

Severe Thunderstorms

Allen County Public Health Preparations

Because severe storms can bring about significant damage and casualties, the U.S. government is working to improve overall preparation for them. One aspect of preparation is to learn what to do before, during, and after a severe thunderstorm in order to mitigate harm and damage.

If a public health emergency happens in our community, Allen County Public Health will be the local agency responsible for preparing and guiding medical response and public information efforts. During such an emergency, a critical role of the Public Health Department will be to work with other local first responders, such as fire and police. The Public Health Department will also coordinate response activities with state and federal agencies.

Allen County Public Health is providing this information to help you understand what response you may be asked to take in the event of a severe storm.

When is a thunderstorm severe?

According to the National Weather Service, a thunderstorm is severe when it produces hail at least three-quarters of an inch in diameter, has winds of 58 miles per hour or higher, or produces a tornado.

How should I prepare for a severe storm?

- To begin preparing, you should build an emergency kit and make a family communications plan.
- Remove dead or rotting trees and branches that could fall and cause injury or damage during a severe thunderstorm.
- Postpone outdoor activities.

- Remember the 30/30 Lightning Safety Rule: Go indoors if, after seeing lightning, you cannot count to 30 before hearing thunder. Stay indoors for 30 minutes after hearing the last clap of thunder.
- Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage.
- Get inside a home, building, or hard top automobile (not a convertible). Although you may be injured if lightning strikes your car, you are much safer inside a vehicle than outside.
- Remember, rubber-soled shoes and rubber tires provide NO protection from lightning. However, the steel frame of a hard-topped vehicle provides increased protection if you are not touching metal.
- Shutter windows and secure outside doors. If shutters are not available, close window blinds, shades or curtains.
- Unplug any electronic equipment well before the storm arrives.

What should I do during a severe storm?

- Use your battery-operated NOAA Weather Radio for updates from local officials.
- Avoid contact with corded phones and devices including those plugged into electric for recharging. Cordless and wireless phones not connected to wall outlets are OK to use.
- Avoid contact with electrical equipment or cords. Unplug appliances and other electrical items such as computers and turn off air conditioners. Power surges from lightning can cause serious damage.
- Avoid contact with plumbing. Do not wash your hands, do not take a shower, do not wash dishes, and do not do laundry. Plumbing and bathroom fixtures can conduct electricity.
- Stay away from windows and doors, and stay off porches.
- Do not lie on concrete floors and do not lean against concrete walls.
- Avoid natural lightning rods such as a tall, isolated tree in an open area.

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- Avoid hilltops, open fields, the beach or a boat on the water.
- Take shelter in a sturdy building. Avoid isolated sheds or other small structures in open areas.
- Avoid contact with anything metal—tractors, farm equipment, motorcycles, golf carts, golf clubs, and bicycles.
- If you are driving, try to safely exit the roadway and park. Stay in the vehicle and turn on the emergency flashers until the heavy rain ends. Avoid touching metal or other surfaces that conduct electricity in and outside the vehicle.

What should I do if lightning strikes?

Lightening is one of the top 3 storm- related killers in the U.S, so here are a few steps to get help and ensure your safety.

If lightning strikes you or someone you know, call 9-1-1 for medical assistance as soon as possible. The following are things you should check when you attempt to give aid to a victim of lightning:

Breathing - if breathing has stopped, begin mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Heartbeat - if the heart has stopped, administer CPR.

Pulse - if the victim has a pulse and is breathing, look for other possible injuries. Check for burns where the lightning entered and left the body. Also be alert for nervous system damage, broken bones and loss of hearing and eyesight.

What should I do after a storm passes?

- Never drive through a flooded roadway. Turn around, don't drown!
- Stay away from storm-damaged areas to keep from putting yourself at risk from the effects of severe thunderstorms.
- Continue to listen to a NOAA Weather Radio or to local radio and

television stations for updated information or instructions, as access to roads or some parts of the community may be blocked.

- Help people who may require special assistance, such as infants, children and the elderly or those with access or functional needs.
- Stay away from downed power lines and report them immediately.
- Watch your animals closely. Keep them under your direct control.
- Tune into your local radio stations for severe weather information.

If you have any questions about severe thunderstorms please contact Allen County Public Health at 419-228-4457. Health Department staff members are available to answer your questions Monday to Friday from 8:00a.m. to 4:30 p.m. You can also visit www.allencountyhealthdepartment.org. For information about putting together an Emergency Preparation Plan, visit the FEMA site at www.ready.gov. Also, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at www.bt.cdc.gov for additional information.