

HOW-TO GUIDE:

Sexual Health Emergency Preparedness Kits

Center for Biological Diversity

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September 2025



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This how-to guide is intended to help individuals, mutual aid groups, nonprofits, and other organizations plan for, assemble, and distribute Sexual Health Emergency Preparedness (SHEP) Kits in their communities.

Sexual health preparedness is a critical part of emergency preparedness. The climate crisis has a disproportionate effect on women and gender-diverse people, but sexual and reproductive health concerns are often left out of emergency preparedness plans and checklists. SHEP kits help fill this gap, especially in underserved communities.

The Center for Biological Diversity is proud to lead the effort to bring SHEP kits to communities across the country. The Center fights to protect wildlife and wild lands and to address the underlying causes of the extinction crisis, including our endless growth economy, gender inequality, and attacks on bodily autonomy.

This guide was developed in partnership with [Justice Advocacy Network](#), [Jax Period Pantry](#), and [Central Florida Mutual Aid](#).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Photos: Kelley Dennings/Center for Biological Diversity, Rachel Kinbar/Central Florida Mutual Aid, Jacksonville Really Really Free Market, Canva

Graphic Design: Linda Rico



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WHAT ARE SEXUAL HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS (SHEP) KITS?

The climate emergency has increased the frequency and intensity of extreme weather that decimates communities. Vulnerable populations, including people of color, women, and gender-diverse people, are often hit hardest and have a harder time recovering from climate disasters. The damage goes far beyond property loss — it disrupts critical services, like the ability to access healthcare. Lack of access to reproductive healthcare, in particular, makes it even harder for women and gender-diverse people to face these times of crisis.



Photo credit: Canva

The Center created the Sexual Health Emergency Preparedness Kit project to address the critical intersection of reproductive justice, gender equity, and climate resilience. Modeled after emergency preparedness grab bags, the free kits include reproductive health items, like contraception and menstrual products, to help fill the gap in needs while educating people on how to integrate reproductive health into their own emergency preparedness plans.

The project also builds partnerships among community groups providing mutual aid and other services and boosts understanding of the connection between climate change and reproductive health. It aims to build support for long-term changes to government emergency preparedness programs.

WHY DISTRIBUTE SHEP KITS?

Emergency costs disproportionately affect people of color, women, and gender-diverse people who already deal with complex financial inequalities and hostile healthcare environments. Sexual and reproductive health is inextricably tied to economic justice, racial equity, voting rights, immigrant rights, disability justice, LGBTQIA+ liberation, youth justice, decolonization, environmental and climate justice, democracy reform, gender equality, education, and the right to community safety. Ensuring that every person, no matter who they are and where they live, has access to sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice, is foundational to their economic, mental, and physical wellbeing — especially during extreme weather events.



Photo credit: Canva

Severe weather events can limit access to abortions and contraception, making reproductive autonomy more difficult. [Hurricane Katrina](#) caused disruption in family-planning services for people in New Orleans even five to six months after the storm. At that time, 40% of people in an academic study reported they weren't using birth control, with several people reporting that they experienced unintended pregnancy because they couldn't access care. A study on the effects of [Hurricane Ike](#) in Texas revealed that Black women reported greater difficulty than their white or Hispanic counterparts in accessing contraception after the storm.

During disasters, [STIs](#) tend to spread more rapidly in marginalized communities due to lack of access to care and resources. Despite these realities, sexual and reproductive health concerns are often overlooked in both individual and government emergency preparedness plans. The SHEP Kit project bridges this gap by addressing immediate needs while advocating for systemic change.

Offering both practical tools and education helps reduce the risk of unintended pregnancies and STIs and supports people in protecting their health. It also gives people more control over their reproductive choices, including by preventing unintended pregnancies when healthcare access is disrupted.

FLORIDA CASE STUDY

[In September 2024](#) the Center for Biological Diversity and Florida partners gave away hundreds of sexual health emergency preparedness kits at Really Really Free Markets in Jacksonville, Tampa, and Orlando. [The Really Really Free Markets](#) presented an opportunity to highlight the need to support community mutual aid in preparing for natural disasters and after extreme weather events. One of our partners gave away an additional 250 kits in the wake of Hurricanes Milton and Helene.

The Center partnered with [Justice Advocacy Network](#), [Jax Period Pantry](#), and [Central Florida Mutual Aid](#) to acquire and distribute supplies for our kits.

- The emergency contraception was donated by Justice Advocacy Network, which acquired it from Plan B.
- The menstrual products and lubricant were donated by the Jax Period Pantry, which crowdfunds donations through an Amazon wishlist.
- The pregnancy tests were donated by [Florida Access Network](#), which is an abortion fund.
- The internal condoms were donated by the [Midwest Access Coalition](#), another abortion fund, and the local health department.
- The external condoms were donated by the Center for Biological Diversity through its [Endangered Species Condoms](#) project, which addresses the relationship between population dynamics, consumption, patterns, our endless growth economy, and the climate and biodiversity crises.

The Center also donated the printing of informational zines. For the SHEP kit's second year, partners are seeking to expand manufacturer product donations, particularly of over-the-counter birth control pills.



