

Stay Safe During Electrical Storms

March 5 2022 7:15 AM



URBANA – Exceeded only by floods, lightning is the second largest killer associated with storms. According to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#), over 25 million cloud-to-ground lightning flashes occur each year.

Duane Friend, University of Illinois Extension natural resources educator, says the number of lightning deaths has been steadily declining over the last 10 to 15 years.

"Lightning kills by stopping the heart and damaging the nervous system," Friend says. "In non-fatal cases, people suffer permanent disabilities, such as short-term memory loss, distractibility, irritability, and personality change."

There are several considerations for avoiding being hit by lightning. As a storm approaches, move indoor before the rain begins.

"If you can hear thunder, lightning is close enough that it could strike your location at any moment," Friend says. "Lightning originating near the top of a storm can reach as far as 10 to 15 miles away."

Do not stand under or next to trees.

"If you cannot get to an indoor location, crouch in the open space, keeping twice as far from a tree as it is tall," Friend says. If there is a group of people outdoors, keep several yards distance from each other.

Swimming, wading, and other water sports are not safe during a storm since lightning striking the water can travel long distances. If a lightning storm begins while boating, crouch in the center of the boat, away from metal.

Ungrounded, open span buildings, such as ball dugouts and picnic shelters, are not always a good option. If no sturdy buildings are close, a hard top vehicle is the next best choice. Avoid touching metal while the storm is in progress.

If someone is struck by lightning, call 911. Check the victims breathing and pulse and begin CPR if necessary.

Medical issues may include burns at the entry and exit points, broken bones, loss of hearing or eyesight, and nervous system damage. There is no fear of receiving a shock yourself by touching the person after the strike.

SOURCE: [Duane Friend](#), *Illinois Extension Natural Resources, Environment, and Energy Educator*

ABOUT EXTENSION: *Illinois Extension leads public outreach for University of Illinois by translating research into action plans that allow Illinois families, businesses, and community leaders to solve problems, make informed decisions, and adapt to changes and opportunities.*