



## VESTAVIA HILLS SOCCER CLUB LIGHTNING POLICY



Each year, about 400 children and adults in the U.S. are struck by lightning while working outside, at sports events, on the beach, mountain climbing, mowing the lawn or during other outdoor activities. About 80 people are killed and several hundred more are left to cope with permanent disabilities. Many of these tragedies can be avoided. Finishing the game, getting a tan, or completing a work shift is not worth death or crippling injury.

- Lightning often strikes as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall. Many deaths from lightning occur ahead of the storm because people try and wait to the last minute before seeking shelter.
- You are in danger from lightning if you can hear thunder. If you can hear thunder, lightning is close enough that it could strike your location at any moment.
- Lightning injuries can lead to permanent disabilities or death. On average, 20% of strike victims die; 70% of survivors suffer serious long term effects.
- Look for dark cloud bases and increasing wind. Every flash of lightning is dangerous, even the first. Head to safety before that first flash. If you hear thunder, head to safety!
- Blue Skies and Lightning. Lightning can travel sideways for up to 10 miles. Even when the sky looks blue and clear, be cautious. If you hear thunder, take cover. At least 10% of lightning occurs without visible clouds in the sky.

In the event of lightning, the below guidelines will be followed during Vestavia Hills Soccer Club sanctioned events:

### **Suspension and resumption of activity**

Outdoor activity must be suspended when lightning is a maximum of six miles away. This is because lightning can strike **up** to six miles from the base of the thunderstorm.

The "30/30 Rule" should be followed when evaluating lightning danger: if lightning is 30 seconds away, it is too close, and do not resume play for 30 minutes from the last seen flash or last heard thunder.



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### Suspension

- For suspension, follow the **30 second "flash-to-bang" rule**. The "flash-to-bang" method is the easiest and most convenient means for determining distance to the lightning flash, which is integral to assessing the need to postpone or suspend an activity
  - To use the flash to bang method, the observer begins counting when a lightning flash is sighted.
  - Counting stops when the associated bang is heard.
  - Divide this by 5 to determine the distance to the lightning flash (in miles). Example a count of 30 seconds equates to 6 miles.
  - By the time the flash to bang approaches 30 seconds, all individuals should already be inside or should be immediately seeking a safe structure location.
  - **Be proactive** with the flash-to-bang rule. Indecisiveness creates a life threatening situation.
- Lightning should be monitored with the first flash of lightning or clap of thunder, no matter how far away the storm is. It is critical to monitor how far away the lightning is occurring and how fast the storm is approaching, relative to the distance of a safe shelter.
- In the event that play is suspended, all individuals, including athletes, coaches, referees, and spectators, should immediately go indoors or to their cars to wait for the storm to pass.
- If no safe structure or location is within a reasonable distance, find a thick grove of small trees surrounded by taller trees or a dry ditch. Minimize the surface area of your body by assuming a crouched position on the ground with only the balls of the feet touching the ground, wrapping your arms around your knees, and lowering your head. Minimize contact with the ground because lightning current can enter a victim through the ground rather than by a direct overhead strike. Do not lie flat.



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- A person who feels his or her hair stand on end or his or her skin tingle should immediately crouch, as above.
- If unable to reach safe shelter, stay away from the tallest trees or objects (such as light poles or flag poles), metal objects (such as fences or bleachers), individual trees, standing pools of water, and open fields. Avoid being the highest object in a field. Do not take shelter under a single, tall tree.
- Avoid using the telephone, except in emergency situations. People have been struck by lightning while using a landline telephone. A cellular phone is a safe alternative to landline phones, if the person and the antenna are located within a safe structure or location.

### **Resumption**

For resumption follow the 30-minute rule: Play should not be resumed until 30 minutes have passed since the last flash of lightning or clap of thunder.

### **Definitions**

Safe structure or location is defined as: 1) any building normally occupied or frequently used by people (i.e., a building with plumbing and/or electrical wiring that acts to electrically ground the structure). Avoid using shower facilities for safe shelter during a thunderstorm; and 2) in the absence of a sturdy, frequently inhabited building, any vehicle with a hard metal roof (not a convertible or golf cart) and rolled-up windows can provide a measure of safety. It is not the rubber tires that make a vehicle a safe shelter; rather, it is the hard metal roof that dissipates the lightning strike around the vehicle. Do not touch the sides of the vehicle during the storm.

### **Chain of Command**

The team coaches and staff are responsible for ensuring that their players are safe during the storm.

If lightning occurs during a practice or a clinic, the team coaches and/or the technical staff coaches are responsible for monitoring weather conditions. The coaches are responsible for ensuring that all players are safe during the storm.



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The team coaches and staff are responsible for communicating that play is suspended and for clearing the fields.

### **First Aid Procedures for Lightning Strike Victims**

People who have been struck by lightning do not carry an electrical charge. Therefore, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is safe for the responder. Below are general guidelines for treating a lightning strike victim:

- Survey the scene for safety.
- Notify the local emergency management system.
- Move the victim carefully to a safer location, if needed.
- Begin aggressive CPR if needed.
- Evaluate and treat hypothermia and shock.
- Evaluate and treat for fractures.
- Evaluate and treat for burns.

### **Communication of Policy**

Vestavia Hills Soccer Club will communicate this lightning policy in the following methods:

- Post policy on the club's web site.
- Distribute written policy to coaches and team managers in all manuals and team packets at least once per year for further dissemination to team parents.