



## HAMPTON ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

# LIGHTNING SAFETY POLICY

- Education and prevention are the keys to lightning safety.
- Practice and competitions should be immediately suspended as soon as lightning is seen or thunder is heard.
- All athletes and spectators should seek safe shelter during severe weather.
- Play should not resume for at least 30 minutes after the last lightning strike or thunderclap.

### SIGNIFICANCE

Lightning is one of the most consistent causes of weather-related deaths and injury in the U.S. According to the National Severe Storms Laboratory, there are approximately 1 00 lightning-related deaths and over 1000 injuries yearly.

### BACKGROUND

Lightning-related injuries mainly occur between May and September. Most lightning-related casualties happen between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m., with the majority of those occurring between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. Therefore, the risk of lightning-related injury appears to be highest during some of the most active periods for outdoor athletic activities. The average distance between successive lightning flashes is about two to three miles, which means that **risk is present WHENEVER lightning can be seen or thunder can be heard.**

Game administrators, officials and the sports medicine staff can be aware of adverse weather by following local forecasts and by monitoring the National Weather Service (NWS). The NWS issues storm watches and warnings during times of severe weather. A watch means that the conditions are favorable for severe weather to develop, while a warning indicates severe weather has been reported and appropriate precautions should be taken. It must be remembered that any thunderstorm poses a risk of injury, even if not deemed "severe" by the NWS.

### MANAGEMENT

As soon as lightning is seen or thunder is heard, practice and competition should be suspended immediately. If anyone hears thunder or sees a lightning strike, **all personnel, athletes and spectators should be evacuated to safe structures.**

The ideal safe structure is a fully enclosed building with plumbing, telephone and electrical service, which aid in grounding the structure.

A fully enclosed automobile or school bus with all of the windows rolled up is a reasonable shelter, although care must be taken to avoid contact with any metal inside the vehicle. The hard metal frame and roof, not the rubber tires, dissipate the current around the vehicle. Golf carts and convertible cars are not safe shelters. Dugouts and rain / picnic shelters and pavilions are **not** safe shelters and are not grounded for the effects of lightning.

Avoid the use of plumbing during a thunderstorm as the electrical current from lightning can enter the building through plumbing connections. It is also unsafe to stand near utilities or use a landline telephone during a thunderstorm because of the risk of the current traveling through the lines.

Cellular and cordless telephones are considered to be safe.



## MANAGEMENT CONTINUED

If a suitable safe shelter is not available, it is best to avoid tall objects (trees, light poles, etc) that allow lightning an easy path to the ground. It is important to avoid being the tallest object. In an open field, people should crouch with their legs together, the weight on the balls of their feet, arms wrapped around their knees, and head down with their ears covered. The person should minimize contact with the ground and should NOT lie flat.

People who have been struck by lightning do not carry an electric charge. Therefore, it is safe to perform CPR, if needed. Ideally, injured persons are moved into a safe shelter. Lightning-strike victims who show signs of cardiac or respiratory arrest need emergency help.

The McCully Field Complex has an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) on site - affixed to the wall of the concession stand for use in case of medical emergency.

### RETURN TO PLAYING FIELD

HAA requires following the 30-minute rule when making return-to-play decisions. After the last flash of lightning is witnessed or the last thunderclap is heard, it is recommended to wait at least 30 minutes before resuming practice or competition. Given the average rate of thunderstorm travel, the storm should move 10 to 12 miles away from the area, reducing the risk of local lightning strike. **Any subsequent lightning strike or thunder after the beginning of the 30-minute count should reset the clock and another count should begin.**

# FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THESE SAFETY RULES MAY RESULT IN SUSPENSION OR EXPULSION FROM ALL HAA ACTIVITIES

## References

Bennett BL. A model lightning safety policy for athletics. *Journal of Athletic Training* 1997;32:251-253.

Cooper MA, et al. Lightning injuries. In: Auerbach PS, ed. *Management of Wilderness and Environmental Emergencies*.

5th ed. C.V. Mosby, 2007:68-1 08.

HolleR, Lopez R. Lightning-impacts and safety. *WMO Bulletin* 1998;47:148-155.

National Collegiate Athletic Association. Guideline 1d: Lightning safety. 2010-11 *Sports Medicine Handbook* (21st edition).

## Resources

[www.lightningsafety.com](http://www.lightningsafety.com)

[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)

[www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov)



## HAA Lightning Rules

HAMPTON ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION has a zero tolerance when it comes to lightning. If you are on the field and you see lightning, evacuate immediately.

Lightning often precedes rain, so don't wait for the rain to begin before suspending activities. Wait 30 minutes after the last observed lightning or thunder before resuming activity.

REMEMBER - IT IS NOT SAFE TO BE OUTSIDE DURING A THUNDERSTORM!

*"If you can see it, flee it - if you can hear it, clear it."*

When outdoors during lightning:

- Avoid open spaces
- Avoid all metal objects including electric wires, baseball bats, flag poles, fences and gates, high mast light poles, metal bleachers etc.
  - Avoid water
  - Avoid the high ground
- Remove metal objects (including baseball caps)
- Where possible, find shelter in a fully enclosed metal vehicle such as a car, truck or a van with the windows completely shut or in a substantial building.

Unsafe places:

  - Near trees
  - Underneath canopies
  - Small picnic or rain shelters

1) At the sound of thunder or detection of lightning within, umpires or coaches will immediately stop the game or practice. Once 30 minutes have passed without any thunder or lightning, coaches or umpires may resume play.

2) No more than one single thirty-minute weather delay shall be taken during a game before the game is officially called or postponed.

3) All players, coaches, and spectators must take shelter in a car with the windows rolled up or in a safe building. Players, coaches, and spectators may not shelter in the dugouts or under the picnic pavilions at McCully Fields.



4) Coaches and umpires will use their discretion on whether or not to cancel the game.

5) These policies must be strictly enforced and followed at all times.

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