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Parents Encouraged to Include Emergency Preparedness in Back-to-School Plans

August is School and Campus Preparedness Month in Illinois

SPRINGFIELD – Students from kindergarten through college soon will head back to school. As families prepare for the new academic year, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) and local emergency management agencies are encouraging parents to include emergency preparedness in their back-to-school plans.

“Emergencies can occur any time of the day or night, including when children are in school,” said Acting IEMA Director Alicia Tate-Nadeau. “The start of a new school year is the perfect time to make sure you know your school’s plans for keeping students safe during an emergency and then talking to your child about those plans.”

Here are some tips for parents to consider:

- Find out where children will be taken in the event of an evacuation during school hours.
- Ensure your current emergency contact information is on file at your child’s school.
- Pre-authorize a friend or relative to pick up your children in an emergency and make sure the school knows who that designated person is.
- Teach children with cell phones about ‘Text First, Talk Later.’ Short, simple text messages, such as “R U OK?” and “I’m OK,” are more likely to get through than a phone call if phone service is unavailable immediately following an emergency. As phone congestion eases, you can follow up with a phone call to relay more information.

New this academic school year, state law requires schools to hold a minimum of three evacuations drills while students are present to better prepare students and personnel for emergencies. Specifically, within the first 90-days of the school year, schools must conduct at least one law enforcement evacuation drill. These drills must be conducted according to the school's emergency and crisis response plans, protocols, and procedures.

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Students headed off to college also need to be prepared for emergencies. While doing back to school shopping, consider picking up the essential items for an emergency preparedness kit. Every home, dorm and apartment should have the supplies needed to endure a storm, power outage or disaster. You can find a list of emergency kit essentials online at www.ready.illinois.gov.

Many college campuses also offer email and text messages to alert students of potential dangers, such as severe weather and other threats. Encourage your college student to sign-up for such alerts. Some colleges also provide alert messages for parents so they also are aware of potential dangers on campus. In addition, make sure your student knows the emergency plans for their dorm or apartment building.

In addition, a great resource for both parent and college students is the FEMA Weather app. This free app provides fast and reliable alerts from the National Weather Service (NWS). Best of all, the app can be tailored to offer alerts for up to five different locations. This convenience can provide peace of mind for parents who have kids that have moved away to college.

Additional preparedness information is available on the Ready Illinois website at www.Ready.Illinois.gov. You can also follow Ready Illinois on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).