Texas: 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 a minimum three-day drinking and household water reserve**
  Flooding and storm outages can interrupt safe tap water
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 12 US gal minimum for 3 days (evacuation): 1 gal/person/day x 4 x 3; 2-week home supply = 56 gal preferred (CDC); add more for pregnancy, illness, pets
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Pack evacuation food and build a longer home pantry**
  Texas flooding can close roads and refrigeration may fail
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 3 days for 4 people to evacuate; 14 days for 4 people at home; home supply includes evacuation portion
  redcross.org

- [ ] **Pack a manual can opener with the flood evacuation kit**
  Canned food remains usable during storm power failures
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 household opener
  texasready.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

- [ ] **Pack flashlights and spare batteries and check that the lights work**
  Winter storm outages leave stairs and evacuation routes dark
  When: within 2 weeks; check lights before forecast storms | Cost: USD 56.28-70.36 | Qty (family of 4): 4 lights (1 per person)
  texasready.gov

- [ ] **Pack warm blankets and dry winter clothing**
  Cold snaps and wet evacuation clothing increase exposure during outages
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 4 warm blankets or sleeping bags plus dry clothing for each person
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Install and test battery-powered or battery-backup CO alarms near every sleeping area; replace per manufacturer's instructions or every 5 years**
  Backup heating and generators create poisoning risks during Texas outages
  When: now; test before backup equipment use | Cost: USD 24.97-54.97 per alarm | Qty (family of 4): Near every sleeping area; quantity depends on home layout
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Use generators outdoors more than 20 feet from windows, doors and vents; never indoors or in a garage; never run a car in an attached garage, even with the door open; never heat with an oven or burn charcoal indoors**
  Outage workarounds can cause fatal carbon-monoxide exposure
  When: now; follow on every use
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **Arrange annual heating-system and combustion-appliance service**
  Cold snaps can expose faulty heating or blocked ventilation
  When: This fortnight
  cdc.gov

- [ ] **If a CO alarm sounds or you suspect CO poisoning, get everyone outside to fresh air immediately, then call 911. Poison Control 1-800-222-1222 can also advise**
  CPSC: know the symptoms (headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, sleepiness, confusion); if you suspect CO poisoning get outside to fresh air, then call 911
  When: save emergency numbers and learn the response now; act immediately on an alarm or suspected poisoning
  cpsc.gov ; cdc.gov

- [ ] **Use space heaters with automatic shut-off only, at least 3 feet from anything that can burn; never heat the home with an oven, grill or generator**
  City of Austin: fuel-burning heat sources make deadly carbon monoxide and heaters can start fires
  When: before the first freeze
  austintexas.gov

Flood and storm protection

- [ ] **Identify floodplain exposure and routes to higher ground**
  Floods can develop quickly; identify floodplain exposure, flood-prone roads and the fastest route to higher ground before an emergency
  When: now; reassess when warnings change | Qty (family of 4): 1 household route plan
  weather.gov

- [ ] **Sandbags: use only if you have ample time; filling takes longer than you think; never delay evacuation to fill or place them**
  NWS: use sandbags 'if you have sufficient time' and 'filling sandbags can take more time than you may think'; Texas DSHS: when flood threat is high, evacuate early
  When: within 2 weeks; place only if water is not yet arriving and it is safe | Qty (family of 4): No official quantity; ask your county emergency management
  weather.gov ; texasready.gov

- [ ] **Test an existing sump pump and plan backup if appropriate**
  An existing drainage system can fail during repeated rain or outages
  When: within 2 weeks; test before heavy-rain warnings
  weather.gov

- [ ] **Ask a plumber whether a sewer backflow check valve fits the property**
  Heavy rainfall can back sewage into affected drains
  When: This fortnight
  weather.gov

- [ ] **For a tornado warning go to a basement, safe room or interior room on the lowest floor of a sturdy building away from windows; mobile homes and tents are unsafe. Separately plan flood evacuation to higher ground**
  Tornado warnings require immediate protective shelter; flood-prone locations may require escape to higher ground
  When: now; act immediately on warnings | Qty (family of 4): 1 household plan covering both hazards
  weather.gov ; weather.gov ; weather.gov

