



**American Red Cross**  
of Greater Indianapolis

## **Thunderstorm Safety**

Thunderstorms are intense local storms that average 15 to 20 miles across and reach as high as 10 miles. Lightning always accompanies a thunderstorm, but other hazards can include tornadoes, strong winds, flash flooding and hail. Severe thunderstorms have the potential to produce hail one inch in diameter or larger and wind speeds of 58 mph or higher. This can result in large limbs or entire trees being blown down, downed power lines and structural damage to buildings.

### **Before lightning strikes**

- Keep an eye on the sky. Look for darkening skies, flashes of light or increasing wind. Listen for the sound of thunder.
- If you hear thunder, you are close enough to the storm to be struck by lightning. Go to safe shelter immediately.
- Listen to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio or television for the latest weather forecasts.

### **When a storm approaches**

#### **At home:**

- Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage.
- Go inside and stay there.
- Secure outside doors.
- Draw blinds and shades over windows to prevent glass from shattering into your home. Then, stay away from windows and doors.
- Unplug appliances and other electrical items such as computers.
- Turn off the air conditioner. Power surges from lightning can cause serious damage and result in costly repairs. Leaving electric lights on, however, doesn't increase the chance of your home being struck by lightning.
- Telephone lines can conduct electricity. Use a corded phone only for emergencies.
- Avoid running water for a bath, shower or any other purpose. Plumbing and bathroom fixtures can conduct electricity.
- Don't lie on concrete floors or lean against concrete walls. Concrete typically has metal bars reinforcing it, which can serve as conductors.

### **Away from home:**

- Find shelter in a sturdy structure that has electricity or plumbing, which would carry a lightning charge into the ground.
- If you can't find a building, take shelter in a hard-topped vehicle. The steel frame of a hard-topped vehicle provides increased protection if you're not touching metal. You could be injured if lightning strikes the vehicle, but you're much safer there than outside or in a tent or unenclosed shelter area. Keep vehicle windows closed.
- If you're caught in an open area and can't find safe shelter, go to a low-lying place away from trees, poles or anything metal. Make sure the place isn't subject to flooding. Squat on the balls of your feet. Place your hands on your knees with your head between them. Make yourself the lowest, smallest target possible. Don't lie flat on the ground — this will make you a larger target.
- If stuck in the woods, take shelter under a smaller stand of trees, which is less susceptible to lightning strikes or being blown down by the wind.
- If boating or swimming, get to land and find shelter immediately.

### **After the storm passes**

- Stay away from downed power lines and other storm-damaged areas.
- Listen to the TV or radio for information and instructions.

### **Watches and Warnings**

- **Severe thunderstorm watch:** Tells you when and where severe thunderstorms are likely to occur. Watch the sky and stay tuned to local radio and television broadcasts and NOAA Weather Radio station to know when warnings are issued.
- **Severe thunderstorm warning:** Issued when severe weather has been reported by spotters or indicated by radar. Warnings indicate imminent danger to life and property to those in the path of the storm.

### **If someone is struck by lightning**

- People struck by lightning carry no electrical charge and should be attended to immediately.
- Call for emergency help.
- Check the shocked person for burns both where the lightning struck and where the electricity left the body. Lightning also can cause nervous system damage, broken bones and loss of hearing or eyesight.
- Give first aid. If breathing has stopped, a trained person should begin rescue breathing. If the heart has stopped beating, a trained person should give CPR. If the person has a pulse and is breathing, look and care for other possible injuries. Learn first aid and CPR by taking a Red Cross course at [www.indyredcrosstraining.org](http://www.indyredcrosstraining.org).