

Drop, Cover, and Hold On

Drop, Cover, and Hold On or other recommended actions such as Lock (wheels), Cover, and Hold On – if you feel shaking or get an alert.

Your past experience in earthquakes may give you a false sense of safety; perhaps you did nothing, ran outside, or stood in a doorway, and you survived with no injuries. Or perhaps you got under your desk, and others thought you overreacted. Yet you may never have experienced the kind of strong shaking that is possible in much larger earthquakes: sudden and intense back and forth motions of several feet per second will cause the floor or the ground to jerk sideways out from under you, and every unsecured object around you could topple, fall, or become airborne, potentially causing serious injury.



This is why you must learn the expert guidance for how to immediately protect yourself after the first jolt... or get an alert that shaking is on its way! Federal, State, and local emergency management experts and other official preparedness organizations agree that the actions described below will reduce injury and death during earthquakes.

In most situations, if you feel shaking or get an earthquake alert, immediately:



DROP where you are, onto your hands and knees. This position protects you from being knocked down and reduces your chances of being hit by falling or flying objects.



COVER your head and neck with one arm and hand.

- If a sturdy table or desk is nearby, crawl underneath for shelter.
- If no shelter is nearby, crawl next to an interior wall.
- Stay on your knees; bend over to protect vital organs.



HOLD ON until the shaking stops.

- Under shelter: hold on to it with one hand; be ready to move with your shelter if it shifts
- No shelter: hold on to your head and neck with both arms and hands.

Or adapt to your situation. If you have difficulty getting onto the ground, or cannot get back up again without help, then follow these recommendations:

If you use a cane: DROP, COVER, and HOLD ON or sit on a chair, bed, etc. and cover your head and neck with both hands. Keep your cane near you so it can be used when the shaking stops.



If you use a walker or wheelchair: LOCK your wheels (if applicable). If using a walker carefully get as low as possible. Bend over and COVER your head/neck with your arms, a book, or a pillow. Then HOLD ON until the shaking stops.



Taking the proper actions described in this page, above and below, can save lives and reduce the risk of injury. Everyone, everywhere, should learn and practice what to do during an earthquake, whether at home, work, school, or traveling.

Why Drop, Cover, and Hold On?

Our special report explains why official rescue teams, emergency preparedness experts, and others recommend “Drop, Cover, and Hold On” as the best way, in most situations, to protect yourself during earthquake shaking.

The report also describes why running outside, standing in a doorway, or the “triangle of life” are dangerous or out-dated recommendations.

How to Protect Yourself in Various Settings

Indoors: Drop, Cover, and Hold On. Avoid exterior walls, windows, hanging objects, tall furniture, televisions, and cabinets with heavy objects or glass. Do not try to move more than 5-7 feet before getting on the ground. Do not go outside during shaking! (Exterior building materials and glass can fall and may hit you as you exit.) If seated and unable to drop to the floor: bend forward, Cover your head with your arms, and Hold On to your neck with both hands.

In bed: Do not get out of bed. Lie face down to protect vital organs, and Cover your head and neck with a pillow, keeping your arms as close to your head as possible, while you Hold On to your head and neck with both hands until shaking stops. You are less likely to be injured by fallen and broken objects by staying where you are.

In a multiple-floor building: Drop, Cover, and Hold On. Avoid windows and other hazards. Do not use elevators. Do not be surprised if sprinkler systems or fire alarms activate.

In a classroom: Drop, Cover, and Hold On. Laboratories or other settings may require special considerations to ensure safety. Students should also be taught what to do at home or other locations.

In a stadium or theater: Drop to the ground in front of your seat or lean over as much as possible, then Cover your head with your arms (as best as possible), and Hold On to your neck with both hands until shaking stops. Then walk out slowly, watching for anything that could fall during aftershocks.

In a store: Drop, Cover, and Hold On. Getting next to a shopping cart, beneath clothing racks, or onto the bottom shelf of a large multi-shelf unit to provide extra protection from falling objects.

Outdoors: Move to an open space if you can safely do so; avoid power lines, trees, signs, buildings, vehicles, and other hazards. Then Drop, Cover, and Hold On. This protects you from any objects that may be thrown through the air, even if nothing is directly above you.

Driving: Pull over to the side of the road, stop, and set the parking brake. Avoid overpasses, bridges, power lines, signs, trees and other hazards. Stay inside the vehicle until the shaking stops, then proceed carefully by avoiding fallen debris, cracked or shifted pavement, and emergency vehicles. If a power line falls on the car, stay inside until a trained person removes the wire.

Near the shoreline: Follow instructions for your setting described above. Then as soon as shaking reduces enough that you are able to stand, walk quickly to high ground or inland as a tsunami may arrive within minutes. Don't wait for officials to issue a warning. Walk, rather than drive, to avoid traffic, debris, and other hazards.

Below a dam or reservoir (water storage facility): Follow instructions for your setting described above. Large water storage structures can become damaged during a major earthquake. Catastrophic failure causing a large amount of water to be released and flow downhill is unlikely, but if you live downstream from a dam, you should know flood-zone information and have prepared an evacuation plan for getting to high ground.

