

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS POINTERS



Thunderstorms & Lightning

Thunderstorms are intense storms that can bring strong winds, hail, lightning, heavy rain (which can cause flash flooding), and tornadoes. The typical thunderstorm is approximately 15 miles in diameter and lasts 30 minutes. The months of June, July and August are the most active months for thunderstorms in Idaho.

A **thunderstorm** is **ALWAYS accompanied by lightning**. Across the United States, dozens of school children are killed or injured by lightning during outdoor extracurricular activities, on their way to or from school or during recess. Idaho averages one death and eight injuries a year and ranks 6th in the nation in lightning deaths per capita. Being prepared for thunderstorms and lightning means knowing what to do before, during and after one occurs.

BEFORE

Learn the thunderstorm danger signs.

- Dark skies or clouds.
- Distant lightning and thunder.

Have disaster supplies on hand.

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- Emergency food and water
- Non-electric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes



Know the difference between a thunderstorm **WATCH** and **WARNING**.

A *thunderstorm watch* means the weather conditions are such that a thunderstorm is likely to develop. A *thunderstorm warning* means a thunderstorm has been sighted.

Develop an emergency communication plan.

Many thunderstorms occur during the day when children are at school and adults are at work. Have a plan for reuniting family members.

- After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Ask an out of state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact".

DURING

If indoors:

- Listen to a battery operated radio for the latest storm information.
- Stay away from windows.
- Do not handle any electrical equipment or telephones because lightning can follow the wires.
- Avoid bathtubs, water faucets and sinks because metal pipes can transmit electricity.

If outdoors:

- Get into a building or car.
- If no structure is available, make yourself the smallest target possible. Squat down and wrap your arms around your legs while tucking your head between your knees. **Do not lie flat on the ground.**
- Avoid tall structures such as towers, trees, fences, telephone poles or power lines.
- Stay away from natural lightning rods such as golf clubs, tractors, fishing rods, bicycles or camping equipment.
- Stay away from rivers, lakes or other bodies of water and be aware of the potential for flooding in low-lying areas.

If in a car:

- Pull safely onto the shoulder of the road away from any hillsides that could slide or trees that could fall on your car.
- Stay in the vehicle.
- Strictly avoid flooded roadways.

AFTER

Check for injuries.

A person who has been struck by lightning **does not** carry electrical charges that can shock other people. If the victim is burned, provide first aid and **call 9-1-1**. There may be burns where lightning entered and exited the body. If the strike caused the victim's heart and breathing to stop, administer CPR until medical professionals arrive.

Report downed utility wires.

Drive only if necessary.

Debris and washed-out roads may make driving dangerous.

Estimating the Distance from a Thunderstorm

Because light travels so much faster than sound, lightning flashes can be seen long before the resulting thunder is heard. To estimate the number of miles you are from a thunderstorm: count the number of seconds between a flash of lightning and the next clap of thunder and divide this number by five.

Important: You are in danger from lightning any time you can hear the thunder. Knowing how far away a storm is does not mean that you're in danger only when the storm is overhead.