

WHERE TO SHELTER FROM NUCLEAR FALLOUT

Where in a building to shelter from fallout, how long to stay, what to do about air, and what to keep in your shelter spot.

SHELTER TYPES, IN FEMA'S ORDER [1][2]

1. **Underground:** basements, subway tunnels, underground parking garages.
2. **Center of a large, heavy building:** most commercial buildings; thick-walled masonry.
3. **House with a basement:** the basement.
4. **Wood frame house, no basement:** limited protection, still far better than outside.
5. **A car is not a shelter.**

- ▮ Concrete, brick, stone, and earth shield well. Wood and drywall shield little alone, but many walls add up.
- ▮ Put as many walls between you and the outside as you can.
- ▮ Broken windows do not rule a building out if it is structurally sound.

WHERE IN THE BUILDING [1][4]

- ▮ Go to the basement or the middle of the building.
- ▮ Stay away from the roof, outside walls, windows, corners, and doors.
- ▮ **House with basement:** basement, away from windows and outside walls.
- ▮ **House without basement:** interior room or hallway near the center.
- ▮ **Apartment or office:** interior hallway or windowless room near the center, away from roof and outer walls. A basement or underground garage is better.

IF YOUR SHELTER IS POOR [1]

- ▮ Adequate shelter within about 15 minutes: move there no later than 30 minutes after the blast.
- ▮ Somewhat better shelter: stay an hour or two, then move.

HOW LONG TO STAY [1][2][5]

- ▮ At least 24 hours. The right time to leave can be a few hours to several days.
- ▮ Leave early only for fire, gas leak, building collapse, or serious injury.
- ▮ Otherwise wait for officials to say it is safe or give evacuation instructions.

AIR AND VENTILATION [1][6]

- ▮ Close and lock windows and doors.
- ▮ Turn off fans, air conditioners, and forced-air heat. Close fireplace dampers.

- ▮ You do not need to seal the room. Keep enough ventilation for indoor air quality.

■ WARNING

Do not go outside to reset breakers or check the house. If someone arrives from outside, let them in, have them remove their outer clothing before entering, then wash. [4][7]

FOOD AND WATER [8]

- ▮ Sealed food and drinks already inside are safe, including unspoiled fridge and freezer food. Wipe containers from outside.
- ▮ Drink bottled water until officials clear other water. Toilet tank (not bowl) and water heater water are also free of radioactive material.
- ▮ Boiling does not remove radioactive material. Tap water is fine for washing.
- ▮ Keep taking your medications.

KEEP IN YOUR SHELTER SPOT [2][3][7]

WATER AND FOOD

- ☐ Water: 1 gallon per person per day, several days
- ☐ Several days of non-perishable food
- ☐ Manual can opener
- ☐ Pet food and water; infant supplies if needed

INFORMATION AND LIGHT

- ☐ Battery or hand-crank radio; NOAA Weather Radio
- ☐ Flashlight and extra batteries
- ☐ Phone charger and backup battery

HEALTH AND CLEANUP

- ☐ First aid kit; medications and eyeglasses
- ☐ Spare clothes for each person
- ☐ Trash bags and ties for contaminated clothing
- ☐ Moist towelettes, soap, dust mask

OTHER

- ☐ Sleeping bag or blanket for each person
- ☐ Whistle; wrench or pliers for utilities
- ☐ Local maps; paper, pencil, kids activities

IN AN EMERGENCY CALL 911. INSTRUCTIONS FROM LOCAL OFFICIALS COME FIRST.

Sources: [1] FEMA, Planning Guidance for Response to a Nuclear Detonation, Third Edition (2022) ([fema.gov](https://www.fema.gov)). [2] Ready.gov, Radiation Emergencies (Nuclear Explosion) ([ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov)). [3] Ready.gov, Build a Kit ([ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov)). [4] CDC, What to Do: Get Inside ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)). [5] CDC, What to Do: Stay Inside ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)). [6] CDC, Where To Go In a Radiation Emergency (infographic) ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)). [7] CDC, What to Do: Stay Tuned ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)). [8] CDC, Food, Drinking Water, and Medicine Safety in a Radiation Emergency ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)). **Reviewed** October 30, 2026.