

What to Do if You Are Outside and a Severe Thunderstorm Is Approaching

CORE ACTION MESSAGES

- Get to shelter.
- Avoid likely lightning targets.

You should:

- **Find shelter immediately. If you are boating or swimming, get to land, get off the beach, and find shelter immediately.** Stay away from rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water. Water is an excellent conductor of electricity. When lightning strikes nearby, the electrical charge can travel through the water. Each year, people are killed by nearby lightning strikes while in or on the water.
- **Take shelter in a substantial, permanent, enclosed structure,** such as a reinforced building. A sturdy building is the safest place to be. Avoid gazebos, rain or picnic shelters, golf carts, baseball dugouts, bleachers, and other isolated structures in otherwise open areas because such places are often struck by lightning. In addition, gazebos and picnic shelters are often poorly anchored and subject to being uprooted and blown around in strong thunderstorm winds. They also offer little protection from large hail.
- **If there is no reinforced building in sight, take shelter in a vehicle.** Keep the windows closed and avoid convertibles. Rubber-soled shoes and rubber tires provide no protection from lightning. However, the steel frame of a hard-topped vehicle provides increased protection if you are not touching metal. Although you may be injured if lightning strikes your vehicle, you are much safer inside a vehicle than outside.
- **If you are in the woods, find an area protected by a low clump of trees.** Never stand beneath a single large tree in the open. Be aware of the potential for flooding in low-lying areas.
- **As a last resort and if no suitable structure or vehicle is available, go to a low-lying, open place away from trees, poles, or metal objects.** Make sure the place you pick is not subject to flooding. Crouch low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands on your knees and your head between your knees. Minimize your body's surface area, and minimize your contact with the ground. Lightning current often enters a victim through the ground rather than by a direct overhead strike.
- **Avoid tall structures, such as towers, tall trees, fences, telephone lines, and power lines.** Lightning strikes the tallest objects in an area.
- **Stay away from natural lightning rods, such as golf clubs, tractors, fishing rods, bicycles, and camping equipment.** Lightning is attracted to metal and poles or rods.
- **If you are isolated in a level field or prairie and you feel your hair stand on end (which indicates that lightning is about to strike), crouch low to the ground on the balls of your feet.** Place your hands on your knees and your head between your knees. Minimize your body's surface area, and minimize your contact with the ground. Lightning current often enters a victim through the ground rather than by a direct overhead strike.

Note: Coordinators of outdoor events should monitor the weather with a NOAA Weather Radio and evacuate participants when appropriate.

Note: School buses are an excellent lightning shelter due to the amount of metal shielding but a substantial building is still a better shelter due to the high-winds associated with severe storms.