Louisiana: 2026-27 El Nino checklist

Last reviewed: Nov 2, 2026 · Peak risk window: Dec-Mar · 60 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 drinking and sanitation water: 1 gallon per person per day**
  Flood can foul tap water; outages hit pumps. Ready.gov says 'several days'; we use 3 days as the minimum
  When: This fortnight | Cost: USD 15-40 | Qty (family of 4): 12 gal (4 gal/day x 3 days); 7 days = 28 gal
  ready.gov
- [ ] **Keep bottled water sealed in a cool dark place; replace non-commercial stored water every 6 months**
  Keeps the store safe through the Dec-Mar window
  When: This fortnight
  ready.gov
- [ ] **Follow local water notices. If you have no bottled water: boil clear water for 1 minute, or add 8 drops of unscented 5-9% bleach per gallon. Use 16 drops if the water is cloudy or very cold. Wait 30 minutes. Boiling and bleach do not remove fuel or chemicals**
  Floods can make tap water unsafe; use bottled water when available
  When: learn within 2 weeks; follow advisories immediately | Cost: USD 2-5 | Qty (family of 4): 1 suitable bleach bottle; pot; measuring dropper
  cdc.gov
- [ ] **Stock non-perishable food: canned meat/fruit/veg, bars, cereal, peanut butter, dried fruit, shelf-stable milk, plus a manual can opener**
  Road closures and power loss after floods/storms
  When: This fortnight | Cost: USD 40-90 | Qty (family of 4): several-day supply for 4 (we suggest 3 days minimum)
  ready.gov
- [ ] **Keep fridge and freezer doors shut. A fridge stays cold about 4 hours; a full freezer about 48 hours, a half-full one about 24. Throw out fridge food after 4 hours without power. Frozen food with ice crystals, or at 40°F or below, can be refrozen**
  Power outages can make refrigerated and frozen food unsafe
  When: prepare within 2 weeks; apply during outages | Cost: USD 5-15 | Qty (family of 4): 1 appliance thermometer per appliance; 2 if using both fridge and freezer
  cdc.gov
- [ ] **After a flood, throw out food that touched floodwater or storm water; if unsure whether a food is safe, throw it out; sanitize flooded food-contact surfaces**
  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

Power, heat and light

- [ ] **Build a kit with battery or hand-crank radio, flashlight, extra batteries, whistle, phone chargers and backup battery; keep power banks charged**
  Outages from Gulf lows and severe storms
  When: This fortnight | Cost: USD 40-100 | Qty (family of 4): 1 radio, 1 flashlight per person, 1-2 power banks
  ready.gov
- [ ] **Install carbon monoxide detectors with battery backup in central locations on every level of your home**
  CO is colorless and odorless; outages push people to generators and stoves
  When: This fortnight | Cost: USD 20-60 | Qty (family of 4): at least 1 per level, in central locations
  ready.gov
- [ ] **Use portable generators outdoors more than 20 feet from windows, doors and vents; never inside a home or garage even with doors or windows open**
  Generator exhaust can cause fatal carbon monoxide poisoning
  When: before any generator use; learn within 2 weeks
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Never heat the home with a gas oven or stove; use camp stoves and charcoal grills only outdoors**
  CO risk; symptoms: headache, dizziness, nausea, confusion. Move everyone outside to fresh air first, then call 911 or Poison Control 1-800-222-1222
  When: within 2 weeks, before the first outage
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Pack warm blankets/sleeping bags, weather-appropriate clothes, sturdy shoes**
  Ready.gov lists a sleeping bag or warm blanket per person, a complete change of clothing appropriate for your climate and sturdy shoes as kit items
  When: This month | Cost: USD 60-200 | Qty (family of 4): 1 per person
  ready.gov

Flood and storm protection

- [ ] **Check that an existing sump pump works and consider a backup; have a professional install plumbing check-valves where appropriate**
  Helps prevent floodwater backing up through household drains
  When: within 2 weeks; before flooding | Cost: USD 150-600 plus install | Qty (family of 4): 1 backup if appropriate for existing sump pump
  weather.gov

- [ ] **Move valuables to higher levels; elevate critical utilities; install a sewer back valve**
  Reduces flood damage
  When: This month | Cost: USD 0-2000+ depending on utilities
  ready.gov

