

How to stay safe in a lightning storm

Each year, as many as 300 people in the United States are killed by lightning, and many more suffer lightning-related injuries that lead to permanent disability. You can reduce your risk by following a few simple safety rules:

■ **Be prepared.** When you plan on being outdoors, monitor weather forecasts and know where to find shelter if the weather turns bad. Although high winds, rain, and clouds can signal a thunderstorm, lightning can strike before the storm hits, even in clear skies, with the storm as far as 10 miles away.

■ **Evacuate/seek shelter.** Large, enclosed structures are safer than smaller or open ones, such as a bus shelter or covered patio. Once inside, stay away from windows and doors, don't use corded phones or electrical equipment (because lightning can travel from outdoor power lines to these devices), and avoid contact with plumbing. If a building is not available, seek shelter in a hardtop, all-metal vehicle, as opposed to a convertible with a canvas top.

■ **Stay low.** If there is no shelter, crouch down to avoid being the tallest object in an

area. If possible, assume a lightning position: Squat with both feet together and cover your ears with your hands. Don't stand near isolated trees. Caves, ditches, and valleys might offer protection, unless they're filled with water. Stay several yards away from other people.

■ **Get out of the water.** Water conducts electricity, so swimming, wading, snorkeling, and boating during a storm are dangerous. As much as possible, stay away from any body of water, including puddles.

■ **Avoid metal.** Large metal objects can conduct lightning, so stay clear of metal flagpoles, lightpoles, fences, sheds, and bleachers. Don't hold on to metal objects, such as golf clubs or tools.

Sources: 1. National Weather Service. "Lightning safety outdoors." www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/outdoors.htm (11 Feb. 2005). 2. O'Keefe Gatewood, M., & Zane, R. D. (2004). Lightning injuries. *Emerg Med Clin North Am*, 22(2), 369.



© PHOTODISC, INC.

