

# Lightning Safety

## Introduction

Lightning kills an average of 73 people in the United States each year, and injures an average of about 300 (based on documented lightning injuries; undocumented injuries are probably much higher). There can be a variety of long-term debilitating symptoms, such as numbness, dizziness, fatigue, memory loss, irritability, sleep disorders, depression, weakness, stiffness in joints, and muscle spasms.

Cloud-to-ground lightning strikes occur an estimated 25 million times per year in the United States. Besides the visible flash that appears in the air, the electricity continues to travel along the ground once it reaches the earth's surface. While some victims are struck by the main lightning bolt, many are injured by the current traveling through or on the ground.

## Outdoor Activities

People participating in outdoor activities, such as camping, hiking, bicycle riding, walking, jogging, swimming, boating, fishing, baseball, soccer, and golf need to respond carefully to approaching thunderstorms. Umpires, referees, coaches, and camp counselors should protect people participating in such outdoor activities by stopping the activities sooner than they often times are. Some officials of organized sports are instructed to only stop a sports activity if actual lightning is seen, not if there is only thunder. *Remember, thunder is the sound that lightning makes, so if there is thunder, there is lightning!*

## When Should You Seek Shelter?

Lightning can strike as far as 10 miles from the rain area of the thunderstorm, which is about the distance you can hear thunder. If the sky looks threatening, take shelter before hearing thunder. If visibility is good, and there is nothing obstructing your view of the thunderstorm, use the 30-30 rule. After you see lightning, count the seconds until you hear thunder. If the time is 30 seconds or less, the lightning is within 6 miles of you, and you should seek shelter immediately. Wait at least 30 minutes after the last lightning to leave your shelter. *Don't be fooled by sunshine or blue sky!*

## Lightning Safety Tips

- Watch for dark skies, increasing wind, and flashes of lightning. These may be signs of an approaching thunderstorm. Coaches should listen to NOAA Weather Radio for a severe weather tone-alert during practices and games.
- Many people take shelter from rain, but most people hit by lightning are not in the rain. Go into a completely enclosed building or into a hard-top vehicle, not a carport, open garage, or building overhang.
- Avoid places such as: under or close to trees, sheds, picnic shelters, baseball dugouts, bleachers & open fields. If there is no shelter, crouch down. Stay twice as far away from a tree as it is tall. Stay away from tall objects, fences, and clothes lines.
- Get out of the water and out of small boats and canoes, and stay off the beach. If caught in a boat, crouch down in the middle, away from metal hardware.