

Stay Safe During Pennsylvania's Summer Storms: Lightning Safety and Severe Weather Preparedness

As summer rolls into Pennsylvania, so do the threats of severe weather. Thunderstorms, heavy rain, high winds, hail, and especially lightning can strike with little warning—putting people at risk of serious injury or even death. In 2023 alone, the National Weather Service reported over 100 days of severe weather alerts in the Commonwealth. With summer storms becoming more frequent and intense, it's essential for Pennsylvanians to be prepared and stay safe.

Understanding the Risks

Lightning is one of nature's most powerful and unpredictable forces. It can strike miles away from the center of a storm and carries a voltage of up to one billion volts. Each year in the United States, lightning strikes kill about 20 people and injure hundreds more—often leaving victims with long-term physical and neurological damage.

Severe thunderstorms can also bring damaging winds, flash flooding, and hail—all of which can lead to trauma-related injuries, especially in outdoor settings.

Summer Storm and Lightning Safety Tips

Whether you're hiking in the Poconos, enjoying a Phillies game, or just doing yard work, knowing what to do when the skies turn dark can save your life.

1. Be Weather Aware

- Monitor forecasts through local news, weather apps, or a NOAA Weather Radio.
- Sign up for emergency alerts through your local municipality or Ready PA.
- Watch for signs of approaching storms, such as darkening skies, distant rumbles, or sudden wind shifts.

2. When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors

- If you hear thunder—even if it's distant—you're close enough to be struck by lightning.
- Immediately seek shelter in a substantial building or enclosed metal vehicle (not a convertible).
- Avoid small shelters, tents, or open areas like fields or beaches.

3. Safe Shelter Practices

- Once indoors, stay away from windows and doors.
- Avoid contact with water (don't bathe, shower, or wash dishes) and don't use corded electronics—lightning can travel through plumbing and electrical systems.
- Wait at least 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder before returning outside.

4. Outdoor and Travel Safety

- If you're caught outdoors and cannot reach shelter:
 - Avoid open fields, hilltops, or isolated trees.
 - Stay away from water, metal objects, and tall structures.
 - Crouch low with feet together if no safe shelter is available—never lie flat.
- **Driving during storms?** Pull over safely, turn on hazard lights, and stay in the vehicle. Avoid flooded roads—"Turn Around, Don't Drown."

5. After the Storm

- Be cautious of fallen power lines, damaged trees, and debris.
- Watch for localized flooding, especially in urban or low-lying areas.
- Report injuries or hazards to emergency services and avoid unnecessary travel.

Encourage your community to develop a family emergency plan and build a weather safety kit with flashlights, batteries, water, non-perishable food, and a first-aid kit. For workplaces, camps, and outdoor programs, ensure staff are trained in weather response procedures and basic first aid.

Severe summer weather is a fact of life in Pennsylvania—but injuries and fatalities are preventable. By staying informed, seeking shelter early, and practicing smart storm safety, you can protect yourself, your loved ones, and your community.

Let's stay safe together—rain or shine.