

Fact sheet 6: Non-natural disasters

What is a non-natural disaster?

Non-natural disasters are caused by human activity. These disasters may be limited to a small area or their effects might be widespread.

Non-natural disasters could include:

- wildfires (also known as bushfires)
- pandemics (Avian or swine flu, SARS)
- biohazards (chemical spills)
- transportation accidents (trains, planes)
- terrorism (bombs, threats).

In these situations, always tell an adult or appropriate authority, and follow instructions.

Wildfires and pandemics

This fact sheet concentrates on wildfires and pandemics.

- A *wildfire* is an unplanned fire that starts outdoors, such as on a gorse-covered hillside or in a forest. They become hazards when the fire threatens nearby people or property.

Many houses in New Zealand are surrounded by bush, which makes them vulnerable to wildfire. Even if people do not live anywhere near the bush, they often holiday in areas susceptible to wildfires. So it is important to know what to do.

- A *pandemic* is a widespread outbreak of an infectious disease throughout a region or even the world, for example Avian or swine flu, or SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome).

Devastating influenza (flu) pandemics swept the globe three times last century: 1918–19 (Spanish flu), 1957–58 (Asian flu) and 1968–69 (Hong Kong flu). The Spanish flu was New Zealand's worst disaster, killing about 8,600 people in our country and about 50 million worldwide.

Besides the large numbers of deaths caused by pandemics, they also result in huge disruptions to society. Medical services are overwhelmed, schools and businesses close down, transportation and trade is reduced, and borders are closed.

What do we do before a non-natural disaster?

Wildfire

- Make sure that garden hoses are connected to taps and reach all areas of your property.
- Keep your driveway clear so that fire appliances can reach your house.
- Make sure your property is easy to find from the road.
- Plan and practise how you will evacuate.
- Know at least two suitable exit routes from your neighbourhood.
- Make sure you have emergency survival items at home as well as a getaway bag if you have to leave in a hurry.

Pandemic

- Talk to your family and friends about health hygiene – hand washing, and safe coughing and sneezing.
- Make sure you have your emergency survival items.
- Include paracetamol (for fever) in your home emergency survival items.
- Have a plan for what you and your family would do if you had to stay at home, possibly for weeks, during a pandemic.

What do we do during a non-natural disaster?

Wildfire

- Dial 111.
- Follow the instructions of emergency personnel.
- If you have to evacuate:
 - close all doors and windows
 - leave outside doors unlocked so that fire-fighters can get in easily if they have to
 - leave a light on in each room to help improve the visibility for fire-fighters if it is smoky.

- If caught in the open, move to an area with low fuel, such as a clearing, lake or previously burnt ground.
- Don't try to outrun the fire – move across the front of the fire to the flanks (sides).
- Move downhill – the most intense fire will be at the top of hills.
- Don't try to run through the flames unless you can clearly see behind them.
- Try to get in or behind something to avoid the radiant heat.
- Stay low and cover your mouth and nose with a wet cloth.
- For more information, see the New Zealand Fire Service website: www3.fire.org.nz.

Pandemic

- Stay home if you are sick, keep away from other people and avoid visitors.
- Wash and dry your hands before handling food and after coughing, sneezing, using the bathroom, wiping children's noses or when looking after sick people.
- Use tissues to cover coughs and sneezes. Throw used tissues in the rubbish bin.
- Give fluids to people who have a fever and/or diarrhoea. Paracetamol can be used to bring down high fevers.

For more information, see the Ministry of Health website: www.moh.govt.nz/influenza

What do we do after a non-natural disaster?

Wildfire

- Do not go sightseeing.
- Beware of hotspots as they can flare up again.

Pandemic

- Listen to the radio for instructions.
- Talk to your family about how you can stay prepared – pandemics often come in waves.

