

Managing health impacts of a power outage for frail older people and younger people with disabilities in the community

Aged Care Branch
3 February 2009

Victoria has the most reliable power supply in Australia. But sometimes power outages do occur. Power outages can be caused by severe weather and associated events such as lightning, floods, bushfires or high winds, or by trees falling on power lines. Electricity power outages can last from minutes to several days in some situations.

At particular risk are those frail older people and younger people with disabilities living in the community who have special needs and require an uninterrupted supply of electricity for ventilators, to store medication, for cooling systems or other health reasons.

Everyone should be prepared to manage and minimise the impact of power outages that may be caused by severe weather conditions, accidents or "load shedding" – selective disruptions to power supplies to manage pressure on power systems. Some clients may need assistance to be prepared and to manage in power outages.

Some of you may already have contingency plans to deal with power outages. This information is to support and complement your plans in managing those activities for vulnerable people in the community, particularly those who require an uninterrupted supply of electricity for health reasons.

Because power outages can occur at anytime, ensure that all clients have an emergency plan and kit that includes:

- **Important Contacts** – complete list of important telephone numbers in a safe and easily locatable place. The client may need to arrange alternative communication strategies if they have a phone that will be affected by a power outage.
- **Alternative lighting** such as torches with working batteries or candles, including matches or other lighting products. Remember to keep naked flames from gas and flammable material.
- **Alternative cooking facilities and heating/cooling** – ensure that gas connections are maintained and are in good working order.
- **Battery powered radio** to stay tuned to news services to get updates on weather conditions and power outages.
- **Access to fresh water**, particularly if you use electricity to run a water pump.

If clients have special needs and require uninterrupted supply of power because of life support equipment, have a medical condition that requires continuous power supply or other special needs there are steps that they can take to protect their access to power including:

- **Registering with their power supplier** (the company they pay for their electricity) as a person requiring continuous access to power because of essential needs i.e. ventilator, medication or need for cooling. This may mean that you can avoid experiencing 'load shedding' and be prioritised for reconnection in the event of a power outage.
- Contacting their local power supplier to prioritise their reconnection in the event of a power outage.
- In the event of a power outage, ensure that the client is aware of how to manage medication appropriately (ie not to open fridge too often, or to move medication that needs to be kept cool into the fridge).

In addition make sure that in hot weather the client is aware of the need to ensure that there is a readily available supply of drinking water.

Further information is available at <http://www.vic.gov.au/news-detail/your-guide-to-power-outages.html>