

What To Do: Citizen Emergency Guide

Plain-language action guides for nine common emergencies — what to do, what not to do, and when to call 911. Keep this guide at home and on your phone.

9 Emergencies Covered	3 Action Sections Each	6 General Preparedness Tips	1 Number to Call First
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■ **Always call 911 for any immediate life-threatening emergency. This guide is for information — it does not replace emergency services.**

BEFORE AN EMERGENCY

General Preparedness — Six Things Everyone Should Do

**Always call 911 first**

This app provides community-wide information. For any immediate life-threatening emergency, call 911 before anything else.

**Keep the app on your home screen**

Install EmergencyAlert to your phone home screen for instant access. Enable notifications in Settings so alerts wake you up.

**Register for SMS and email alerts**

Sign up in the Get Alerts tab so warnings reach you even when the app is closed or your phone is locked.

**Prepare a 72-hour kit**

Keep water (2L per person per day), non-perishable food, flashlight, battery radio, first aid kit, and medications ready at all times.

**Have a family plan**

Agree on a meeting place and an out-of-area contact before an emergency. Tell your contact where you're going when you evacuate.

**Power outage or network overload? Text first, don't call**

Voice calls need a dedicated circuit for their full duration — if the network is full they fail immediately. SMS texts (~140 bytes) queue automatically and push through any gap. Priority: (1) SMS/text first, (2) WhatsApp or iMessage over Wi-Fi, (3) short voice call under 30 sec, (4) Wi-Fi calling. Tip: text an out-of-area contact in another city — long-distance routing often has capacity when local circuits are jammed.

**Check on neighbours**

Elderly residents, people with disabilities, and those who live alone may need help evacuating or getting information.

EMERGENCY ACTION GUIDES

What To Do in Each Emergency

For each emergency, you will find: what to do, what not to do, a bulletin note (check the app for real-time details), and when to call 911.

EVACUATI ON	Mandatory Evacuation <i>When you receive an evacuation order — flooding, wildfire, or other imminent danger</i>
WHAT TO DO	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave immediately. Do not wait to gather belongings. • Take: medications, ID, phone + charger, wallet, a change of clothes, water and snacks for 24 hours. • Follow the designated evacuation route — do not use shortcuts that may be flooded or blocked. • Never drive through flooded roads. Even 15 cm of fast-moving water can knock you off your feet; 30 cm can float a car. • Go to the named shelter or evacuation centre — do not go to a friend or family home in the affected area. • Bring your pets — most shelters have a pet area. • Notify a family contact outside the area that you are safe once you arrive at the shelter. • Check the app Bulletins tab for shelter addresses and route updates. 	
WHAT NOT TO DO	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Do not return home until the official all-clear is issued. ✗ Do not ignore the order — it is issued only when there is a real, immediate threat. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Check Bulletins for the current shelter address and official evacuation route.</i> 	

FLOODING**Flood Warning / Rising Water**

When a flood warning is issued due to rising river or creek levels, storm surge, ice jam, dam release, or severe rainfall

WHAT TO DO

- Move to higher ground immediately if you are in a low-lying area or near a waterway.
- Take your go-bag: medications, ID, phone and charger, 72 hours of food and water.
- Follow the designated evacuation route in the Bulletins tab — confirm it is not flooded before using.
- Unplug electrical appliances only if you can do so without stepping in water.
- Use sandbags if available and time permits — protect door thresholds first.
- Document all property damage with photos before any cleanup begins, for insurance purposes.
- Contact your insurance company as soon as you are safely out of the affected area.
- Be aware that provincial response teams — Ontario Provincial Police, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and Ontario Works — may be deployed to assist. Follow all directions from uniformed personnel.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Do not walk through moving floodwater — just 15 cm can knock an adult off their feet.
- ✗ Do not drive through flooded roads — 30 cm of water can float most vehicles. Turn around, don't drown.
- ✗ Do not touch electrical panels, outlets, or appliances if any part of the floor is wet.
- ✗ Do not enter a flooded building without checking for structural damage — sagging ceilings, shifted walls, cracked foundations.
- ✗ Do not consume tap water during or after a flood until an official boil water advisory has been issued and lifted.
- ✗ Do not return home until the official all-clear bulletin is posted.