- [ ] **Turn Around, Don't Drown: never walk or drive through floodwater, and never drive around barricades**
  NWS: over half of flood drownings happen when a vehicle is driven into flood water; 6 in of fast water can knock over an adult, 12 in can carry away most cars, 2 ft can carry away SUVs and trucks
  When: learn now; apply on every warning
  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**
  FEMA provides official flood maps through its Flood Map Service Center; Texas Department of Insurance warns that floods can happen outside floodplains
  When: This fortnight
  ready.gov ; tdi.texas.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

- [ ] **Houston-Galveston area: find your hurricane evacuation zone (coastal A, B or C) on H-GAC's Know Your Zone page, and check that the zone map and evacuation route map carry the current year's date**
  H-GAC: knowing your evacuation zone helps ensure a safe and timely evacuation. Other Texas counties publish their own zones, so ask your county emergency management office
  When: before the next hurricane season (June) | Qty (family of 4): 1 household check
  h-gac.com

Home preparation

- [ ] **Have roof shingles and flashing checked and repair defects**
  Repeated winter rain and storm winds can worsen existing roof leaks
  When: This fortnight
  tdi.texas.gov
- [ ] **Check gutters and downspouts and tighten loose fasteners in dry, calm weather from a steady ladder, or hire help. Never use a ladder or go on the roof in wind or rain**
  Loose gutters can worsen Texas storm damage
  When: within 2 weeks; inspect again after leaf fall
  tdi.texas.gov
- [ ] **Check trees and move unsecured outdoor objects to shelter**
  Dead limbs and loose furniture become hazards in severe thunderstorms
  When: within 2 weeks; secure loose items before storm arrival
  tdi.texas.gov
- [ ] **Photograph belongings and record serial numbers before floods**
  Pre-loss evidence helps claims after Houston-area flooding or DFW wind damage
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): 1 household inventory including closets and drawers
  tdi.texas.gov
- [ ] **Know where to shut off electricity, gas and water; if flooding is likely and you have time, shut off electricity before you leave. Never touch the electrical panel if it is wet or you are standing in water**
  Flood and storm damage can cause utility leaks and electrical hazards
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 labeled household utility plan
  texasready.gov ; tdi.texas.gov
- [ ] **Do not enter a flooded home if electricity may be on. Never operate switches or use electric tools or appliances while standing in water. Have a qualified electrician inspect the electrical system before power is restored; equipment must be completely dry before reuse**
  Flood-damaged wiring and live power lines can cause fatal electric shocks
  When: learn now; apply after any flood | Cost: free (electrician cost varies)
  texasready.gov ; weather.gov ; cdc.gov
- [ ] **Before a freeze: wrap pipes in unheated spaces, remove outdoor hoses, open cabinets under sinks and drip faucets overnight (follow local water limits). Know your water shutoff valve and turn it off if a pipe bursts**
  TDI: a frozen pipe can burst and flood the home when it thaws
  When: before the first freeze | Qty (family of 4): 1 household check
  tdi.texas.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 photo IDs, passports and birth records for household members**
  Flood evacuation can separate family members from identity documents
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): 1 copy set covering 2 adults and 2 children
  texasready.gov
- [ ] **Copy insurance policies and property deed or lease and claims contacts**
  Flood displacement makes proof of address and coverage harder to retrieve
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): 1 household property and insurance copy set
  texasready.gov ; tdi.texas.gov

- [ ] **Copy medical records and prescriptions and children's vaccination records**
  Evacuation can interrupt treatment and school or childcare arrangements
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): Records for all 4 people; vaccination copies for both children
  cdc.gov ; texasready.gov
- [ ] **Put copies in a portable waterproof case and make protected cloud backups**
  Floodwater can destroy papers and a lost bag can remove the only copy
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): 1 household waterproof case plus digital backup
  texasready.gov ; irs.gov

