California: 2026-27 El Nino checklist

Last reviewed: Nov 2, 2026 · Peak risk window: Dec-Mar · 67 actions

In an emergency, or if life is at risk, call 911. Follow evacuation orders and instructions from local officials and the National Weather Service. They override this checklist.

Water and food

- [ ] **Store sealed drinking water for the household**
  Storm flooding can interrupt or contaminate water service
  When: Now | Cost: USD 16.44-17.28 | Qty (family of 4): 12 US gallons: CDC 3-day minimum at 1 gallon/person/day for 4 people; build toward a 2-week supply (56 US gallons) if space allows
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Build a reserve of familiar shelf-stable food and include a manual can opener**
  California storm outages can stop refrigeration and cooking
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): Food for 4 people for 3 days of evacuation; build toward 14 days at home
  redcross.org

- [ ] **Bookmark water advisories and CDC safe-water instructions; use another water source for suspected chemical contamination**
  Boiling does not remove toxic chemicals, fuel or radioactive material, so use another water source if those are suspected
  When: now; follow advisories during each storm
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **After a flood, throw out any food that touched floodwater. If unsure, throw it out. Clean and sanitize counters and pans. Throw out wooden cutting boards, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers that touched floodwater: you cannot clean them safely**
  CDC: food that may have had contact with floodwater or storm water may be unsafe to eat, and unsafe food can make you sick even if it looks and smells normal
  When: know before any flood; apply during recovery
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **In a power outage keep the fridge and freezer closed. Fridge food stays safe up to 4 hours; a full freezer 48 hours (24 if half full). Throw out food that has reached 40°F or above**
  Outages can spoil food without visible signs
  When: know before any outage
  cdc.gov ; ready.gov

Power, heat and light

- [ ] **Prepare battery lights and compatible spare batteries**
  Storm outages leave rooms and evacuation routes dark
  When: Now | Cost: USD 29.00-35.18 | Qty (family of 4): 2 lights; compatible spare batteries priced separately
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Install or test battery-backed carbon monoxide alarms on every level and near sleeping areas**
  Unsafe emergency heating or generation during outages can cause fatal CO poisoning
  When: Now | Cost: USD 23.47-54.97 | Qty (family of 4): Number depends on home layout; price is per alarm
  cdc.gov ; news.caloes.ca.gov

- [ ] **If using a generator run it only outdoors, more than 20 feet from your home, doors and windows (CDC: also vents); never inside the home or garage, even with doors and windows open; never heat the home with a gas stove or oven**
  Storm outages create carbon-monoxide and electrical hazards; keep generators dry and protected from rain and flooding
  When: before any generator use; plan now
  news.caloes.ca.gov ; cdc.gov

- [ ] **Set aside existing dry layers and blankets; identify a warm place with power**
  Cold wet weather is harder to manage during a storm outage
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): Warm clothing and bedding for all 4 people
  cdc.gov ; cdc.gov

- [ ] **Learn the signs of carbon monoxide poisoning: headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, confusion. If anyone has them or a CO alarm sounds, get everyone outside into fresh air at once, then call 911. Poison Control (1-800-222-1222) can also advise**
  Odorless, invisible fumes from charcoal, gas and propane can cause carbon monoxide poisoning; use a battery-powered or battery-backup CO detector when running a generator
  When: Now
  cdc.gov ; cpsc.gov