■ *Check Bulletins for evacuation routes, shelter addresses, sandbag locations, road closures, and provincial response updates.*

■ **Call 911 for immediate life-threatening situations.**

HAZMAT**HAZMAT — Shelter-in-Place***When ordered to shelter in place due to a chemical, industrial, or hazardous materials incident***WHAT TO DO**

- Go inside immediately — any building is safer than being outdoors.
- Close all windows and doors. Lock them to improve the seal.
- Turn off all heating, air conditioning, and ventilation systems.
- Seal gaps under doors and around windows with wet towels, tape, or clothing.
- Move to an interior room on the highest floor if the hazard is heavier than air (most vapours are).
- Stay tuned to the app for updates — the incident commander will advise when it is safe to ventilate.
- Do not go outside until the all-clear is officially announced.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Do not open windows to "air out" — this draws contaminants inside.
- ✗ Do not evacuate in a vehicle unless specifically ordered to — driving through a chemical plume is dangerous.

■ *Check Bulletins for the shelter zone boundary and update frequency.*

■ **If someone is exposed and showing symptoms — difficulty breathing, burning eyes, skin irritation — call 911.**

WATER**Boil Water Advisory***When the municipal water supply may be contaminated due to a main break, flooding, or test failure***WHAT TO DO**

- Bring all water to a full, rolling boil for at least 1 minute before drinking, cooking, or brushing teeth.
- Let boiled water cool and store in a clean, covered container in the refrigerator.
- Use only boiled or bottled water for making baby formula, ice, and washing raw foods.
- It is safe to shower and bathe — avoid swallowing water. Use boiled water for young children's baths.
- Check the app Bulletins for bottled water distribution locations if you cannot boil water.
- Flush your cold tap for 2 minutes before boiling if your pipes have been sitting unused.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Do not drink tap water directly, make ice with tap water, or use a coffee maker that doesn't boil water.
- ✗ Do not assume boiling is unnecessary — even clear-looking water may be contaminated.

■ *Check Bulletins for bottled water pickup locations and the expected duration of the advisory.*

WILDFIRE**Wildfire Watch / Warning**

When a wildfire is burning near your community and an evacuation may be imminent

WHAT TO DO

- Prepare your go-bag now: medications, ID, phone + charger, cash, a few days of clothes, important documents.
- Fill your vehicle with fuel immediately — gas stations may be overwhelmed or closed if an order is issued.
- Move patio furniture, doormats, and other combustibles indoors or away from your home.
- Close all windows, doors, and fireplace dampers.
- If on well water, fill sinks, tubs, and containers as a precaution.
- Know two evacuation routes from your neighbourhood in case one is blocked by fire.
- Monitor the app Weather tab and Bulletins tab continuously — an evacuation order can be issued quickly.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Do not wait for the order before preparing — preparation takes time you may not have.
- ✗ Do not return for belongings once an evacuation order is issued.

- *Check Bulletins for wind direction updates and which neighbourhoods are under watch.*

**POWER
OUTAGE****Extended Power Outage**

When power is expected to be out for 18 hours or more

WHAT TO DO

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed. A full freezer stays safe for 48 hours; a half-full freezer for 24 hours.
- Use flashlights or battery-powered lanterns — not candles if you can avoid it.
- Dress in layers; move to the lowest occupied floor to conserve warmth in cold weather.
- If you rely on electrically powered medical equipment (oxygen, dialysis, etc.), call 211 for support now.
- Check on elderly neighbours and those who may be isolated.
- Go to a warming or cooling centre listed in the Bulletins tab if your home becomes unsafe.
- Charge phones and devices in your vehicle if needed — keep the car in an open area, never a closed garage.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- X Never use a BBQ, camp stove, generator, or gas oven indoors — carbon monoxide poisoning is fatal.
- X Do not open the freezer repeatedly to check food — every opening lets cold air out.