People in California are encouraged to download the [MyShake app](#) to receive earthquake alert messages on their cellphone.

What NOT to do!

Many people still think "getting in a doorway" is safe, however this is out-of-date advice that should never have been recommended. We now understand that doorways: are not stronger than any other part of the house; do not provide protection from falling or flying objects; and will not be a safe space in the rare case of building collapse.

Improve Safety

Improve Safety immediately after an earthquake by evacuating if necessary, helping the injured and preventing further injuries or damage.

The moment the ground stops shaking it is important take action quickly and safely. Evacuate to higher ground if a tsunami is possible. If not, check for injuries and damages that need immediate attention. Use your training in first aid to assist those in need. Look around your environment to identify any new hazards such as leaking gas lines, damage to the building, water or electric lines, or other things that may be dangerous, especially if there are aftershocks. Be prepared to report damage to city or county government. First take care of your own situation. Remember your emergency plans. Aftershocks may cause additional damage or items to fall, so get to a safe location. Use your “grab-and-go” emergency supplies as needed.



When should I evacuate?

If you are near a large body of water (the ocean or a large lake), move to higher ground as soon as you can safely do so. Tsunami waves can arrive within minutes.

- Go on foot. Roads and bridges may be damaged.
- If evacuation is impossible, go to the third or higher floor of a sturdy building or climb a tree. This should only be used as a last resort.
- Stay away from the coast until officials tell you it is safe to return. The danger may last for days.

If you are not in a tsunami zone, evacuate your home or office only if there is damage to the building or the surrounding area is unsafe. Consider relocating somewhere safer such as a friend's house or a community shelter. If the building is undamaged, it can be safe to remain, even if the power is out, but you will want to find an alternative location if power is not restored within a few days.

If you need to evacuate to a shelter, take only your “grab-and-go” bag (Step 3) with essentials such as medication, important documents, prescription eye wear, etc. Shelters have limited space.

If you get trapped:

If you are trapped by falling items or a collapse, protect your mouth, nose, and eyes from dust. If you are bleeding, put pressure on the wound and elevate the injured part. Signal for help with your emergency whistle, a cell phone, or knock loudly on solid pieces of the building, three times every few minutes. Rescue personnel will be listening for such sounds.

Once you are safe, help others and check for damage. Protect yourself by wearing sturdy shoes and work gloves, to avoid injury from broken glass and debris. Also wear a dust mask and eye protection.

Help the injured:

Immediately check to see if anyone is injured, and if you have been trained in first aid, put your skills to use by assisting those in need.

- Check your first aid kit for detailed instructions on first aid measures (or install the [Red Cross First Aid App](#) if you have service).
- If a person is bleeding, put direct pressure on the wound. Use clean gauze or cloth, if available.
- If a person is not breathing, administer rescue breathing.
- If a person has no pulse, begin CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).
- Treat anyone injured or traumatized for shock by keeping them warm with a blanket. Elevate their feet over their heart, as long as this does not interfere with their injuries.
- Do not move seriously injured persons unless they are in immediate danger of further injury.
- Cover injured persons with blankets or additional clothing to keep them warm.
- Get medical help for serious injuries. Call 9-1-1 if available.
- Carefully check children or others needing special assistance.

Prevent further injuries or damage:

Be prepared for aftershocks and stay away from anything that looks like it may fall.

- Fire. If you are trained and have a fire extinguisher handy, put out small fires in your home or neighborhood immediately. Call for help, but don't wait for the fire department. Large fires are a sign to evacuate.
- Gas Leaks. Shut off the main gas valve only if you suspect a leak because of broken pipes, the odor or sound of leaking natural gas, or you see the meter spinning quickly. Only the gas company can turn the gas back on after they check for leaks, so shut it off only if necessary. The phone book has detailed information on this topic. Do not use candles or matches. You could start a fire and there may also be gas leaks. Use your flashlights, battery powered lights, and light sticks.
- Damaged Electrical Wiring. Shut off power at the main breaker switch if there is any damage to your house wiring. Leave the power off until the damage is repaired.
- Broken Lights and Appliances. Unplug these as they could start fires when electricity is restored.
- Downed Power Lines. If you see downed power lines, consider them energized and stay well away from them. Keep others away from them also. Never touch downed power lines or any objects in contact with them.
- Fallen Items. Beware of items tumbling off shelves when you open the doors of closets and cupboards.
- Spills. Use extreme caution. Clean up any spilled medicines, drugs, or other non-toxic substances. Potentially harmful materials such as bleach, lye, garden chemicals, and gasoline or other petroleum products should be isolated or covered with an absorbent such as dirt or cat litter. When in doubt, leave your home.
- Damaged Masonry. Stay away from chimneys and walls made of brick or block. They may be weakened and could topple during aftershocks. Don't use a fireplace with a damaged chimney. It could start a fire or let poisonous gases into your home.