

Coaches & Sports Officials Guide to Lightning Safety



This policy applies to all PA West Soccer run activities. Every responsible effort should be made to comply with this policy as the health, safe, and welfare of all participants and spectators is our primary objective

Lightning Kills...Play it Safe!

Each year in the United States, more than 400 people are struck by lightning. On average, about 70 people are killed and many others suffer permanent neurological disabilities. Most of these tragedies can be avoided if proper precautions are taken. When thunderstorms threaten, coaches and sports officials must not let the desire to start or complete an athletic activity hinder their judgement when the safety of participants and spectators is in jeopardy.

Know the basic facts about lightning and its dangers.

- ***All thunderstorms produce lightning and are dangerous.*** In an average year, lightning kills more people in the U.S. than either tornadoes or hurricanes.
- ***Lightning often strikes outside the area of heavy rain and may strike as far as 10 miles from any rainfall.*** Many deaths from lightning occur ahead of storms because people wait too long before seeking shelter, or after storms because people return outside too soon.
- ***If you hear thunder, you are in danger.*** Anytime thunder is heard, the thunderstorm is close enough to pose an immediate lightning threat to your location.

Avoid the lightning threat.

- ***Plan ahead.*** Have a lightning safety plan. Know where people will go for safety and how much time it will take for them to get there.
- ***Postpone activities.*** Prior to a practice or event, check the latest forecast. If thunderstorms are forecast, consider postponing activities early to avoid being caught in a dangerous situation.
- ***Monitor the weather.*** Watch and listen for clues of impending danger. Look for darkening skies,
- ***Get to a safe space.*** If you hear thunder, suspend your activity immediately and instruct everyone to get to a safe place. Substantial buildings provide the best protection. Once inside, stay off corded phones and away from wiring and plumbing. Avoid sheds, small or open shelters, dugouts, bleachers, or grandstands. If a sturdy building is not nearby, a hard-topped metal vehicle with the windows up and closed will offer good protection.
- ***Stay inside.*** Do not resume activities until 30 minutes have passed since the last lightning flash was visible or thunder heard.

Coaches & Sports Officials Guide to Lightning Safety



What should you do if you can't find a safe place?

Being outside during a thunderstorm puts you at risk of being struck by lightning. The measures listed below will reduce that risk somewhat, but are no substitute for getting to a safe place.

- **Avoid open areas and stay away from isolated tall trees, towers, or utility poles.** Lightning tends to strike the taller objects. Shelter in an enclosed building if possible. If you can't get into a building, return to your vehicle for cover.
- **Stay away from metal bleachers, backstops, and fences.** Lightning can travel long distances through metal.
- **Spread out.** This reduces the risk of multiple lightning casualties.

If you feel your hair stand on end, lightning is about to strike

There may be little or nothing you can do to keep from being struck by lightning. As a last desperate resort:

- **Stay away from metal bleachers, backstops, and fences.** Lightning can travel long distances through metal.
- **Spread out.** This reduces the risk of multiple lightning casualties.

Know what to do if struck by lightning.

- Lightning victims do not carry any electrical charge, are safe to handle, and need immediate medical attention. Cardiac arrest is the immediate cause of death in lightning fatalities. Some deaths can be prevented if the victim immediately receives proper first aid.
- **Call for help.** Call 9-1-1 or your local ambulance service.
- **Give first aid.** Check the victim's pulse and breathing. Begin CPR if necessary. An Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) may also be useful if one is available.
- **If possible, move victim to a safer place.** An active thunderstorm is still dangerous. Don't let the rescuers become victims. Lightning CAN strike the same place twice.

There are an estimated 25 million cloud-to-ground lightning flashes in the United States each year. While the National Weather Service issues severe thunderstorm warnings and watches, watches and warnings are NOT issue for lightning. However, **the sound of thunder should serve as an immediate warning of the lightning danger.**

Coaches & Sports Officials Guide to Lightning + Weather Safety



High Winds

Events should not be held in high winds to avoid exposure to flying debris and possible damage to property. In advance of a high wind episode, all portable equipment should be stored in a safe space. If safe storage is not available, an effort should be made to properly secure all equipment to avoid damage to the equipment and possible injury to individuals who may be in the area..

Heavy Rain

While it is recognized that soccer may be played in rain, care must be exercised to ensure the playing surface is safe prior to and throughout the contest. Discretion should also be exercised to avoid long term damage to the playing surface, especially natural surfaces..

Flooding

When flash flooding is a possibility, care should be taken to monitor the weather channels to anticipate situations that could result in potential flooding, especially when the field is in a low-lying area or near a stream, creek, river, or other water source.

Snow

During winter months, the weather forecast should be monitored and care used in determining if the activity should proceed as scheduled. Like rain, soccer may be played in snow, but accumulating snow could be a hazard to the players and the result in damage to the playing surface.

Tornadoes

Weather forecasts should be monitored when conditions exist for possible tornado activity. Consideration should be monitored when conditions exist for possible tornado activity. Consideration should be given to cancelling the activity to allow individuals to remain indoors. If individuals are outside, all fields/open spaces are to be cleared as soon as a tornado watch is given for the area or an approaching tornado has been identified. Individuals should be instructed as the situation dictates whether to seek safety on site or return home.

Low Temperatures

Temperatures should be monitored, along with the wind chill, to allow the event/competition to occur without the unnecessarily exposing the participants to cold-related injury. Participants should be monitored for heat-related illness as they may overdress to avoid the cold.

[Click here for complete U.S. Soccer Cold Weather Guideline](#)

High Temperatures

Temperatures should be monitored, along with the heat index, to allow the event/competition to occur without the unnecessarily exposing the participants to heat-related injury

[Click here for complete U.S. Soccer Warm Weather Guideline](#)