

Recommended Earthquake Safety Actions



Federal, State, and local emergency management experts and other official preparedness organizations agree that the actions described below will reduce injury and death during earthquakes.

In most situations, if you feel shaking or get an earthquake alert, immediately:

DROP where you are, onto your hands and knees. This position protects you from being knocked down and allows you to stay low and crawl to shelter if nearby.

COVER your head and neck with one arm and hand.

- If a sturdy table or desk is nearby, crawl underneath it for shelter.
- If no shelter is nearby, crawl next to an interior wall (away from windows).
- Stay on your knees; bend over to protect vital organs.

HOLD ON until the shaking stops.

- Under shelter: hold on to it with one hand; be ready to move with your shelter if it shifts.
- No shelter: hold on to your head and neck with both arms and hands.

If you are unable to drop to the ground, sit and bend over, covering your head and neck with your hands and arms. If you use a cane, keep it with you even if you go under a table to help you get back up. If you use a wheelchair or walker with wheels (a rollator), **LOCK** your wheels (or set the brake) and remain seated until the shaking stops. Always **COVER** your head and neck with your arms, a pillow, a book, or whatever is available and **HOLD ON** until shaking stops. For other accessibility recommendations see EarthquakeCountry.org/accessibility.

U.S. West Coast residents are encouraged to download the MyShake app to receive earthquake alert messages on their cellphone.

A small jolt might turn out to be the start of a large earthquake, so always protect yourself immediately!



How to Protect Yourself in Various Settings

Indoors: Drop, Cover, and Hold On. Avoid exterior walls, windows, hanging objects, tall furniture, televisions, and cabinets with heavy objects or glass. Do not try to move more than 5-7 feet before getting on the ground. Do not go outside during shaking! (Exterior building materials and glass can fall and may hit you as you exit.) If seated and unable to drop to the floor: bend forward, Cover your head with your arms, and Hold On to your neck with both hands.

In bed: Do not get out of bed. Lie face down to protect vital organs, and Cover your head and neck with a pillow, keeping your arms as close to your head as possible, while you Hold On to your head and neck with both hands until shaking stops. You are less likely to be injured by fallen and broken objects by staying where you are.

In a multiple-floor building: Drop, Cover, and Hold On. Avoid windows and other hazards. Do not use elevators. Do not be surprised if sprinkler systems or fire alarms activate.

In a classroom: Drop, Cover, and Hold On. Laboratories or other settings may require special considerations to ensure safety. Students should also be taught what to do at home or other locations.

In a stadium or theater: Drop to the ground in front of your seat or lean over as much as possible, then Cover your head with your arms (as best as possible), and Hold On to your neck with both hands until shaking stops. Then walk out slowly, watching for anything that could fall during aftershocks.

In a store: Drop, Cover, and Hold On. Getting next to a shopping cart, beneath clothing racks, or onto the bottom shelf of a large multi-shelf unit to provide extra protection from falling objects.



What NOT to do!

Many people still think "getting in a doorway" is safe, however this is out-of-date advice that should never have been recommended. We now understand that doorways: are not stronger than any other part of the house; do not provide protection from falling or flying objects; and will not be a safe space in the rare case of building collapse.

Outdoors: Move to an open space if you can safely do so; avoid power lines, trees, signs, buildings, vehicles, and other hazards. Then Drop, Cover, and Hold On. This protects you from any objects that may be thrown through the air, even if nothing is directly above you.

Driving: Pull over to the side of the road, stop, and set the parking brake. Avoid overpasses, bridges, power lines, signs, trees and other hazards. Stay inside the vehicle until the shaking stops, then proceed carefully by avoiding fallen debris, cracked or shifted pavement, and emergency vehicles. If a power line falls on the car, stay inside until a trained person removes the wire.



Near the shoreline: Follow instructions for your setting described above. Then as soon as shaking reduces enough that you are able to stand, walk quickly to high ground or inland as a tsunami may arrive within minutes. Don't wait for officials to issue a warning. Walk, rather than drive, to avoid traffic, debris, and other hazards.



Below a dam or reservoir (water storage facility): Follow instructions for your setting described above. Large water storage structures can become damaged during a major earthquake. Catastrophic failure causing a large amount of water to be released and flow downhill is unlikely, but if you live downstream from a dam, you should know flood-zone information and have prepared an evacuation plan for getting to high ground.

More information

[EarthquakeCountry.org/step5](https://www.earthquakecountry.org/step5) (additional guidance, videos, and images)

[EarthquakeCountry.org/accessibility](https://www.earthquakecountry.org/accessibility) (includes additional guidance for accessibility accommodations before, during, and after earthquakes)

[ShakeOut.org](https://www.shakeout.org) (Register to practice earthquake self-protection along with millions worldwide each year!)

[YouTube.com/greatshakeout](https://www.youtube.com/greatshakeout) (Look for the *Earthquake Safety Video Series* Playlist)