■ *Check Bulletins for warming/cooling centre locations and estimated restoration time.*

■ **Call 911 if someone is showing signs of hypothermia (confusion, uncontrollable shivering) or heat stroke (hot/dry skin, confusion).**

SHELTER	<h2>Using an Emergency Shelter</h2> <p><i>When an emergency shelter is opened during an evacuation, power outage, or extreme weather event</i></p>
WHAT TO DO	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring your own medications and any medical supplies you rely on daily. • Bring ID and any important documents if you have time. • Check the Bulletins tab for the shelter address, accessible entrance, and any capacity information. • Pets are usually accepted in a designated area — confirm in the bulletin before arriving. • Register with shelter staff when you arrive so your family can locate you. • Follow all shelter staff instructions — they are there to help. • Let staff know of any medical needs, dietary restrictions, or mobility requirements. 	
WHAT NOT TO DO	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Do not bring weapons, alcohol, or illegal substances. ✗ Do not leave the shelter without letting staff know, especially if you have registered. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Check Bulletins for the current shelter address, capacity, pet policy, and accessible entrance.</i> 	

ROADS	<h2>Road Closure / Severe Storm Travel</h2> <p><i>When roads are closed due to flooding, storm damage, or structural concerns</i></p>
WHAT TO DO	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the detour route listed in the Bulletins tab — do not attempt to find your own shortcut. • If caught in a vehicle during a severe storm, stay in the vehicle — it offers significant protection. • During a tornado warning: do not try to outrun it. Drive at a right angle to its path or abandon the vehicle and lie flat in a ditch. • During a blizzard: if visibility drops to near zero, pull completely off the road, turn on hazard lights, and wait. • Avoid driving through standing water of any depth — road surfaces may be washed out beneath. • Report downed power lines to your utility provider — treat all downed lines as live. 	
WHAT NOT TO DO	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Never drive around a road closure barrier. ✗ Do not drive into water of unknown depth — "turn around, don't drown." 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Check Bulletins for the detour route, commercial vehicle alternate, and estimated reopening time.</i> ■ Call 911 for traffic accidents, downed power lines with immediate hazard, or if someone is trapped. 	

TORNADO**Tornado Warning**

When a tornado warning is issued or a funnel cloud is spotted near your area

WHAT TO DO

- Go immediately to the lowest floor of a sturdy building — basement is safest.
- In a basement: get under a heavy workbench or staircase and cover your head with your arms.
- If no basement: go to an interior room or hallway on the lowest floor — a bathroom with no windows is ideal.
- Stay away from all windows, doors, and exterior walls.
- If outside with no shelter: lie flat in a low-lying ditch or depression, face down, hands protecting the back of your head.
- If in a vehicle: do not try to outrun it in a car. Drive at a 90-degree angle to the tornado's path if you can clearly see it moving away. If it is not moving, abandon the vehicle and take shelter in a sturdy building.
- Protect your head and neck at all times — flying debris is the primary cause of injury.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Do not shelter under a highway overpass — wind funnels and accelerates there, making it more dangerous.
- ✗ Do not open windows — this wastes precious time and does not equalize pressure.
- ✗ Do not stay in a mobile home or trailer — evacuate to a nearby sturdy building immediately.
- ✗ Do not wait to see the tornado before taking shelter — warnings are issued before they are visible.

■ *Check Bulletins and the Weather tab for the active warning area and when the all-clear is issued.*

■ **Call 911 for injuries, trapped persons, or downed power lines after the storm passes.**

RADIATION**Radiation Emergency**

When a nuclear facility incident or radiological event is announced by authorities