Photo credit: Jacksonville Really Really Free Market

HOW TO DISTRIBUTE SHEP KITS

Step 1: Identify collaborators

When identifying potential collaborators, start by asking:

- **Who in the desired community could benefit from the kits?**
- **Who could contribute to making the campaign a success?**
- **Who can provide resources?**
- **Who can connect with those in need?**

We'll dig deeper into identifying those in need during the needs assessment section.

Start by looking for partner organizations in the community that already provide some of the items found in the kits, especially if they do it at no cost. For example, there may be a group that supplies menstrual products in bulk for those in need. Local health departments are also great partners, as they often offer free condoms and educational materials. LGBTQIA+ organizations and Planned Parenthood frequently distribute similar items as well.

When seeking out potential partners, be sure to provide an explanation of the project and how their contribution will benefit the community. Elaborate on how their existing work potentially aligns with the goals and mission of the campaign. Make sure to directly express what you expect from each partner organization — for example, donations, outreach, or help with distributing the kits.

When identifying partner organizations to support SHEP distribution, look at which community areas have the greatest need, and then find partner organizations like public libraries, food banks, or mutual aid groups that are local to that specific community in need.



Photo credit: Canva

Step 2: Conduct a needs assessment and set campaign goals

A needs assessment is a process used to understand the needs and priorities of a community. Before beginning, it's important to have a clear understanding of the campaign's purpose. The SHEP campaign is designed to educate people about the connections between climate resilience, reproductive justice, and gender equity. It also aims to introduce sexual health preparedness into broader emergency preparedness efforts. It does that by filling gaps in sexual and reproductive health needs while educating people on how to integrate reproductive health into their own emergency preparedness plans.

To begin the assessment process, one of the first questions to ask is:

- **Who in the community is most impacted by the intersection of these issues?**

Your partners may already have this information, but you can also often find an answer through state and local government health and environmental data.

On a national level, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color ([BIPOC](#)) are often the most affected by climate-related inequalities. These groups frequently live in areas with heavy industrial activity, which makes them more vulnerable to environmental hazards and natural disasters. This is part of a larger issue known as environmental racism. Unfortunately these communities often get the least support and resources after disasters strike, as we saw with Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Hurricane Maria in 2017.

Based on [reports](#), marginalized communities are most impacted by the effects of climate change and injustice, with BIPOC women tending to be disproportionately impacted. However, in your local community, the group most impacted by climate change and injustice may be different. It's important to determine which groups in your community could benefit from SHEP kits, keeping in mind that not all communities and groups are the same. For example, if the community is in a rural setting, the group that is most affected by climate injustice may differ from that of an urban setting.

Once you've identified a community, the next step is to keep gathering information, which should *only* happen after collecting verbal or written consent. Consenting ensures that community members are comfortable with giving out information that's beneficial for project planning. The information gathered should be specific to those who'll be benefiting from the campaign to paint a full picture of people's needs, barriers, and what kind of support would be most helpful. You can do that through informal surveys, interviews, or discussion groups with community elders or partner organizations.

Examples of useful questions include ...

- **Where is there a hub in the community that many people access?**
- **Are there organizations in the community distributing sexual health items, and if so, what items do they offer?**
- **What sexual health, family-planning, or menstrual items are hardest to obtain?**

After collecting data, take the time to analyze it for common themes. The insights gained will be a guide on how to implement the SHEP kits in a way that's responsive and meaningful to the community. This research will also help you create campaign goals for evaluation at the end.

Step 3: Identify locations

After you've completed the needs assessment, the next step is identifying the best place(s) to distribute the SHEP kits. The insights you gather during the assessment will help pinpoint where these kits will have the most impact.

When choosing distribution sites, it's important to focus on places that are easily accessible and familiar to the community, especially to people who may be disproportionately disadvantaged and living in areas vulnerable to natural or manmade disasters. The goal is to ensure that the location is welcoming, comfortable, and inclusive, somewhere community members can feel safe accessing sexual and reproductive health resources. For the SHEP kit campaign pilot, kits were handed out at mutual aid Really Really Free Markets, a setting that aligned well with the needs and habits of the target audience.

Using the data from the assessment, use these questions to help you think about which locations in the community make the most sense:

- **Is this location easy to get to without a car?**
- **What are its hours of operation?**
- **When are community members most likely to visit?**

Consider community-centered spaces like libraries, food banks, community centers, schools, laundromats, public events, and farmers markets. If the area has mutual aid locations, that could be a great place to start. With permission, when necessary, pop-up distribution sites in a vacant lot or unused storefront could also be explored.



Photo credit: Canva

Depending on who the local community partners are, utilizing their existing spaces, regular tabling locations, or mobile units to help distribute kits may be an option. No matter which site(s) you pick, strive to make sure they're truly accessible and beneficial to the community. The goal is for the community to feel empowered by the campaign and fully benefit from the resources provided in the SHEP kits.

Step 4: Gather SHEP kit supplies

One of the most important steps in organizing a SHEP kit distribution is gathering inventory. The goal is to secure donations of needed products from stakeholders, which can include individuals in the community, local businesses, or direct suppliers of items in the kits. Starting with people and organizations who are already invested in community wellbeing can make the process smoother and more impactful.

