

Lightning Safety

From 2005-2014, Colorado had the third-most lightning-strike fatalities of any state, with 17. Another 15 were injured, according to the National Weather Service. Recognizing the danger of lightning early and getting to a safe location are the best ways to protect yourself or your family.

When you can hear thunder, lightning is close enough to be dangerous. When lightning is within six miles, or by the time the flash-to-bang time is 30 seconds, you should seek shelter.

- Head immediately inside to a substantial building but stay away from corded telephones, electrical appliances, and plumbing. While a picnic shelter might keep you dry from rain, it will not provide adequate protection from lightning.
- The second safest place is a vehicle with a metal roof and metal sides.
- If you are caught outside, stay away from open areas, high ground and water. Never stand under a tall, isolated tree.



The Highlands Ranch Metro District has developed lightning guidelines for our recreation game officials and coaches. These include suspending games or practices when lightning is within six miles and waiting for 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder to resume play.

Lightning's behavior is random and unpredictable. Preparedness and quick response are the best defenses.

Lightning Myths and Facts

Myth: If trapped outside and lightning is about to strike, you should lie flat on the ground.

Fact: Lying flat increases your chance of being affected by potentially deadly ground current. If you are caught outside in a thunderstorm, you should keep moving toward a safe shelter.

Myth: If thunderstorms threaten while you are outside playing a game, it is okay to finish it before seeking shelter.

Fact: Many lightning casualties occur because people do not seek shelter soon enough. No game is worth death or life-long injuries. Seek proper shelter immediately if you hear thunder. Adults are responsible for the safety of children.

Myth: If it's not raining or there aren't clouds overhead, you're safe from lightning.

Fact: Lightning often strikes more than three miles from the center of the thunderstorm, far outside the rain or thunderstorm cloud.

Myth: Lightning never strikes the same place twice.

Fact: Lightning often strikes the same place repeatedly, especially if it's a tall, pointy, isolated object.

Myth: Rubber tires on a car protect you from lightning by insulating you from the ground.

Fact: Most cars are safe from lightning, but it is the metal roof and metal sides that protect you, *not* the rubber tires. Remember, convertibles, motorcycles, bicycles, open-shelled outdoor recreational vehicles and cars with fiberglass shells offer no protection from lightning. When lightning strikes a vehicle, it goes through the metal frame into the ground. Don't lean on doors during a thunderstorm.

Source: National Weather Service



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Lightning Guidelines

Guidelines for Game Officials, Game Management, & Coaches to Use Regarding Lightning

The purpose of these lightning guidelines is to provide information to those responsible for making decisions about suspending and restarting games and/or practices based on the presence of lightning.

The current recommendation of the National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL) is to consider terminating play when the lightning is six miles away (flash-to-bang time of 30 seconds or less). This recommendation was developed as a practical way to make a judgment in situations where other resources such as technology and instrumentation are not available.

As a minimum, NSSL staff strongly recommends that by the time the flash-to-bang count is 30 seconds, all individuals should have left the game/practice site and reached a safe structure or location. In addition, a smaller, but still real, risk exists with the presence of lightning at greater distances. Unfortunately, current science cannot predict where within the radius the next strike will occur. The existence of blue sky and the absence of rain are not protection from lightning. Lightning can, and does, strike as far as 10 miles away from the rain shaft. It does not have to be raining for lightning to strike.

The flash-to-bang method is the easiest and most convenient way to estimate how far away lightning is occurring. Thunder always accompanies lightning, even though its audible range can be diminished because of background noise in the immediate environment and its distance to the observer. To use the flash-to-bang method, count the second from the time the lightning is sighted to when the clap of thunder is heard. Divide this number by five to obtain how many miles away the lightning is occurring.

When considering resumption of a game or practice, NSSL staff recommends that everyone ideally should wait at least 30 minutes after the last flash of lightning or sound of thunder before returning to the field of activity.

Lightning's behavior is random and unpredictable. Preparedness and quick response are the best defenses towards the lightning hazard. At first signs of lightning or thunder, leave the ball field. Go to your vehicle and take shelter with the windows rolled up.

UNSAFE SHELTER AREAS include all outdoor metal objects like - rain and sun shelters, dugouts, flag poles, fences and gates, high mast light poles, power poles, metal bleachers, golf carts, machinery, etc. AVOID trees. AVOID water. AVOID open fields. AVOID the high ground.

If you feel your hair standing on end, and/or hear "crackling noises" - you are in lightning's electric field. If caught outside during close-in lightning, immediately remove metal objects (including baseball cap), place your feet together, duck your head, and crouch down low in baseball catcher's stance with hands on knees.

If available, electronic devices should be used as additional tools to determine the severity of the weather. However, such devices should not be used as the sole source when considering termination of play.

Teach this safety slogan:

"If you can see it (lightning) - flee it; if you can hear it (thunder) - clear it."

(Information taken from the NCAA Sports Medicine Handbook, NCAA Championship Severe Weather Policy, and the National Severe Storms Laboratory website)