Flood and storm protection

- [ ] **City of Los Angeles residents: locate free ready-to-fill sandbags at neighborhood fire stations and confirm sand availability**
  Temporary barriers may limit shallow runoff at vulnerable doors
  When: now; check supply before traveling | Qty (family of 4): Up to 25 ready-to-fill bags per household under the LAFD offer; not a design quantity
  lafd.org
- [ ] **Where a home has a sump check that the pump works; test any existing backup using manufacturer instructions and consider whether a backup or professional work is needed**
  An electric drainage pump can stop during a power outage
  When: now; arrange any needed work before rain
  weather.gov
- [ ] **Below burn areas, check the LA County debris and mudflow potential forecast before each storm**
  LA County: other rural and canyon roads below burn areas may be impacted by any significant storm event, and some areas are advised to be prepared to evacuate with any forecast of rain
  When: within 2 weeks; recheck before each forecast storm
  dpw.lacounty.gov
- [ ] **Plan an evacuation route that bypasses bodies of water and leads to higher ground; if told to evacuate, do so immediately and never drive around or through barricades**
  Saturated hillsides and flooding can block roads; Cal OES says not to wait for an order if flooding is likely
  When: within 2 weeks; leave when instructed
  news.caloes.ca.gov
- [ ] **Check surf and tide forecasts; keep the family off exposed beaches and jetties during high surf. Never turn your back on the ocean**
  Large waves can overtop the normal tide line and erode California beaches
  When: before every coastal outing during Dec-Mar
  weather.gov
- [ ] **Never walk, drive or swim through floodwater, and never drive around or through barricades: turn around, don't drown**
  Ready.gov: do not walk, swim or drive through flood waters, turn around, don't drown; just six inches of moving water can knock you down and one foot of moving water can sweep your vehicle away
  When: within 2 weeks; apply in every storm
  ready.gov
- [ ] **Look up your flood risk on FEMA's Flood Map Service Center, and remember that a home outside the mapped high-risk area can still flood**
  Ready.gov: know your risk for floods using FEMA's Flood Map Service Center, but flooding does not follow lines on a map; where it rains it can flood
  When: This fortnight
  ready.gov
- [ ] **Keep the car's fuel tank full and never drive through flooded areas**
  Ready.gov: a full tank helps in an evacuation or power outage; six inches of water can cause a vehicle to lose control or possibly stall
  When: within 2 weeks; keep topped up Dec-Mar | Cost: free (cost of fuel) | Qty (family of 4): 1 car; n/a if none
  ready.gov
- [ ] **San Luis Obispo County: check on the county map whether your address is inside the Gifford Debris Flow Area; other burn-scar counties publish similar maps (look yours up)**
  County of San Luis Obispo: locations downhill and downstream from burned areas are very susceptible to flash flooding and debris flows, particularly in the first two years after the fire
  When: within 2 weeks; recheck before each forecast storm
  readyslo.org

- [ ] **Santa Barbara County: open ReadySBC's Maps page and look at the Emergency Zones Map and the Community Hazard Awareness Map for your address; ask the county which areas are burn-scar or debris-flow risks**
  Burn scars can produce debris flows in heavy rain; the ReadySBC maps page lists county hazard and emergency-zone maps
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 household check
  readysbc.org
- [ ] **Learn landslide warning signs: rushing water or mud, a rumbling that gets louder, cracking trees, doors or windows that suddenly stick. Stay awake during heavy rain if you live below a slope, and leave early**
  Ready.gov: by the time a debris flow is confirmed it may be too late to get away; many deaths happen while people sleep
  When: Now
  ready.gov

Home preparation

- [ ] **Check for roof leaks and book repairs. Clear gutters and downspouts only in dry, calm weather, from the ground or a steady ladder. Never go on the roof or a ladder in wind or rain. Renters: ask your landlord**
  Repeated heavy rain can enter damaged roofs or overwhelm blocked drainage
  When: Now
  ready.lacounty.gov
- [ ] **Trim tree branches that may fall on your home and secure outdoor items, working from a safe position. Never trim near power lines: call your utility. Leave dangerous branches to professionals**
  Storm winds can bring branches onto homes and power lines
  When: now; repeat before strong winds
  news.caloes.ca.gov
- [ ] **Make a written room-by-room inventory of your belongings, backed up by a video of each room, and keep a copy away from the property**
  Flood or coastal storm damage claims need evidence of belongings
  When: Now
  files.consumerfinance.gov
- [ ] **Locate your main water valve and your main electrical breaker; do not touch electrical equipment, switches or the panel if it is wet or you are standing in water, and call an electrician instead**
  Storm damage may require safe isolation of household utilities; wet electrics can shock
  When: Now
  cdc.gov
- [ ] **Find your gas shutoff valve by the meter, but do not turn it for practice. If you smell gas, leave at once and move upwind. Do not use phones, light switches, flashlights or cars until you are well away. Call 911 from a safe place, then your gas utility (PG&E 1-800-743-5000; SoCalGas or SDG&E customers call their own utility)**
  Storm damage or a suspected gas leak needs utility-led safety action
  When: now; contact utility immediately for a suspected leak
  pge.com
- [ ] **After a flood, if electrical circuits or equipment got wet or are in or near water, turn the power off at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel, but do not enter standing water to reach it (call an electrician)**
  CDC: do not turn the power back on until the electrical equipment has been inspected by a qualified electrician; all electrical equipment and appliances must be completely dry before returning them to service
  When: now; apply after any flood | Cost: free (any electrician's work is extra)
  cdc.gov
- [ ] **Pack a grab-and-go bag: first aid kit, whistle, dust masks, flashlight, radio, spare batteries, moist towelettes and garbage bags, local maps, phone charger**
  Ready.gov basic kit list; you may have minutes to leave
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 household bag
  ready.gov