Children

- [ ] **Formula-fed infants: ready-to-feed formula is safest. If using powder, mix with bottled water until officials say tap water is safe; with no power, prepare fresh formula for every feeding, use within 2 hours of preparation and 1 hour of starting a feed, and discard leftovers**
  CDC: unsafe tap water after flooding or no refrigeration makes formula preparation risky; if bottled water is unavailable, follow the CDC page to make water safe
  When: within 2 weeks; rotate before expiry | Qty (family of 4): Only if an infant is in the household; quantity based on usual feeds and clinician advice
  cdc.gov
- [ ] **Pack diapers and wipes and the child's prescribed medicines**
  Storm evacuation or road closures can interrupt infant care
  When: within 2 weeks; check supplies before evacuation | Qty (family of 4): For each applicable child: usual daily use for planned absence; medicines per prescriber
  cdc.gov
- [ ] **Add games and quiet activities for each child**
  Flood evacuation and cold-weather shelter stays disrupt routines
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 2 activity sets using existing items
  redcross.org
- [ ] **Agree school pickup and reunification arrangements and child contact cards**
  Texas flash-flood closures can leave children and parents apart
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): 2 child contact cards plus a parent copy and household pickup plan
  cdc.gov
- [ ] **Plan calm explanations and routines and know when to seek professional help**
  Flood or tornado experiences can cause lasting child distress; CDC lists the SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline 1-800-985-5990 (call or text) for immediate support
  When: within 2 weeks; use during recovery
  cdc.gov

Older, disabled and medical needs

- [ ] **Register eligible household members with Texas STEAR (online or by dialing 2-1-1)**
  Medical or mobility needs complicate flood evacuation; registration does not guarantee assistance
  When: now; update if needs or address change | Qty (family of 4): 1 registration for each eligible person
  tdem.texas.gov
- [ ] **Ask your electricity delivery utility (for example Oncor) about Critical Care or Chronic Condition status**
  Storm outages threaten device users; designation does not guarantee uninterrupted power
  When: Now
  oncor.com
- [ ] **Plan how to keep refrigerated medicines cold and medical devices working during an outage; contact the device manufacturer about battery or generator compatibility and confirm backup runtime with the supplier**
  Oxygen equipment and other powered devices may be unusable during outages
  When: now; arrange a safe alternative before device backup power runs out | Qty (family of 4): Individual plan for every device user; backup runtime is device-specific and must be confirmed
  stacks.cdc.gov ; cdc.gov
- [ ] **Keep at least 2 weeks of prescription medicines if the prescriber permits, plus a cooler and chemical ice packs for refrigerated medicines. If power is out a day or more, discard refrigerated medicines unless the label states otherwise; if a life depends on one, use it only until a new supply is available**
  Texas flooding can block pharmacies and power failures interrupt refrigeration
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): At least 2 weeks per prescribed user (CDC); ask prescriber/pharmacist; follow label storage instructions
  cdc.gov ; cdc.gov ; cdc.gov

- [ ] **Assign a check-in helper and backup caregiver with accessible transport**
  Older or disabled relatives may need help when flooded roads disrupt care
  When: now; agree check-in times before warnings | Qty (family of 4): A named helper and a backup for each person who needs support; confirm transport needs
  cdc.gov ; texasready.gov

- [ ] **Know the signs of hypothermia: shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, drowsiness. A body temperature below 95°F is an emergency: call 911. If home is too cold, go to friends or a warming center**
  Ready.gov: winter storms put older adults, children, sick people and pets at greater risk
  When: before the first freeze
  ready.gov ; cdc.gov

Pets

- [ ] **Prepare carriers and leashes and practice loading animals**
  Flood evacuation and tornado shelter moves can lead to escaped pets
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 appropriately sized carrier or secure restraint per pet; pets additional to 4 people
  redcross.org

- [ ] **Pack separate pet food and water and medicines**
  Storm displacement interrupts supplies and household water is allocated to people
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): Per pet: usual food and medicines for evacuation period; water additional to 12 human gallons
  redcross.org

- [ ] **Copy vaccination and medical records and owner-with-pet photos**
  Records support boarding and reunification after Texas flood evacuation
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): 1 record and photo set per pet; use existing waterproof storage
  redcross.org

- [ ] **Confirm pet arrangements at the evacuation destination**
  Household pets may be housed separately from people at disaster shelters
  When: within 2 weeks; confirm again before traveling | Qty (family of 4): 1 confirmed destination and alternative for all pets
  redcross.org

- [ ] **In a freeze, bring pets indoors**
  City of Austin winter guidance
  When: each freeze | Qty (family of 4): n/a; all pets
  austintexas.gov