WHAT TO DO

- Follow official instructions immediately — authorities will direct whether to shelter-in-place or evacuate.
- If told to shelter-in-place: go inside the nearest solid building. Brick, concrete, and underground spaces offer the best protection.
- Close all windows, doors, and fireplace dampers. Turn off all ventilation and HVAC systems.
- Move to the centre of the building and stay away from exterior walls and roof.
- If you were outside when the event occurred: remove your outer clothing and shoes outside before entering. Place them in a plastic bag.
- Shower thoroughly with soap and water — do not use conditioner, which can bind particles to hair.
- Listen only to official sources — the app, Emergency Alert broadcasts, and government radio.
- Do not eat or drink anything that may have been exposed to outside air or contaminated water.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- X Do not self-administer potassium iodide (KI) unless specifically directed to by public health authorities — it protects only the thyroid and only against radioactive iodine.
- X Do not leave a shelter-in-place order to evacuate unless told to by authorities — movement outdoors may increase exposure.
- X Do not use mobile phones for non-emergency calls — keep networks clear for emergency services.
- X Do not rely on food or water from potentially affected areas.

■ *Check Bulletins for whether to shelter-in-place or evacuate, affected zones, and decontamination centre locations.*

■ **Call 911 only for medical emergencies. Follow Public Safety Canada and your local EOG for all other instructions.**

SNOWSTORM**Severe Snowstorm / Blizzard**

When a blizzard warning or extreme winter storm warning is issued

WHAT TO DO

- Stay indoors if possible — most storm-related injuries happen while shovelling or travelling.
- Before the storm: stock 72 hours of food and water, extra medications, flashlights, and a battery-powered or hand-crank radio.
- If you must drive: tell someone your route and expected arrival time. Carry a winter emergency kit: blanket, sand/kitty litter, booster cables, shovel, snacks, and water.
- If stranded in a vehicle: stay with the vehicle — it is easier for rescuers to find. Run the engine for warmth only 10 minutes per hour; keep a window slightly open and check that the exhaust pipe is clear of snow.
- Dress in layers if going outside: moisture-wicking base layer, insulating middle layer, windproof outer layer. Cover extremities — frostbite can occur within 30 minutes in extreme cold.
- Check on neighbours, especially elderly residents and those living alone.
- If power goes out, refer to the Extended Power Outage guide above.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Do not shovel snow if you are older, have heart conditions, or are not physically fit — shovelling in cold weather is a leading cause of cardiac events.
- ✗ Do not travel during a blizzard warning unless absolutely necessary.
- ✗ Do not use BBQs, camp stoves, or gas generators indoors — carbon monoxide poisoning is fatal.
- ✗ Do not assume your vehicle can handle all conditions — even 4WD vehicles slide on ice.

■ *Check Bulletins for road closures, warming centre locations, and expected storm duration.*

■ **Call 911 for hypothermia (confusion, slurred speech, uncontrollable shivering) or frostbite with loss of sensation.**

**EPIDEMIC /
OUTBREA
K****Public Health Alert — Disease Outbreak**

When your local health unit issues a disease outbreak or epidemic alert for your community

WHAT TO DO

- Follow all instructions from your local health unit exactly and promptly.
- Wash hands frequently — soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before eating and after coughing.
- Stay home if you have symptoms — call Telehealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000) before going to any clinic or hospital.
- Wear a mask in crowded public spaces if directed by your health unit.
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces regularly — doorknobs, phones, countertops, and taps.
- Keep up to date on vaccination if directed by public health authorities.
- Stay informed through official health unit communications and this bulletin board only.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Don't go to the emergency room unless you are seriously ill — call Telehealth first to be directed appropriately.
- ✗ Don't spread unverified information — share only official health unit and government guidance.
- ✗ Don't stockpile medications or supplies beyond your personal needs — shortages harm others.
- ✗ Don't ignore symptoms thinking they will pass — early reporting and treatment prevents spread.
- ✗ Don't visit vulnerable individuals (elderly, immunocompromised) if you are unwell or have been exposed.