Documents

- [ ] **Copy IDs and passports plus the children's birth certificates for the evacuation bag**
  California flood or debris-flow evacuation can separate families from identity papers
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): Copies for both adults and both children as applicable
  files.consumerfinance.gov
- [ ] **Copy insurance policies and claim contacts plus deeds or lease**
  Storm displacement can leave claim and housing records inaccessible
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): One household record set
  redcross.org

- [ ] **Copy medical records and prescriptions plus children's vaccination records and care plans**
  Evacuation or pharmacy closure can interrupt treatment
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): Relevant records for all 4 people
  cdc.gov ; cdc.gov

- [ ] **Use portable waterproof document storage; keep separate paper copies and a password-protected cloud backup**
  California floodwater can destroy the only copy of household records
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): One portable household set plus separate paper and digital backups
  consumerfinance.gov

Children

- [ ] **For a formula-fed infant pack single-serving ready-to-feed formula; if you must mix powder and tap water is unsafe, use bottled or boiled water; plan for breastfeeding during outages**
  If applicable: RTF formula is safest because it needs no water. If it is unavailable and tap water is unsafe, mix powder with bottled water or water boiled for 1 minute (3 minutes above 6,500 ft) and cool it first. For infants under 2 months, premature infants or those with weakened immunity, follow the CDC powdered-formula steps instead: boil, let the water stand about 5 minutes, mix while it is still very hot (about 158°F), then cool the feed before use. Prepare each feed fresh with the exact amounts on the container, never dilute it, use it within 2 hours (1 hour once feeding starts) and discard leftovers; if prepared formula is not used within 2 hours, refrigerate it and use it within 24 hours; if the power has been off 4 hours or more, or the fridge is above 40°F, discard opened or prepared formula (CDC). Use safe water to clean feeding items; throw away bottle nipples and pacifiers that touched floodwater (CDC)
  When: now; review monthly | Qty (family of 4): If applicable: several days at the infant's current feeding needs; do not dilute formula
  cdc.gov ; cdc.gov ; cdc.gov

- [ ] **For an infant pack diapers and wipes plus usual medicines agreed with the child's clinician**
  Flood evacuation may interrupt shops and access to routine child supplies
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): If applicable: at least 1 large pack of diapers and 2 packs of wipes; medicines individualized
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Pack simple transportable activities (such as coloring books and crafts) in the children's evacuation bags**
  Storm shelter stays and outages disrupt children's routines
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): A few activities per child as a household allocation
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Make a family reunification plan (contacts, several meeting places), complete a contact card for your child's backpack and your wallet, and ask your child's school or childcare how you will be reunited and notified in an emergency or evacuation and where to go for pick-up**
  Flooded roads or school evacuation can separate children from parents
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): Plan covering both children and their schools or childcare
  cdc.gov ; cdc.gov

- [ ] **Prepare durable child ID/contact cards or tags and keep current family photos for reunification**
  Storm evacuations and shelter moves increase separation risk
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): 2 child cards or tags; current family photos
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **After a disaster restore routines and limit distressing coverage; seek pediatric or school support for persistent or worsening distress**
  Flood loss and repeated evacuation can affect children's mental health
  When: plan now; apply after an event
  cdc.gov

