

Lightning Safety on Golf Courses and Playing Fields

Outdoor sports and thunderstorms are a deadly combination.

Lightning in open fields kills more people than any other outdoor place. Outdoor sports activities on large open fields—like soccer, golf, baseball, and softball—usually peak during thunderstorm season in most states. Players, coaches, and staff often push their luck when thunderstorms threaten their safety, hoping to get one more hole in, one more kick off, or one more batter up. The consequences can be deadly. They don't have to be.

There is no reason to be caught off guard by a thunderstorm.

The best way to avoid lightning is not put yourself, family, and friends in danger in the first place. No one should be caught “off guard” by thunderstorms. Weather information is all around you. You can:

- Listen to weather reports on the radio
- Watch current weather forecast on TV
- Read current weather information on the Internet
- Tune in on your NOAA Weather Radio
- Sign up for lightning notification services
- Scan the skies 360 degrees around you and overhead

If weather warnings or your own observations confirm that thunderstorms will be near where your activity is planned, re-schedule your activity or change your plans. Yes, changing your plans may be inconvenient for you and others. But no line drive or putt or final score is worth being killed or disabled by lightning.

Know the lightning safety warning program at your outdoor sports facility.

Outdoor rec facilities, such as golf courses, should have a formal lightning warning policy that meets these two basic requirements:

1. Lightning danger warnings can be issued in time for everyone to get to safe shelter.
2. There is access to adequate safe shelter—such as a clubhouse or locker room.

Watch for thunderstorms and use the 30/30 rule.

During thunderstorms, no place outside is safe. But you can minimize your risk if thunderstorms develop or approach during your game by following these steps:

Step 1: Designate someone from your group to be the storm watcher.

Step 2: Use the 30/30 rule.

The 30/30 rule:

Step 1: When you see lightning, count the seconds until you hear thunder.

Step 2: If this time is 30 seconds or less, quickly go inside a substantial building. If such a building is not available, a metal-topped vehicle is the next best choice.

Step 3: Wait at least 30 minutes after seeing the last lightning or hearing the last thunder before going back outside.

Your last resort is stay low and stay away from trees and other tall things.

If you're still outdoors and lightning has struck close to you, crouch down into a ball on the balls of your feet. Your goal is to be the smallest target possible with the least contact with the ground. Do not seek shelter under tall or isolated trees or unsubstantial shelters. It's better to be wet from the rain than dead or disabled from lightning.