

When thunder is HEARD or lightning is SEEN, SUSPEND play.

There is one exception for distant lightning that can be verified with assistance from lightning detection devices. But that is a rare situation and the exception to the rule states: "**If no thunder can be heard and the flashes are low on the horizon**, the storm **MAY** not pose a threat." It is always better to err on the side of caution.

I will emphasize that if you **hear** thunder **OR** see lightning, **stop play** and follow the 30 minute procedure as described in the NFHS Rule Book, on the WIAA web site, and described in the WIAA sport rule videos.

From the National Weather Service: <https://www.weather.gov/lwx/IdentifyThreatsLightning>

Biggest takeaway:

*This is a routine occurrence/hazard that needs a plan - otherwise, you are putting your people's lives at risk. **When Thunder Roars - Go Indoors** (or into your vehicle). **Nearly all lightning deaths occur outside - from people disregarding their risk, or thinking they have a few minutes more.** The most deadly strikes are often the first few before the rain begins.*

Warning/Trigger for Plan:

There is no NWS warning for lightning threat, **but nature has its own warning - thunder.**

- ***If you can hear thunder, you are in danger of being struck outdoors.***
 - *Nearly all lightning deaths occur outdoors.*
 - *Staying dry is not the same as being safe from lightning.*
 - *Some charge from a nearby strike can be carried through wiring & plumbing. To be extra safe, avoid using corded items, or showers/sinks during thunderstorms.*
 - *What is Safe?:*
 - *Fully enclosed, permanent building*
 - *Not roofed, but open shelters (like gazebos)*
 - *Not fabric covered, metal framed pavilions*
 - *Shelter from the rain is not the same as shelter from lightning*
 - *Hardtop (non-convertible) Vehicles*
 - ***"When Thunder Roars, Head Indoors"***
 - ***Shelter at first rumble of thunder***
 - ***Shelter until 30 mins after last rumble of thunder***
 - *Anything less than the above increases risk.*

From the NFHS rule books and the WIAA web site: <https://www.wiaawi.org/Health/Lightning.aspx>

NFHS GUIDELINES ON HANDLING PRACTICES AND CONTESTS

DURING LIGHTNING OR THUNDER DISTURBANCES

These guidelines provide a default policy to those responsible or sharing duties for making decisions concerning the suspension and restarting of practices and contests based on the presence of lightning or thunder. The preferred sources from which to request such a policy for your facility would include your state high school activities association and the nearest office of the National Weather Service.

PROACTIVE PLANNING

1. Assign staff to monitor local weather conditions before and during practices and contests.
2. Develop an evacuation plan, including identification of appropriate nearby safer areas and determine the amount of time needed to get everyone to a designated safer area:
 - a. A designated safer place is a substantial building with plumbing and wiring where people live or work, such as a school, gymnasium or library. An alternate safer place from the threat of lightning is a fully enclosed (not convertible or soft top) metal car or school bus.
3. Develop criteria for suspension and resumption of play:
 - a. **When thunder is heard or lightning is seen***, the leading edge of the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play for at least 30 minutes and vacate the outdoor activity to the previously designated safer location immediately.
 - b. 30-minute rule. Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or lightning is witnessed* prior to resuming play.
 - c. Any subsequent thunder or lightning* after the beginning of the 30-minute count will reset the clock and another 30-minute count should begin.
 - d. When lightning-detection devices or mobile phone apps are available, this technology could be used to assist in making a decision to suspend play if a lightning strike is noted to be within 10 miles of the event location. However, you should never depend on the reliability of these devices and, thus, hearing thunder or seeing lightning* should always take precedence over information from a mobile app or lightning-detection device.
4. Review the lightning safety policy annually with all administrators, coaches and game personnel and train all personnel.
5. Inform student-athletes and their parents of the lightning policy at start of the season.

* – At night, under certain atmospheric conditions, lightning flashes may be seen from distant storms. In these cases, it may be safe to continue an event. **If no thunder can be heard and the flashes are low on the horizon**, the storm **may** not pose a threat. Independently verified lightning detection information would help eliminate any uncertainty.