Older, disabled and medical needs

- [ ] **Identify backup power for medical equipment and agree a device-specific evacuation plan with the clinician and equipment supplier**
  Storm outages can be life-threatening for users of powered medical equipment
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): For each dependent person and device; runtime set with supplier
  cdc.gov ; fda.gov

- [ ] **Ask your pharmacist how long your medicines keep without a fridge. Keep a cooler and ice packs. If power is out a day or more, throw away fridge medicines unless the label says otherwise. If someone's life depends on a medicine, keep using it until you get a new supply**
  Storm road closures and outages can interrupt prescriptions and refrigeration
  When: now; refill before storms | Qty (family of 4): Discuss quantity with prescriber and pharmacist: Red Cross suggests 7 days; CDC child/pregnancy emergency checklist specifies at least 2 weeks
  cdc.gov ; cdc.gov ; redcross.org ; cdc.gov
- [ ] **If a full-time household member has a qualifying medical condition or device, apply for your utility's Medical Baseline program (lower rate and extra advance notice of Public Safety Power Shut-offs) and keep your own backup plan for powered medical equipment**
  CPUC: Medical Baseline is based solely on medical conditions, with no income requirement, and provides a lower rate and extra notifications before a PSPS
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): Each eligible household member
  cpuc.ca.gov
- [ ] **Form a personal support network of family, friends and neighbors with agreed check-ins, and ask local emergency management about evacuation assistance**
  Cold outages and blocked routes can isolate older or disabled Californians
  When: within 2 weeks; activate before each storm | Qty (family of 4): Plan for each person needing help
  cdc.gov

Pets

- [ ] **Prepare secure carriers or harnesses and practice loading before evacuation**
  Flood or debris-flow evacuation must include animals
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): One suitable carrier or restraint per pet; n/a if no pets
  redcross.org
- [ ] **Pack pet food and extra drinking water plus usual medicines and bowls**
  Storm closures or shelter stays interrupt animals' normal care
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): Per pet's needs and evacuation duration; agree amounts with vet; n/a if no pets
  redcross.org
- [ ] **Add vaccination and medical records plus owner/pet photos and vet contacts to protected document backups**
  Pet evacuation facilities may need vaccination and ownership evidence
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): One record set per pet; n/a if no pets
  redcross.org
- [ ] **Identify pet-friendly evacuation options; ask shelter staff about animal arrangements**
  Flood shelters may house household pets separately from people
  When: now; confirm available shelter during each event
  redcross.org

Alerts and communication

- [ ] **Keep Wireless Emergency Alerts enabled on compatible phones; check NWS local forecasts as well**
  California flash-flood warnings can require immediate action; WEA needs no signup
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): All compatible household phones
  weather.gov
- [ ] **LA County households: register for Alert LA County and check additional city systems**
  Localized burn-scar or coastal evacuation messages need current contact details
  When: This fortnight
  ready.lacounty.gov
- [ ] **Russian River and Sonoma coast households: register or update SoCoAlert using the county's current link**
  SoCoAlert carries local emergency messages including flood warnings and evacuation notifications
  When: This fortnight
  socoemergency.org
- [ ] **Get a NOAA Weather Radio with battery power or backup and test local reception; program your county if the receiver supports SAME**
  Storm outages may interrupt internet and cell phone alerts
  When: Now | Cost: USD 20-120 | Qty (family of 4): 1 radio; compatible spare batteries extra
  weather.gov ; weather.gov

- [ ] **Charge phone power banks and test compatible cables before storms**
  Long outages can disable phones needed for evacuation alerts
  When: now; recharge before each storm | Cost: USD 39.98-71.98 | Qty (family of 4): 2 power banks
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Learn the difference between a Flood Watch (be prepared) and a Flood or Flash Flood Warning (take action now), and agree what each household member does for each**
  NWS: a Flood Watch means conditions are favorable for flooding, which is possible but not certain; a Flood Warning means flooding is imminent or occurring; a Flash Flood Warning means move immediately to high ground if you are in a flood-prone area
  When: before the first storm warning
  weather.gov

