



# **GUIDELINES ON HANDLING PRACTICES AND CONTESTS DURING LIGHTNING OR THUNDER DISTURBANCES**

## **National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)**

It is important that state associations continue to educate their member schools on the importance of having an established Lightning Policy / Plan in place for all outdoor high school sports and activities and for indoor swimming pools and that this Policy / Plan is current, practiced and executed.

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 association and the nearest office of the National Weather Service.

### **PROACTIVE PLANNING**

1. Assign a specific staff member to monitor local weather conditions before and during practices and contests. This staff member is charged with suspending outdoor activities and determining when to resume activities. Any individual following these guidelines shall not be challenged.
2. Develop an emergency action 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 going outdoors and 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 will begin.
  - d. If available, data from a nationally connected network for lightning detection network should be monitored closely when storms are possible or during lightning delays. Play shall be suspended when lightning is within a 10-mile radius of the event and will not be resumed until at least 30 minutes have passed since the last lightning within the 10-mile radius. However, never depend on the reliability of any detection device if the sky looks threatening, you hear thunder, or see lightning\*. Visual and audio indications of a storm should always take precedence over information from a mobile app or lightning-detection device.

\* – 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.

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.

**October 2024**

**January 2021**

**March 2018**

**October 2014**

**January 2014**

**October 2010**

**October 2007**

**January 2004**

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