■ *Check Bulletins for affected areas, symptoms to watch for, closures, and health unit guidance updates.*

■ **Call 911 only for life-threatening symptoms such as difficulty breathing. For all other symptoms call Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000.**

**ACTIVE
SHOOTER****Active Shooter Incident**

When police confirm an active shooter at a nearby location and an official bulletin is issued

WHAT TO DO

- **RUN** — if there is a clear and safe escape route, leave immediately. Leave all belongings behind. Keep your hands visible when you encounter police.
- **HIDE** — if you cannot run safely: lock and barricade the door, turn off lights, silence your phone completely, stay low and out of sight, and move away from the door.
- **FIGHT** — only as an absolute last resort when your life is in immediate danger. Act aggressively and commit fully to stopping the threat.
- Call 911 when it is safe to do so. Stay on the line and follow all dispatcher instructions.
- If you are outside the affected area: move away immediately and keep roads and sidewalks clear for emergency vehicles.
- Go only to the designated reunification site if one is announced — do not go to the scene.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Don't pull the fire alarm — it forces people into open corridors and common areas.
- ✗ Don't open your door to anyone while hiding unless police verbally and clearly confirm it is safe.
- ✗ Don't drive toward the scene to find family — go to the reunification site and wait.
- ✗ Don't post unverified information on social media — it causes panic and can actively interfere with the police response.
- ✗ Don't stop to help the wounded if the threat is still active — call 911, give the location, and keep moving.
- ✗ Don't run toward police with anything in your hands.

■ *Check Bulletins for confirmed location, avoidance zone, reunification site address, and the official all-clear from police.*

■ **Call 911 — give your exact location, the number of people with you, and the shooter's last known location if it is safe to do so.**

**ADVISORY
LIFTED****When an Advisory is Lifted***When a boil water advisory, shelter-in-place, or other precautionary advisory is officially cancelled***WHAT TO DO**

- Wait for the official all-clear bulletin before resuming normal activities — do not act on rumours.
- Boil water advisory lifted: run your cold tap for 2 minutes before using. Discard and remake ice.
- Shelter-in-place lifted: open windows and doors to ventilate before re-occupying fully.
- Discard any food that was in direct contact with floodwater or that was without refrigeration for more than 4 hours.
- Check with your insurance provider if your property was affected before beginning cleanup.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Do not resume normal water use before the official bulletin — lab testing takes time.
- ✗ Do not enter a building that was flooded without checking for structural damage first.

■ *The official all-clear will be posted as an UPDATE bulletin. Wait for it before resuming normal activity.*

**RETURNING
HOME****Returning Home After an Evacuation***When an evacuation order is downgraded to an advisory or lifted entirely***WHAT TO DO**

- Wait for the official bulletin before returning — "advisory" means you can check your property, not that it is fully safe.
- Enter your home carefully: check for structural damage, sagging ceilings, cracked foundations before going fully inside.
- Do not turn on electrical switches if flooring is wet — have an electrician inspect first.
- Run water taps for 2 minutes before using. Do not drink until a boil water advisory (if any) is lifted.
- Document all damage with photos before cleanup — you will need this for insurance.
- Register with community cleanup resources listed in the Bulletins tab.
- Check on neighbours — not everyone returns at the same time.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Do not use gas appliances if you smell gas — leave immediately and call your gas utility.
- ✗ Do not drive through flooded roads even on the return — damage may not yet be cleared.

■ *Check Bulletins for cleanup resource locations, any remaining road closures, and water safety status.*

FAMILY PREPAREDNESS

Emergency Communications: When Cell Networks Go Down

Cell towers can fail during storms, power outages, and major emergencies — often when you need communication most. Tower battery backup typically lasts only 4-8 hours without grid power. A layered communications plan uses the simplest, most infrastructure-independent method first.

KEY TIP During network congestion, send a TEXT instead of calling — texts use less bandwidth and often go through when voice calls cannot. Use iMessage or WhatsApp over Wi-Fi if your home internet is still working.

Why Cell Networks Fail

Tower Damage	Storms, tornadoes, ice storms, fires, and earthquakes can physically destroy towers or sever fibre connections.
Power Outage	Cell towers run on battery backup — typically only 4-8 hours without grid power.
Network Congestion	During emergencies everyone calls simultaneously. Circuits jam. Texts go through when calls won't.
Infrastructure Failure	Cyberattacks or cascading technical problems can take down entire regional networks.