- [ ] **Riverside County: use the county's Stay Informed directory for road-condition information**
  Official road-condition links help households check travel before storms; alerts are on the separate Alert RivCo page
  When: before the first storm warning
  emd.rivco.gov

- [ ] **San Joaquin County: sign up for the county's official emergency alert and warning system (SJReady)**
  SJReady signup page: stay connected with the County of San Joaquin's official emergency alert and warning system
  When: This fortnight
  sjready.org

- [ ] **Sign up for your county's emergency alerts through CalAlerts.org, even if your county is not listed here**
  Cal OES: sign up for local emergency alerts; county systems send evacuation orders
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): All household phones and email addresses
  calalerts.org ; news.caloes.ca.gov

Money and insurance

- [ ] **Get flood insurance quotes now. NFIP cover usually starts 30 days after you buy. Check floodsmart.gov and FEMA's reauthorization page for NFIP status**
  Atmospheric-river or tidal flooding can occur before peak winter; coverage must start before losses, and if NFIP authority lapses FEMA would stop selling and renewing policies
  When: now; a new policy usually starts 30 days after you buy it, so buy immediately. Key date: NFIP authority runs to Dec 11, 2026. If it lapses, FEMA stops selling and renewing policies but can still pay valid claims. | Qty (family of 4): One household assessment; building and contents assessed separately
  fema.gov ; floodsmart.gov

- [ ] **Review flood and earth-movement exclusions and ask about wildfire-caused debris-flow losses; check FAIR Plan supplemental cover if applicable**
  California mudflow and landslide cover differ and wildfire-related losses need individual assessment
  When: This fortnight
  insurance.ca.gov ; insurance.ca.gov

- [ ] **Keep some cash in small bills at home**
  Storm outages can disable ATMs and card payments
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): Your choice
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Save claim contacts; after damage contact your insurer promptly and take pictures or video of the damage**
  California flood or storm recovery needs dated evidence and compliance with policy deadlines
  When: save now; report damage promptly after an event
  consumerfinance.gov

Local help

- [ ] **Save LA County Office of Emergency Management's Ready LA portal for official preparedness and storm information**
  LA households need official preparedness and local storm information
  When: This fortnight
  ready.lacounty.gov

- [ ] **Use 211 for local food, housing and disaster referrals: find your local 211 through the California directory (LA County: 211 LA)**
  Storm displacement may require food or housing help beyond emergency response
  When: now; use when help is needed
  211ca.org

- [ ] **Bookmark the American Red Cross open-shelter locator and confirm event-specific sites with county officials**
  Flood or coastal evacuation may require temporary accommodation
  When: now; check when an evacuation occurs
  redcross.org
- [ ] **PG&E customers: save outage information line 1-800-743-5002 and bookmark the official outage center**
  Wind or flooding may interrupt northern and central California electricity
  When: Now
  pge.com
- [ ] **Southern California Edison customers: save 1-800-611-1911 for outage reporting; for downed power lines stay away and call 911 first then notify SCE on that number**
  Storm winds or flooding can bring down lines; stay away from downed lines
  When: Now
  sce.com
- [ ] **LADWP customers: save water/power outage reporting number 1-800-342-5397**
  Los Angeles city storm outages may involve LADWP rather than SCE
  When: Now
  ladwp.com
- [ ] **Los Angeles County: bookmark the county emergency page for alerts and preparedness**
  The county emergency page links to official alerts and preparedness resources; check current notices and follow local authorities
  When: This fortnight
  lacounty.gov
- [ ] **Sonoma County: find the Department of Emergency Management's mitigation, preparedness and recovery information**
  Sonoma County's emergency office runs local storm preparedness and recovery
  When: This fortnight
  sonomacounty.gov

General preparedness information from official sources, not personal, legal, medical or insurance advice. Always follow instructions from your local authorities and emergency services. In an emergency call 999 or 112 (UK) or 911 (US). Checklist built from official-source tables (source hosts shown; full links on the website); costs marked indicative are planning ranges.

Full links and updates:
ninoprep.com/zones/us-ca/
Scan the code or type the address.