- [ ] **Use sandbags only if sufficient time remains; filling and placing them takes time. Never delay leaving a home likely to flood**
  Flood preparation must not delay evacuation
  When: prepare before flooding | Cost: varies | Qty (family of 4): No universal quantity; ask parish OHSEP about local availability
  weather.gov

- [ ] **Turn Around, Don't Drown: never walk or drive into floodwater, and never drive around barricades. 6 in of fast-moving floodwater can knock over an adult; 12 in of rushing water can carry away most cars; 2 ft of rushing water can carry away SUVs and trucks**
  Over half of flood-related drownings happen when a vehicle is driven into hazardous floodwater
  When: learn within 2 weeks
  weather.gov

- [ ] **For a tornado warning, immediately use a basement or safe room, or an interior room on the lowest floor of a sturdy building away from windows. Plan substantial shelter in advance if living in a mobile home or tent**
  Tornado warnings indicate imminent danger; mobile homes and tents are unsafe shelters
  When: plan now; act immediately on a warning
  weather.gov ; weather.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: Now
  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

- [ ] **Plan evacuation routes and a destination on higher ground, with alternates in different directions; follow parish evacuation orders and leave early**
  Ready.gov: be familiar with alternate routes; choose destinations in different directions; leave early enough to avoid being trapped by severe weather; do not take shortcuts
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): 1 household route plan
  ready.gov

Home preparation

- [ ] **Photograph or video major household items and valuables; record serial numbers and store the inventory with important documents in a safe dry place**
  A household inventory helps support flood-insurance claims
  When: within 2 weeks; before flooding | Qty (family of 4): 1 inventory per household
  floodsmart.gov

- [ ] **Know how to shut off utilities and keep a wrench or pliers with the kit. If you smell gas, open a window, get everyone out and call the gas company from outside or a neighbor's home. If the gas is turned off, only a qualified professional should turn it back on**
  Flood and storm damage to gas, water, electric lines
  When: This fortnight | Cost: USD 8-20 | Qty (family of 4): 1 wrench or pliers
  ready.gov ; ready.gov

- [ ] **Do not enter a flooded home if the electricity may be on; do not touch electrical equipment if wet or standing in water; have the power company or a qualified electrician check and fix wiring before power is restored**
  Floodwater can hide live wires; underground or downed power lines can electrically charge the water
  When: learn within 2 weeks; apply after any flood | Cost: free (electrician cost varies)
  ready.gov ; weather.gov

- [ ] **Review your homeowners policy and ask your insurer about separate flood insurance; standard homeowners insurance excludes flooding**
  Identify flood-cover gaps before a loss
  When: now; a new flood policy usually does not start for 30 days, so do not wait for a storm
  weather.gov

- [ ] **Pack a go-bag for each person that you can carry if you must leave on foot**
  Ready.gov: prepare a go-bag you can carry when you evacuate on foot or by public transportation
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 bag per person
  ready.gov

- [ ] **Add a first aid kit and a whistle to your emergency kit**
  Ready.gov lists a first aid kit and a whistle (to signal for help) in a basic kit
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 first aid kit; 1 whistle per person
  ready.gov

Documents

- [ ] **Make copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records**
  Ready.gov lists copies of important family documents
  When: This fortnight | Cost: USD 0-20 | Qty (family of 4): 1 set per adult
  ready.gov

- [ ] **Keep copies of important documents saved electronically or in a waterproof portable container**
  Floods destroy paper
  When: This fortnight | Cost: USD 10-40 | Qty (family of 4): 1 waterproof container + 1 cloud folder
  ready.gov

- [ ] **Meet with your household and write down how you will contact each other and reconnect if separated, and where your family meeting place is**
  Household plan: contact, reconnecting if separated, and a family meeting place
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 plan
  ready.gov

- [ ] **Include copies of the registration information and other relevant documents for each pet, and a picture of you and your pet together**
  A picture helps if you become separated from your pet
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 set per pet
  ready.gov

- [ ] **Keep an emergency contact outside the area and current microchip registration**
  Local phone networks fail in storms
  When: This fortnight
  ready.gov

