written contact card (numbers + addresses)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Water bottle + energy bar<br><input type="checkbox"/> Light rain layer |
|---|--|

### If it starts while you are driving

- Pull over somewhere legal and safe; hazards on; engine stays on for radio and charging
  Never drive into water — 30 cm moving water shifts a car
  If traffic is solid, parking and walking often beats crawling

### Pocket audit — what is on you right now

- Phone above 50% as a habit
  Small power bank
  Cash \$20-50
  One day of any critical medication
  Torch (tested)

Run it for what you carry *today*, not what you own. Add the one missing item tomorrow — the first ten minutes of anything you experience away from home are decided by what is already on you.

## PART 2 · WORKSHEETS

## Worksheet 7 · Family plan — cut out, fold, wallet

Mobile networks are the most fragile infrastructure in a crisis. This half-page is what still works when the bars disappear. Fill one per household member; photograph it as backup.

Household members + phones	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
Rally point 1 — near home (if separated locally)	
Rally point 2 — outside the area (if home unreachable)	
Out-of-area contact — name + number (everyone reports here)	
School / work pickup plan for dependants	

### The communication ladder — try in this order, then stop draining batteries

1	One short voice call to the out-of-area contact: "Safe. At X. Plan Y."
2	SMS — text often passes when calls fail. Same three facts.
3	Messenger over any working data / public Wi-Fi.
4	FRS walkie-talkie (licence-free) — agree the channel now and write it here: CH ____
5	Paper note in an agreed spot (door frame, rally point): time, status, direction.

Charge rule: phones to power-saving at the first sign of trouble; one device may stay off as the reserve.

### Wallet card — fill in, cut along the border, fold once

OUT-OF-AREA CONTACT	RALLY 1 (near home)
RALLY 2 (out of area)	RADIO CH _____ · EMERGENCY 911

Second copy — one card per adult, plus one in each child's school bag:

OUT-OF-AREA CONTACT	RALLY 1 (near home)
RALLY 2 (out of area)	RADIO CH _____ · EMERGENCY 911

## PART 3 · MEDICAL MINIMUM

## Three things worth knowing by heart

**This page is pointers, not training.** A 4-hour first-aid course (Red Cross or equivalent) turns this into reflex — book one. Reference for when professional care is unreachable; always call 911 first when you can.

### 1 · Rehydration (ORS) — stops the dehydration that kills

**1 quart safe water + 6 level teaspoons sugar + ½ level teaspoon salt** — mix, drink in small sips. Make fresh every 24 h. Use boiled-and-cooled water. (WHO/UNICEF home formula.)

Give after every loose stool / heavy sweating: child ~1 cup, adult ~2 cups. Seek care if vomiting everything, blood, or no improvement in 24 h.

### 2 · Severe bleeding — pressure beats everything

Press hard, directly on the wound, with cloth or gauze — and **do not lift to peek** for 10 minutes. Add layers on top if soaked. Limb wound still pouring › tighten an improvised band *above* the wound as a last resort and write down the time. Get help: 911.

### 3 · Cardiac arrest — push, don't hesitate

No breathing or only gasping › call 911, put the phone on speaker, push hard and fast in the centre of the chest, 100–120/min, ~5–6 cm deep. Don't stop until help or an AED arrives. Hands-only CPR is far better than nothing.

### Household medical card — fill in, photograph, keep with the documents

Person	Blood type	Allergies	Conditions / implants

### Want these as fridge-magnet cards?

B2a
STAY-OR-GO

<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <span style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">STAY</span> </div>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <span style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">GO</span> </div>
<input type="checkbox"/> Home structurally sound <input type="checkbox"/> Utilities functional <input type="checkbox"/> Roads OPEN <input type="checkbox"/> Supplies ≥7 days <input type="checkbox"/> Medical needs covered <input type="checkbox"/> No imminent secondary threat	<input type="checkbox"/> Threat advancing <input type="checkbox"/> Utilities failing <input type="checkbox"/> Official evac order <input type="checkbox"/> Roads PASSABLE outward <input type="checkbox"/> Destination confirmed <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle fuelled

More ticks RIGHT → GO. More LEFT → STAY. Tied → score B1 again. →

The printed **Field Card Pack** — 12 laminated reference cards (water, ORS, bleeding, CPR, stay-or-go, comms). Free for referring 3 friends to the Thursday Briefing.

[systemsfaillab.com/refer](http://systemsfaillab.com/refer)

## PART 4 · SOURCES &amp; NEXT

## Where this comes from

Every operative figure in this playbook follows published public guidance. Check the originals — that habit is itself a resilience skill.

WHO — drinking-water & household water treatment	who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/drinking-water
EPA — emergency disinfection of drinking water	epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/emergency-disinfection-drinking-water
FEMA / Ready.gov — build a kit, make a plan, shelter	ready.gov/kit · ready.gov/plan · ready.gov/shelter
American Red Cross — survival kit & first-aid training	redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies
WHO — psychological first aid	who.int/publications/i/item/9789241548205

## What to do next — in order

1	<b>Finish the grey boxes.</b> 20 minutes, pencil, once. This PDF is only worth what you write in it.
2	<b>Take the Resilience Score</b> — 21 questions, 5 minutes, free, no email needed to see it. It finds the blind spots this starter can't. › <a href="https://systemsfaillab.com">systemsfaillab.com</a>
3	<b>Build your Kit List</b> — 90 seconds, personalised to your home, household and region, printable. › <a href="https://systemsfaillab.com">systemsfaillab.com</a> › Kit List
4	<b>Stay on the Thursday Briefing</b> — one calm email a week: what changed, what matters, one action. That's the whole cadence.

### The 7-day follow-through — one small thing a day beats one big never

Day	Task	Done
Day 1	Count your water (page 7). Write the number on the dashboard of your other guide.	Done
Day 2	Pack — or honestly re-check — the bag (page 8).	
Day 3	Write your three leave-triggers (page 5) in pencil, while calm.	
Day 4	One dinner: walk the household through the family plan (page 10).	
Day 5	Time the 15-minute exit (page 6). Find the bottleneck.	
Day 6	Fill the wallet cards; one per adult, one per school bag.	
Day 7	Take the Resilience Score online — see what this starter could not see.	

**This is the free starter — a working taste, not the whole system.** The full domain-by-domain protocols, scenario kits and weekly intel live at [systemsfaillab.com](https://systemsfaillab.com).

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