Alternative Communication Methods

■ Two-Way Radios (Walkie-Talkies)

Work radio-to-radio with zero infrastructure. FRS radios require no licence in Canada; GMRS offers longer range. Keep a set with spare batteries.

- FRS: ~1-2 km range, no licence required in Canada
- GMRS: up to 40+ km range with licence (ISED)
- One per family member — practice before an emergency

■ Satellite Communicators

Work completely independently of cell towers and ground infrastructure. Iridium covers all of Canada including the Arctic.

- Garmin inReach / Zoleo — two-way texting + SOS via Iridium satellite
- iPhone 14+ — Emergency SOS via satellite built in (Canada)
- Starlink portable dish — broadband even when cell and landline fail
- PLB (Personal Locator Beacon) — one-button SOS, no subscription, register free with SAR Secretariat

📞 Traditional Copper Landline

Corded phones plugged into a copper wall jack often work when cell fails. VoIP home phones (Rogers, Bell Fibe) do NOT — they need power and internet.

- Keep one corded phone connected directly to a wall jack
- Ask your provider if you have copper or fibre/VoIP service
- Copper service from Bell or a local telco is most resilient

■ Weather Radio (Hand-Crank)

Battery or hand-crank radios receive 24/7 Weatheradio Canada emergency broadcasts — no infrastructure needed. Essential for situational awareness.

- Environment Canada broadcasts on Weatheradio Canada frequencies
- Hand-crank or solar model works without batteries or power
- Keep one in your 72-hour kit and one in your vehicle

■ Wi-Fi Calling & Messaging Apps

If your home internet or a neighbour's Wi-Fi is still working, use it for calls and messages even without cell service.

- Enable Wi-Fi Calling in your phone's Settings now — before an emergency
- WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram work over Wi-Fi without cellular
- iMessage and FaceTime work over Wi-Fi when cell is down

■ Physical Rally Points

The most reliable plan needs no technology. Agree on two meeting places before any emergency — near home and farther away.

- Primary rally point: a specific spot near your home
- Backup rally point: a relative's house or community centre farther away
- Designate an out-of-area contact — long-distance calls go through when local circuits are jammed
- Check-in schedule: e.g. every 6 hours at the rally point

■ Mesh Networking Apps

Phone-to-phone networks with no cell towers, Wi-Fi, or internet. Each phone relays messages to the next — the more users in an area, the stronger the network.

- Meshtastic (recommended) — uses low-cost LoRa radio device (~\$35-40 CAD), range 3-15+ km per hop. Free app. No licence required in Canada (915 MHz ISM band)
- Bridgefy — Bluetooth only, no hardware needed, ~100m per hop. Install before an emergency while internet is available
- Briar — encrypted, Bluetooth + Wi-Fi Direct, Android only
- goTenna Mesh — dedicated device, 6+ km range, pairs with smartphone

■ Ham (Amateur) Radio

Extremely robust — local repeaters extend range to 80-160+ km and operate on backup power during grid outages. Requires ISED Basic licence (free study, simple exam).

- Ham operators volunteer as emergency communicators (ARES)
- Handheld HT radio: \$40-80 CAD
- Study guides free at rac.ca — basic exam is not difficult

SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS — CANADA

Satellite Options for Canadian Families

Only Iridium and Starlink provide reliable coverage above 70°N in the Canadian Arctic. For most families, a Garmin inReach or Zoleo satellite messenger is the best value option.