Children

- [ ] **For formula-fed infants, stock several days of ready-to-feed formula; pack at least one large diaper pack, two wipes packs and appropriate infant medicines**
  Ready-to-feed formula needs no mixing water and is especially important for infants under 2 months, premature infants or those with weakened immunity
  When: This fortnight | Cost: varies | Qty (family of 4): Several days of formula; check monthly; 1 large diaper pack; at least 2 wipes packs
  cdc.gov ; cdc.gov
- [ ] **If powdered formula is necessary, use bottled water until officials declare tap water safe; otherwise follow CDC water-treatment guidance. Follow the formula label's exact water/powder amounts. Without refrigeration prepare each feed fresh; use within 2 hours of preparation and 1 hour of starting feeding; discard leftovers**
  Prepared formula can become contaminated; saliva promotes bacterial growth
  When: learn within 2 weeks; apply at every feeding
  cdc.gov ; cdc.gov
- [ ] **Pack paper and pencil, books, games, puzzles or other activities for children**
  Reduces stress during shelter or outage
  When: This fortnight | Cost: USD 10-30 | Qty (family of 4): 1 small bag per child
  ready.gov
- [ ] **Write a family communication and reunion plan, meeting places, emergency contacts to call if you cannot be reached; complete a contact card for your child's backpack and your wallet; ask your school about its pickup plan**
  Storms can close schools and roads
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 plan
  cdc.gov ; ready.gov
- [ ] **Know the SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline, 1-800-985-5990 (call or text), for family stress after a disaster**
  Post-disaster stress in children and adults
  When: know within a month
  cdc.gov

Older, disabled and medical needs

- [ ] **Discuss an emergency supply with your prescriber or pharmacist; aim for at least 2 weeks of prescriptions where permitted, plus appropriate over-the-counter medicines, prescription eyewear and medical supplies**
  Emergencies can interrupt pharmacy access and prescription refills
  When: This fortnight | Cost: varies | Qty (family of 4): At least 2 weeks of prescriptions where permitted; individual supplies
  cdc.gov ; cdc.gov
- [ ] **Make a plan with your provider for electricity-dependent devices and refrigerated medicines**
  Outage planning for oxygen, CPAP, insulin
  When: This fortnight
  ready.gov
- [ ] **Contact parish OHSEP now about evacuation assistance, any local registration process and Medical Special Needs Shelter eligibility and arrangements; register where applicable**
  Assistance needs advance planning; Medical Special Needs Shelters have eligibility criteria and require a caregiver
  When: contact now, before an emergency
  gohsep.la.gov ; gohsep.la.gov
- [ ] **Build a support network; give a trusted person a key, supply location and instructions for medicine and equipment**
  Check-in plan during outages
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 2-3 people
  ready.gov
- [ ] **If power is out a day or more, throw out medicine that needs a fridge unless the label says otherwise. If a life depends on it, keep using it until you get a new supply. Keep a cooler with ice packs and ask your pharmacist about insulin**
  Safety guidance
  When: learn within 2 weeks
  cdc.gov ; cdc.gov

Pets

- [ ] **Pack a pet kit: several days of food in an airtight container, water, medicine, collar/ID tag, leash, sturdy carrier**
  Evacuations and shelter stays
  When: This fortnight | Cost: USD 40-150 | Qty (family of 4): per pet
  ready.gov

- [ ] **Keep records in a waterproof container and digitally; keep microchip info current**
  Keep registration information and other relevant documents in a waterproof container and available electronically
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 set
  ready.gov

- [ ] **Plan a pet-friendly place to go: many public shelters and hotels do not allow pets. Arrange a buddy system. Ask your parish emergency management office**
  Shelter policy varies
  When: This fortnight
  ready.gov

Alerts and communication

- [ ] **Know that Wireless Emergency Alerts reach WEA-enabled phones in the targeted area without an app or sign-up**
  WEAs do not track your location; they are broadcast from area cell towers to mobile phones within the defined geographic location
  When: This fortnight
  fema.gov

- [ ] **Choose a NOAA Weather Radio with battery backup and SAME alerts; look up your parish SAME code and program it per the manufacturer's instructions; confirm reception**
  Radio provides an additional alert channel independent of cellular service; reception and transmitter availability still matter
  When: within 2 weeks; check operation before storms | Cost: USD 25-60 | Qty (family of 4): 1 receiver
  weather.gov ; weather.gov ; ready.gov