Alerts and communication

- [ ] **Enable Wireless Emergency Alerts on compatible phones and keep them on**
  Flash-flood and tornado warnings may arrive while the household sleeps
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): All compatible household phones; WEA needs no subscription
  weather.gov

- [ ] **For Harris County register for ReadyHarris alerts and save the Houston TranStar road-closure link listed on readyharris.org**
  Local evacuation and flood instructions supplement NWS warnings
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): All household contact numbers used in Harris County
  readyharris.org

- [ ] **Austin area (Bastrop, Blanco, Burnet, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lee, Llano, Travis, Williamson counties): sign up for WarnCentralTexas alerts**
  Travis-area flash floods need local instructions as well as weather alerts
  When: Now | Qty (family of 4): Household contacts in the participating region
  austintexas.gov ; tdem.texas.gov

- [ ] **Prepare a battery-powered or hand-crank NOAA Weather Radio**
  Storm power or cell network failure can cut phone warnings
  When: within 2 weeks; tune and test before severe-weather forecasts | Qty (family of 4): 1 household NOAA-capable radio; compatible batteries as required by the model
  weather.gov ; cdc.gov

- [ ] **Charge compatible power banks and pack existing phone cables**
  Long storm outages can exhaust phones needed for alerts and family contact
  When: within 2 weeks; recharge before warnings | Cost: USD 39.98-71.98 | Qty (family of 4): 2 power banks; existing compatible cables
  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: This fortnight
  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

- [ ] **Oncor customers: set up MyOncor alerts for outages**
  MyOncor alerts: text REG to 66267 to register; text OUT to 66267 to report an outage (Oncor page)
  When: This fortnight
  oncor.com

Money and insurance

- [ ] **Buy NFIP flood insurance now (30-day wait); check floodsmart.gov and FEMA's reauthorization page for NFIP status**
  Homeowners/renters cover generally excludes flood. FloodSmart: cover starts 30 days after purchase (exceptions e.g. new, increased, extended or renewed mortgage). If NFIP authority lapses, FEMA would stop selling and renewing policies (existing policies and valid claims continue). A policy bought now starts about 30 days later, so do not wait.
  When: now; a new policy usually starts 30 days after you buy it. 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): 1 household policy with appropriate building and/or contents cover
  floodsmart.gov

- [ ] **Review wind, hail, flood and other water-damage coverage and deductibles with your insurer**
  Coverage and deductibles vary by policy; standard homeowners policies do not cover flood damage
  When: Now
  tdi.texas.gov

- [ ] **Keep some cash in small bills at home**
  Flooding or storm outages can disrupt card payments and ATM access
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): Your choice
  redcross.org

- [ ] **Photograph damage before doing any work; temporary repairs are generally fine but make no permanent repairs until you have talked to your insurer; keep your insurer's claims number and the TDI Help Line 800-252-3439**
  Flood and wind claims need timely evidence and policy-specific handling
  When: now; use promptly after damage | Qty (family of 4): 1 household claims checklist
  tdi.texas.gov

Local help

- [ ] **Save 2-1-1 Texas for food and housing and local assistance referrals**
  Flood displacement or cold-weather outages can leave households needing support
  When: now; use when assistance is needed
  211texas.org

- [ ] **Bookmark the Red Cross live shelter and disaster-services locator**
  Flood evacuation or winter outages may make home unsafe
  When: now; check again at evacuation time
  redcross.org

- [ ] **For Oncor territory save the outage-reporting line and account details**
  DFW-area storm outages need the electricity delivery utility
  When: now; report when power fails
  oncor.com
- [ ] **For Austin Energy customers save the outage-reporting line**
  Central Texas winter storms and flood damage can interrupt electricity
  When: now; report when power fails
  austinenergy.com
- [ ] **Lee County: use Lee County Emergency Management's page for local emergency information**
  Lee County Emergency Management provides local emergency contacts and links to WarnCentralTexas, flooded-road closures, state highway conditions and STEAR
  When: within 2 weeks; check current information during an emergency
  leecountytx.gov
- [ ] **Never touch a fallen power line or anyone touching one. Stay well away, call 911 if anyone is hurt or there is fire or sparking, then report the line to your electricity company**
  CDC: never touch a fallen power line; report it to the power company
  When: Now
  cdc.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-tx/
Scan the code or type the address.