Satellite Messengers & SOS Devices

Device	Network	Key Features	Best For
Garmin inReach Mini 2	Iridium — global	Two-way texting, GPS tracking, SOS, weather	<i>Backcountry, remote travel, family go-bag</i>
Zoleo	Iridium — global	Two-way messaging, SOS, pairs with smartphone	<i>Family emergency backup</i>
SPOT X	Globalstar	Two-way messaging, SOS, GPS tracking	<i>Southern Canada — check coverage at high latitudes</i>
iPhone 14+ (built-in)	Carrier satellite link	Emergency SOS + roadside assistance via satellite	<i>Emergency SOS — available in Canada</i>
PLB (Personal Locator Beacon)	Cospas-Sarsat	One-button SOS, no subscription, free registration with SAR Secretariat	<i>Backcountry, boating, aviation — most reliable SOS</i>

Satellite Internet Services

Service	Coverage	Speed	Cost (approx.)	Notes
Starlink (SpaceX)	All Canada incl. Arctic	50-250 Mbps, 20-60ms	~\$140/mo + ~\$599 dish CAD	<i>Best overall — Roam plan for portable/cabin use</i>
Xplore (Xplornet)	Rural/remote Canada	Up to 50 Mbps	Varies	<i>Canadian provider, domestic support</i>
HughesNet	Southern Canada <60N	25-100 Mbps, high latency	Varies	<i>GEO satellite — 600-800ms latency</i>

Starlink Roam/Portable plan is ideal for cabins, RVs, and emergency backup. Requires ~50-100W of power — plan for a generator or solar setup if using off-grid.

Mesh Networking Apps

Mesh networking apps let phones communicate directly with each other — no cell towers, no Wi-Fi router, no internet required. Each phone acts as both sender and relay, passing messages hop-by-hop until they reach their destination.

App	Technology	Range/Hop	Hardware	Platforms
Meshtastic ★	LoRa 915 MHz radio	3-15+ km	LoRa device ~\$35-40 CAD	<i>iOS, Android</i>
Bridgefy	Bluetooth BLE	~60-100 m	None — phone only	<i>iOS, Android</i>
Briar	BT + Wi-Fi Direct	~100-200 m	None — phone only	<i>Android only</i>
goTenna Mesh	VHF 155 MHz radio	6+ km	goTenna device ~\$130 USD	<i>iOS, Android</i>

★ *Meshtastic* — Most recommended for emergency use. No licence required in Canada (915 MHz ISM band). Flash firmware free at flasher.meshtastic.org. Messages are encrypted end-to-end. GPS location sharing included. Pre-install with neighbours now so the mesh exists when you need it.

FAMILY PREPAREDNESS

Communications Preparedness Checklist

The Plan

- Designate an out-of-area contact everyone checks in with — long-distance calls go through when local lines are jammed
- Set two family rally points — one near home, one farther away (relative's house, community centre)
- Write down critical phone numbers on paper — do not rely solely on your phone's contacts
- Agree on a check-in schedule — e.g. every 6 hours at the rally point or via radio
- Every family member knows to send a text instead of calling during congestion — texts go through first
- Enable Wi-Fi Calling on all phones now — before an emergency

Equipment

- FRS/GMRS walkie-talkies — one per household, kept charged with spare batteries
- Battery or hand-crank Weatheradio Canada weather radio
- Backup power banks for phones — minimum 20,000 mAh
- Solar charger for extended outages
- Corded phone plugged into wall jack (if you have copper landline service)
- Consider a satellite messenger (Garmin inReach or Zoleo) for your go-bag

Go-Bag Communications Essentials

- Paper map of your local area and region
- Written list of emergency contacts and addresses
- Cash in small bills — ATMs and card readers may be down
- Walkie-talkie with spare batteries
- Whistle or signal mirror for short-range signalling

Knowledge & Skills

- Know how to use WhatsApp or Signal over Wi-Fi without cell service
- Consider getting an ISED Amateur Radio Basic licence — free study at rac.ca
- Install Meshtastic or Bridgefy now — test with neighbours before an emergency
- Practice your communications plan with a 30-minute household drill once per year

**LAYERED
APPROACH**

The best emergency communication plan layers multiple methods. Start with the simplest and most infrastructure-independent option first (rally point, walkie-talkie, hand-crank radio), then work up to more complex tools (satellite messenger, mesh network, Ham radio). No single method is enough on its own. Practice your plan before an emergency.

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■ **Always call 911 for immediate life-threatening emergencies.**