- [ ] **Sign up for emergency alerts through the 'Get alerts and notifications' link on gohsep.la.gov (it registers you with Smart911)**
  State alert registration
  When: Now
  gohsep.la.gov

- [ ] **Find the NWS forecast office for your area at weather.gov (offices serving Louisiana include New Orleans/Baton Rouge (Slidell), Lake Charles and Shreveport)**
  Official forecasts and warnings
  When: ongoing
  weather.gov ; weather.gov ; weather.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

- [ ] **Learn the difference between a Tornado Watch (be prepared) and a Tornado Warning (take shelter now), and agree where each household member goes for each**
  NWS: a Tornado Watch means tornadoes are possible in and near the area, so review plans and check your safe room; a Tornado Warning means a tornado has been sighted or indicated by radar, so move to an interior room on the lowest floor of a sturdy building and avoid windows; from a mobile home, vehicle or outdoors, move to the closest substantial shelter
  When: Now
  weather.gov

- [ ] **New Orleans: sign up for NOLA Ready emergency alerts (text NOLAREADY to 77295, Spanish: ESP, or use the online Smart911 sign-up); subscribers receive NWS severe thunderstorm, flash flood, tornado, tropical storm and hurricane warnings**
  City of New Orleans NOLA Ready 'Emergency Alerts' page (stay-connected section)
  When: This fortnight
  ready.nola.gov

Money and insurance

- [ ] **Arrange NFIP flood insurance early: a new policy normally has a 30-day waiting period. Ask the agent about exceptions and confirm the exact effective date**
  Most homeowners and renters policies exclude flood damage; waiting until a storm approaches can leave a coverage gap
  When: now; a policy bought today normally takes effect about 30 days later (confirm the exact date with the agent) | Cost: varies by risk | Qty (family of 4): 1 appropriate policy
  floodsmart.gov ; agents.floodsmart.gov

- [ ] **Check floodsmart.gov and FEMA's reauthorization page for NFIP status. Renew on time**
  NFIP reauthorization status
  When: now: buy a new policy or renew on time. Key date: NFIP authority runs to Dec 11, 2026. If it lapses, FEMA stops selling and renewing policies but can still pay valid claims.
  fema.gov
- [ ] **Keep some emergency cash and copies of insurance documents in your kit; the amount is a household choice (no official figure)**
  ATMs fail in outages
  When: This fortnight
  ready.gov
- [ ] **After a disaster: apply for FEMA help at DisasterAssistance.gov, and file a claim with your insurance company**
  Claim process
  When: after declaration
  fema.gov

Local help

- [ ] **Louisiana 211: dial 211 or text your ZIP code to 898-211 for shelters and recovery help**
  Non-emergency local help
  When: save within 2 weeks
  louisiana211.org
- [ ] **Find your parish emergency office in the GOHSEP directory and save its number**
  Local contacts for emergency planning and parish news. Examples: Orleans nola.gov/ready; Lafayette lafayetteohsep.org; Calcasieu cppj.net; Terrebonne tpcg.org; Jefferson jeffparish.gov; Caddo caddosheriff.org. GOHSEP main line: (225) 925-7500
  When: This fortnight
  gohsep.la.gov
- [ ] **GOHSEP Get a Game Plan: state guides on floods, power outages, pets, disabilities**
  Statewide preparedness
  When: This fortnight
  gohsep.la.gov
- [ ] **If Entergy is your provider: check outage status at myentergy.com/s/outagemap; report emergencies like downed lines via 800-9OUTAGE (800-968-8243)**
  Utility outage reporting. Not every Louisiana home is an Entergy customer; ask your utility for its outage line
  When: save within 2 weeks
  entergy.com
- [ ] **If a CO alarm sounds or CO poisoning is suspected, move everyone outside to fresh air immediately and call 911. Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 can also advise**
  CO poisoning symptoms include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea and confusion
  When: learn within 2 weeks; act immediately if alarm sounds or poisoning is suspected
  cpsc.gov ; cdc.gov
- [ ] **Agree with neighbors how you will check on each other, especially older or disabled people living alone**
  Ready.gov: discuss how people in your network can assist each other
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): 1 neighbor check-in plan
  ready.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-la/
Scan the code or type the address.