



Earthquake Safety Information

More than one million earthquakes occur each year. That's an average of one every thirty seconds.

Most of these are small, but occasionally they can have devastating effects. If you live or work in an area at risk of large earthquakes, here's what to do before, during and after an earthquake:

BEFORE

Know what to look out for

Typically, you may hear a roaring or rumbling sound that gradually gets louder. You may also feel a rolling sensation that starts out gently and within a second or two, grows violent.

Learn the safe spots in a room

This may be underneath a sturdy table away from walls. Most deaths and injuries are caused by collapsing building materials and heavy falling objects, such as bookcases, cabinets and heating units.

Prepare an emergency plan

Ensure your family members / staff / team are involved and are fully trained. Your chances of survival will increase if you prepare and practise your plans.

Agree to stick with your household / neighbours / team

Unless there is a very good reason not to.

Keep sufficient emergency supplies

A battery-powered radio; torch; water (ideally, enough to last one week); non-perishable food (enough for 72 hours at least); tin opener; cutlery; water purification tablets; first-aid kit. Also include: clothing; footwear; heavy work gloves; sleeping bags or blankets; emergency “space” blankets; and a tent or shelter. Keep a set of tools in the kit, a whistle, toilet paper, personal medication and toiletries.

Keep a spare emergency supplies kit in your car or shed

You may be unable to retrieve things from your home.

Keep important documents in waterproof containers

Passport; will; birth certificate; marriage certificate; important contact numbers; bank account; credit card details.

Know where your gas & water shut-off valves & fuse box are

Learn how to safely turn them off too. Ensure others can do the same.

DURING

Stay calm

Don't be surprised by the noise of shattered glass and falling objects. The electrical supply may shut down and fire and burglar alarms often go off following an earthquake.

Be reassuring to children who may be traumatised by the experience.

Stay away from windows, mirrors, bookcases that could fall or cupboards whose contents may fall on top of you

Crawl under a table, desk or other sturdy furniture

Cover your face and head with your arms. And do not stand in a doorway.

In most situations, you can protect yourself if you immediately DROP, COVER and HOLD ON

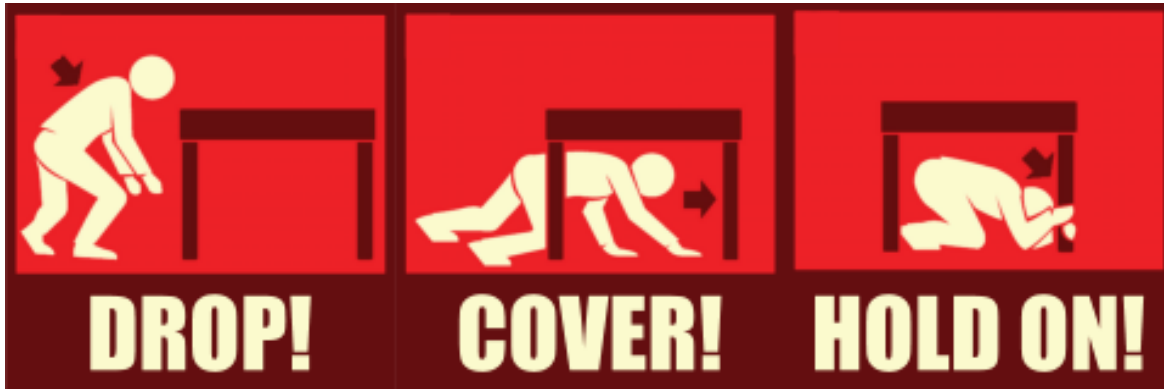


Image: CDC

- Drop down onto your knees before the earthquake knocks you down. This position protects you from falling but allows you to still move if necessary.
- Cover your head and neck (and entire body if possible) underneath a sturdy table.
- Hold on to your shelter until the shaking stops.

The only exception to this rule is if you are in a non-engineered construction

If you are on the ground floor of an unreinforced mud brick (adobe) building, with a heavy ceiling, try to move quickly outside to an open space.

Don't use a lift (elevator)

Move only a few steps to a nearby safe place

If indoors, don't try to leave the building while the shaking continues.

If able, leave the building as soon as the shaking stops

Make for clear ground. Aftershocks can bring down a structure that has been weakened during the initial earthquake.

If you're outside during a quake, avoid buildings, power and phone lines

AFTER

Expect aftershocks

Aftershocks are smaller earthquakes that follow a larger one. They can happen minutes, days, weeks or even months afterwards. If you feel an aftershock, DROP, COVER and HOLD ON.

If you become trapped under debris, cover your mouth with a cloth or shirt and tap against a pipe or other object to make noise

Don't shout for help unless you have to as you may inhale dangerous quantities of dust and you need to conserve your energy.

Check for gas leaks by smell only

If you detect a leak, open all the windows and doors, leave immediately and report the leak to the relevant authorities.

Don't drive your car unless absolutely necessary

Roads may be badly damaged. Keep roads clear for police and emergency vehicles.

Avoid any waterfront areas in case of a tsunami and head for higher ground

Evacuate the area immediately if a tsunami warning is given.

Keep at least 10 metres from fallen power lines

Do not use the phone unless you have to report a life-threatening injury

Keep in regular contact with your employer, family and national embassy – text messages may be more reliable.

Stay away from wild or stray animals

They may be distressed and agitated.

Pay particular attention to personal health and hygiene

Damage to sewers, a shortage of clean drinking water and poor sanitary conditions will increase the risk of you succumbing to diarrhoea or dysentery. Bottled, boiled or treated water is safe for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene.

Medical facilities may be non-existent and even basic medical supplies may not be available

Carry extra supplies of personal medication and a first aid kit. Check yourself and others for injuries. Administer first aid as necessary to prevent infections.

Follow local specialist advice in any risk situation or otherwise carry out your own risk assessment

Many structures will already be severely weakened and may collapse in an aftershock. Watch out for loose electricity cables and travel in convoy if at all possible.

Remember that it's normal to not feel like yourself

Even if you and your household escape physical injury, it is likely that you will feel shocked and upset. You may feel disoriented and forgetful. You may also behave out of character which can add to your anxiety. All this is normal. Contact your organisation for assistance if you think you need it.

If your home or accommodation is seriously damaged and you are looking for shelter, seek advice from emergency services or local experts and take weather conditions into account

A tent or makeshift shelter on open ground may be considerably safer than a building which is familiar to you but may be at risk of collapse in an aftershock.

Listen to the local news and keep abreast of further developments and advice

However, reliable information may be scarce in the immediate

aftermath of an earthquake and may take a couple of days or even longer to become available, depending on how serious and extensive the earthquake is. Staying together with family or friends to support one another is really important, as lack of information, fear of the unknown and worries about the safety of buildings and environment can add to feelings of anxiety.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Sources

[CDC](#) / [WHO](#) / [PAHO](#)

Authors

Dr. Matt Edwards and Jo Thompson

Last Updated

8 Feb 2023