Severe Weather

Thunderstorms

Department of Health

All thunderstorms are dangerous because every thunderstorm produces lightning. Approximately 16 million thunderstorms occur each year around the world and 100,000 occur in the U.S. Of those 100,000 storms, only about 10% are severe. While lightning fatalities have decreased over the past 30 years, lightning continues to be one of the top three storm-related causes of death in the United States. On average in the U.S., lightning kills 51 people and injures hundreds more per year. Although most lightning victims survive, people struck by lightning often report a variety of long-term, debilitating symptoms. Associated dangers of thunderstorms include tornadoes, strong winds, hail, and flash flooding. Flash flooding is responsible for more fatalities than any other thunderstorm-associated hazard.

Tips to Stay Safe

Preparing for a Thunderstorm

- Build an emergency kit and establish a family communication plan.
- Clear dead trees and branches to prevent storm damage.
- Secure outdoor objects and identify sturdy buildings for shelter.
- Protect electronics by unplugging them and turning off the air conditioner.

Taking these steps may reduce potential injuries or accidents caused by flying debris, electrical surges damaging essential medical equipment, or lack of access to shelter.

During a Thunderstorm

- **When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors!** Move from outdoors into a building or a car with a roof.
- Avoid electronic devices and running water.
- Stay informed with alerts and warnings.
- Never drive through standing water - even a foot of flooding can carry your car.
- **If you cannot get indoors or into a car with a roof,** then get to the safest spot possible.
  - Choose a low-lying open place away from poles, metal objects, and trees.
  - If you are in the woods find shelter under short trees. If swimming or boating get to land and find shelter immediately.
  - Be a small target. Squat low to the ground with your hands on your knees and your head between your knees.

The chance of injuries rises significantly in mobile homes or vehicles during tornadoes, as these structures offer less protection against flying debris.

After a Thunderstorm

- Pay attention to authorities and weather forecasts for information on whether it is safe to go outside and potential flash flooding.
- Stay away from storm-damaged areas.
- Watch for fallen power lines and trees. Report them immediately to the power company in the area.
- Avoid using electrical appliances that have been wet or are holding water to prevent electrical shock.

The risk of waterborne illnesses may increase after a thunderstorm, especially in areas where flooding has occured. Contaminated water can lead to illnesses such as gastroenteritis, hepatitis A, and skin infection.

Frequently Asked Questions

How dangerous is lightning, and what precautions can be taken?

Lightning is one of the leading weather-related causes of death and injury. It can strike up to 10 miles away from the rain area in a thunderstorm. The safest place during lightning activity is indoors, away from windows, electrical equipment, and plumbing. If you're caught outside, avoid open fields, high land, trees, poles, and water bodies.

How should one prepare for the strong winds associated with thunderstorms?

Strong winds from thunderstorms can uproot trees, down power lines, and cause damage to buildings and vehicles. To prepare, secure loose outdoor items, trim trees and branches that could fall on your home, and stay informed about severe weather warnings through local news or a weather app.

What is the best way to stay informed about thunderstorm risks?

The best way to stay informed is through local weather forecasts, weather apps, NOAA weather radio, and staying tuned to local news for severe weather alerts and warnings.

Below are a list of additional helpful information and guidelines

- Thunderstorms & Lightning Preparations at: https://www.ready.gov/thunderstorms-lightning
- Thunderstorm Safety at: https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/thunderstorm.html
- Thunderstorm Debris Removal at: https://community.fema.gov/ProtectiveActions/s/article/Thunderstorm-Lightning-and-Hail-Debris-Removal
- What You Need to Know When the Power Goes Out Unexpectedly at: https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/poweroutage/needtoknow.html
- Protect Yourself and Others from Electrical Hazards After a Disaster at: https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/electrical.html