

## An Approaching Thunderstorm: When Should I Seek Safe Shelter?

Lightning can strike as much as 10 miles away from the rain area in a thunderstorm. That's about the distance you can hear thunder. When a storm is 10 miles away, it may even be difficult to tell a storm is coming. **IF YOU CAN HEAR THUNDER, YOU ARE WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE. SEEK SAFE SHELTER IMMEDIATELY!** The first stroke of lightning is just as deadly as the last. If the sky looks threatening, take shelter before hearing thunder.

## The 30-30 Rule

Use the 30-30 rule where visibility is good and there is nothing obstructing your view of the thunderstorm. When you see lightning, count the time until you hear thunder. If that time is 30 seconds or less, the thunderstorm is within 6 miles of you and is dangerous. Seek shelter immediately. The threat of lightning continues for much longer period than most people realize. Wait at least 30 minutes after the last lightning flash before leaving shelter. Don't be fooled by sunshine or blue sky!

## Lightning Safety Outdoors

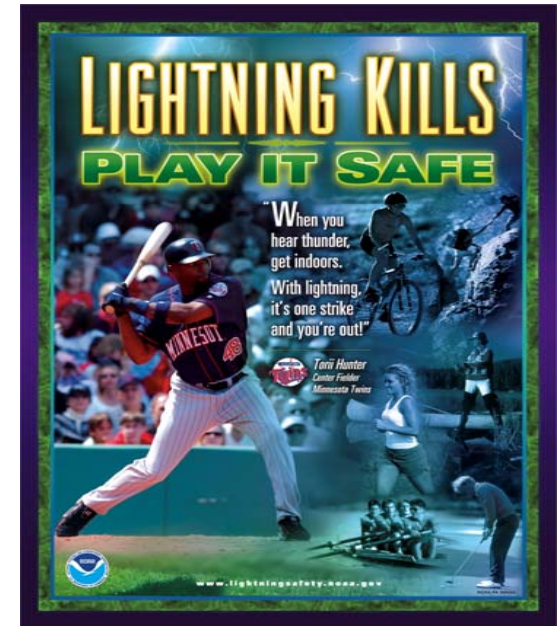
Each year, about 400 children and adults in the U.S. are struck by lightning while working outside, at sports events, on the beach, mountain climbing, mowing the lawn or during other outdoor activities. About 80 people are killed and several hundred more are left to cope with permanent disabilities. Many of these tragedies can be avoided. Finishing the game, getting a tan, or completing a work shift aren't worth death or crippling injury.

- **All thunderstorms produce lightning and are dangerous.** Lightning kills more people each year than tornadoes.
- **Lightning often strikes as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall.** Many deaths from lightning occur ahead of the storm because people try and wait to the last minute before seeking shelter.
- **You are in danger from lightning if you can hear thunder.** If you can hear thunder, lightning is close enough that it could strike your location at any moment.
- **Lightning injuries can lead to permanent disabilities or death.** On average, 20% of strike victims die; 70% of survivors suffer serious long term effects.
- **Look for dark cloud bases and increasing wind.** Every flash of lightning is dangerous, even the first. Head to safety before that first flash. If you hear thunder, head to safety!

*"In the pursuit of excellence in youth sports, we are committed to creating a positive environment for our youth's participation in and enjoyment of recreational sports."*



**Lightning-The Underrated Killer**  
National Weather Service  
[www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/overview.htm](http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/overview.htm)



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## The Single Most Dangerous Place

Outdoors is the most dangerous place to be during a lightning storm. When lightning is seen or thunder is heard, or when dark clouds are observed, quickly move indoors or into a hard-topped vehicle and remain there until well after the lightning storm ends. Listen to forecasts and warnings through NOAA Weather Radio or your local TV and radio stations. If lightning is forecast, plan an alternate activity or know where you can take cover quickly.

The U.S. lightning season is summer but lightning can strike year round! The Fourth of July is historically one of the most deadly times of the year for lightning. In summer, more people are outside, on the beach, golf course, mountains or ball fields. Outdoor jobs such as construction and agriculture, and outdoor chores such as lawn mowing or house painting are at their peak, putting those involved in danger.

## Safety Rules

1. **Postpone activities promptly. Don't wait for rain.**  
Many people take shelter from the rain, but most people struck by lightning are not in the rain! Go quickly inside a completely enclosed building, not a carport, open garage or covered patio. If no enclosed building is convenient, get inside a hard-topped all-metal vehicle. A cave is a good option outside but move as far as possible from the cave entrance.
2. **Be the lowest point. Lightning hits the tallest object.**  
In the mountains if you are above treeline, you ARE the highest object

around. Quickly get below treeline and get into a grove of small trees. Don't be the second tallest object during a lightning storm! Crouch down if you are in an exposed area.

3. **Keep an eye on the sky.**  
Look for darkening skies, flashes of lightning, or increasing wind, which may be signs of an approaching thunderstorm.
4. **Listen for the sound of thunder.**  
If you can hear thunder, go to a safe shelter immediately.
5. **If you see or hear a thunderstorm coming or your hair stands on end, immediately suspend your game or practice and instruct everyone to go inside a sturdy building or car.**  
Sturdy buildings are the safest place to be. Avoid sheds, picnic shelters, baseball dugouts, and bleachers. If no sturdy building is nearby, a hard-topped vehicle with windows closed will offer some protection. The steel frame of the vehicle provides some protection if you are not touching metal.
6. **Listen to NOAA Weather Radio.**  
Coaches and other leaders should listen for a tone-alert feature during practice sessions and games.
7. **If you can't get to a shelter, stay away from trees.**  
If there is no shelter, crouch in the open, keeping twice as far away from a tree as it is tall.

8. **Avoid leaning against vehicles.**  
Get off bicycles and motorcycles.
9. **Get out of the water. It's a great conductor of electricity.**  
Stay off the beach and out of small boats or canoes. If caught in a boat, crouch down in the center of the boat away from metal hardware. Swimming, wading, snorkeling and scuba diving are NOT safe. Lightning can strike the water and travel some distance beneath and away from its point of contact. Don't stand in puddles of water, even if wearing rubber boots.
10. **Avoid metal!**  
Drop metal backpacks, stay away from clotheslines, fences, exposed sheds and electrically conductive elevated objects. Don't hold on to metal items such as golf clubs, fishing rods, tennis rackets or tools. Large metal objects can conduct lightning. Small metal objects can cause burns.
11. **Move away from a group of people.**  
Stay several yards away from other people. Don't share a bleacher bench or huddle in a group.

## Prevention

Far more important than treating survivors is preventing lightning injury. All of the people who helped make possible [National Lightning Safety Awareness Week](#) hope it will help you and your family learn how to avoid injury. **Prevention is the KEY.**