When you're reaching out to stakeholders, it's helpful to share a short summary of the campaign, along with some key information about its goals. It's also most effective to directly ask for what you want, including the quantity of items (for example, 100 pregnancy tests). That gives potential donors a clear picture of what the SHEP kit campaign is, who it serves, and how their support will directly benefit the community. Providing this context will hopefully encourage them to contribute in a meaningful way.

Once you've decided which items to include in the kits, an online wishlist makes it easy to spread the word, collect donations, and request help. [SoKind](#) is a customizable alternative wishlist-and-registry website that lets individuals register for any kind of gift they might want — new, secondhand, donations, or gifts of time or service. For more information about SoKind, email us at sokind@biologicaldiversity.org.

The products and educational material you put into the kits can vary depending on the community's needs and how you distribute the kits. Whether people are assembling their own kits or getting them pre-prepared, it's important to make sure the contents are inclusive, meeting a wide range of needs. That means including items that support people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.



Here are some items the kits can include:

- Condoms (internal and external)
- Dental dams
- Emergency contraception
- Non-latex gloves
- Lubricant
- Menstrual products
- Over-the-counter birth control pills
- Pregnancy tests
- Educational resources (like pamphlets, zines, or stickers)

Photo credit: Kelley Dennings/Center for Biological Diversity

While it's important to include essential sexual health preparedness supplies, educational materials are just as crucial. Once the physical products run out, these resources can continue to guide and inform the community. They provide ongoing support and help people make thoughtful, informed choices during times of uncertainty or crisis.

Step 5: Promote and distribute the kits

To successfully engage the community in SHEP kit distribution and make sure the kits are reaching those who need them, it's important to promote your distribution event(s) in a thoughtful and intentional way using strategies aligned with the insights gathered from the needs assessment.

Event promotion should clearly communicate what attendees can expect. It's helpful to include a brief overview of the SHEP kit campaign, its purpose, and why it matters. Highlight a few items that will be available in the free kits and include a short explanation about why sexual health preparedness is so critical during emergencies.

Collecting emails from needs-assessment interviews and surveys or partner member lists is often the best baseline method for promotion because it's simple, cost effective, and easy. If the distribution area has community meetings, use a meeting to advertise and share information on the campaign. If most of the community is active on social media, make sure to create posts across the platforms they frequent. You can even create campaign-specific hashtags to build visibility and engagement online.

If the community listens to the radio or local news, consider pitching the SHEP kit story to reporters — and local news outlets' event-listings editors — a few weeks before the distribution event. This traditional form of outreach can be especially helpful for reaching people who may not be very active online. Using a mix of digital and traditional advertising helps make sure no one is left out.



Photo credit: Canva

Don't forget to leverage partners in spreading the word. Provide them with flyers and other materials they can distribute. If partners have a website, make sure the event is featured there as well. Generate QR codes that link to the event page and post them anywhere the community will likely see them.

Step 6: Track performance

Tracking the performance of your SHEP kit campaign is essential to making it as effective and impactful as possible. By monitoring how the campaign is doing, you can identify what's working, what needs improvement, and how to better meet the community's needs moving forward. It also shows partners the value of their support and the real difference they're making.

Before you start tracking performance, make sure the campaign goals are clearly defined. Using the SMARTIE goal framework — making sure your goals are *specific*, *measurable*, *achievable*, *relevant*, *time-bound*, *inclusive*, and *equitable* — can help you stay focused and organized. Having clear, realistic goals in place gives you something concrete to measure against and helps guide decisions as the campaign grows.

For example, your goal might be to distribute 100 SHEP kits at your event or to talk to 20 people at a tabling event.



Photo credit: Kelley Dennings/Center for Biological Diversity

During events, it's important to track how many people attend and how many SHEP kits or items are distributed. Keeping a record of which items people take or request most can provide valuable insight into your community's needs and make future events more successful.

The metrics you collect can serve multiple purposes. During partner meetings and annual planning sessions, this data helps highlight areas of success as well as areas where you can improve, ensuring proper preparation for future events. Sharing data with other local organizations doing similar work can help everyone prepare to meet the community's needs during a disaster.

CONCLUSION

Emergency preparedness is becoming increasingly important across the United States as every region is affected by some form of extreme weather or climate-fueled disaster. SHEP kits provide an opportunity for organizations to address climate disasters' disproportionate impact on marginalized communities and lay the foundation for local governments and institutions to include sexual and reproductive health in emergency preparedness checklists and plans.

A well-organized SHEP kit campaign can:

- Directly benefit people in your community by providing essential sexual health resources.
- Educate organizations, government officials, and event attendees on the importance of including reproductive health in emergency preparedness.
- Raise awareness about the intersection of reproductive justice and environmental justice.
- Build community resilience through education and mutual aid.

Exposing the connections between climate change and negative reproductive health outcomes increases awareness of one of the invisible threats of climate change — reproductive injustice — and offers solutions for mitigating this threat in a time of climate crisis.