



*Or Not?*



Office of Emergency Management, City of Philadelphia

# Severe Weather Safety Guide

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Severe weather happens. In Philadelphia, this can include flooding, thunderstorms and lightning, and tornadoes. Flooding from an excess of rain can affect the water levels of the Schuylkill River, Delaware River, and local creeks and streams. This flooding can cause damage to homes, roads, bridges, and utilities. Thunderstorms and lightning can mean power outages or damage caused by falling trees. Tornadoes are created from dangerous thunderstorms and can create a path of damage and debris. See our Hurricane Guide for information on hurricanes and tropical storms.

### Are you and your family prepared for severe weather?

If you had to stay in your home for a few days during severe weather, would you have what you need to stay safe, comfortable, and healthy?

If you had to suddenly leave your home, without time to pack anything, would you be ready to go?

The time to start planning for an emergency is not in the middle of one. In an emergency, you're either READY or you're not. Learn more about what you can do to prepare before, during, and after severe weather.

For more information on how to get READY, visit [www.phila.gov/ready](http://www.phila.gov/ready) or email us at [oem@phila.gov](mailto:oem@phila.gov).

### Be Ready. Make a Plan. Get what you need.

### How to Stay Informed

- Sign up for text and email alerts from **ReadyPhiladelphia** at [www.phila.gov/ready](http://www.phila.gov/ready).
- Follow the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management on Twitter and Facebook at @PhilaOEM.
- Visit our website at [www.phila.gov/ready](http://www.phila.gov/ready) for the latest updates. Stay tuned to local radio and television news for updates. Call Philly 3-1-1 for updates.



## Flooding

**Flooding is the nation's most common natural disaster, and Pennsylvania has the highest flooding rate of any other state. Not all floods are alike—some can develop slowly during a long period of rain, or in a warming trend following a heavy snow period. Others, such as flash floods, can occur quickly, even without any rain in the immediate area. Be prepared for flooding no matter where you live, but especially if you are in a low-lying area or near water. Even a very small stream or dry creek bed can overflow and create flooding.**

### Before a Flood



- Know your area's flood risk. To estimate your flood risk and flood insurance premium, visit [www.floodsmart.gov](http://www.floodsmart.gov), or call 1-800-427-2419.
- Consider getting flood insurance. Protection against loss due to floods is not covered under a homeowner's policy. Flood insurance is offered through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).
- If you live in an area that floods often, keep materials such as sandbags, plywood, plastic sheeting, and lumber on hand to help protect your home.
- If possible, create barriers to prevent any floodwater from entering your home or building. Seal basement walls with waterproof compound.
- Elevate the furnace, water heater, and electric panel in your home if you live in an area that has a high flood risk. Remove other items from the basement floor. Consider moving them to another level or store them higher up on shelves.
- Fill out a Family Emergency Plan, which will contain important contacts for you and your family in the event of any emergency.
- Learn the safest route from your home or place of business to safe, high ground in case you have to evacuate. This should be part of your Family Emergency Plan.
- Prepare a Go Bag that you can grab in case you need to leave your home in a hurry.
- Make a list of and take photos of personal property, including furnishings, clothing, and valuables.
- If you need to evacuate, turn off all utilities at the main power switch and close the main gas valve. Do not touch any electrical equipment unless it is in a dry area. If you do need to touch electrical equipment, wear rubber-soled shoes or boots and rubber gloves and stand on a piece of dry wood.
- Fill bathtubs, sinks, and jugs with clean water in case regular supplies become contaminated.
- Board up windows or protect them with storm shutters or tape to prevent flying glass.
- Bring outdoor objects, such as lawn furniture, garbage cans, and other loose items inside. If you cannot bring them inside, secure them safely.

## What Goes in Your Go Bag?

**Prepare a Go Bag, an emergency supply kit for your family, that you can easily grab and go if you need to evacuate. A backpack or small suitcase on wheels make great Go Bags. Keep your Go Bag in a place where you can get to it easily in case you need to leave in a hurry.**

### Consider these items for your Go Bag:

- A first-aid kit.
- Sturdy, comfortable shoes or boots, lightweight raingear such as a poncho, and wet and cold weather gloves.
- A Mylar or space thermal blanket. They are very light weight and durable blankets. They retain body heat, which will prevent hypothermia and trauma shock.
- Bottled water and ready-to-eat foods such as granola or energy bars that don't need to be refrigerated.
- A working flashlight and extra batteries.
- A battery-operated AM/FM radio and extra batteries.
- A small, regional map.
- A notepad and pen.
- If the power goes out in your area, you may not be able to use credit cards or ATM machines. So make sure you have a small supply of cash, especially in small bills such as \$1s, \$5s, and \$10s.
- Extra set of car and house keys.
- Copies of your important documents such as insurance cards, photo IDs/licenses, birth certificates, deeds, and proof of address. Keep these in a waterproof and portable container, or store them on a flash drive.
- Medication—be sure to refill medications before they expire. Keep a list of the medications each member of your household takes, why they take them, and their dosages. Also keep copies of all prescriptions and contact information for your doctors and pharmacists.
- Personal care items: hand sanitizer, sanitary products, toothbrush and toothpaste, toilet paper, and wipes.
- Child care supplies or other special care items.
- Contact and meeting place information for your household and members of your support network.





## During a Flood



### Inside/Outside on Foot

- Keep a battery-operated AM/FM radio tuned to a local station and follow emergency instructions.
- If flooding occurs and it is safe to move, go to high ground.
- If you're caught inside by rising waters, move to a higher floor. Take warm clothing, a flashlight, and portable radio with you. Wait for help. Do NOT try to swim to safety.
- If it is safe and you need to evacuate, take your Go Bag with you.
- When outside, remember: floods are deceptive. Avoid flooded areas and do not attempt to walk through flood water more than knee deep.

### With a Vehicle: Turn Around, Don't Drown!

- Avoid flooded roadways. Parts of the road may already be washed out, and you could become stranded or trapped.
- Never drive through flooded roadways. The water may be deeper than it looks. Just two feet of moving water can sweep a Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) off the road.
- Never drive around barricades that are put in place to protect you. Find another road that is not blocked.
- If your car stalls in a flooded area, abandon it as soon as possible. Floodwater can rise rapidly and sweep a car and those in it, away.
- If it is nighttime, follow these tips with extra caution.

## After a Flood

### After a Flood

- Before going into a building, check for damage to make sure it is safe to enter. Make sure it is not in danger of collapsing. Turn off any outside gas lines at the meter or tank. Let fresh air into the building for several minutes to get rid of foul odors or escaping gas.
- Turn off the electricity in all flooded rooms. Watch for electrical shorts or live wires before turning off the main power switch. Do not turn on any lights or appliances until an electrician has checked the system for short circuits.
- Cover broken windows and holes in the roof or walls to prevent further weather damage.
- Take pictures of all damage and flood impacts. Keep receipts for all repairs in case you need to make an insurance claim. If you are eligible to apply for disaster assistance, you will also need those receipts and photos.



### Clean Up Safely

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health offers these tips to help you and your family stay safe when cleaning up after a flood:

- Remove all water by mopping, pumping, wet vacuuming, or clearing drains.
- Clean and thoroughly dry all wet light fixtures. Don't turn the electricity on until they are dry!

### Throw Out

- All ceiling tiles, paper products, baseboards, and insulation that were damaged by water.
- All drywall up to four feet above the floodwater line.
- Furniture, such as mattresses, sofas, and upholstered chairs, that has absorbed water.
- Medicines and food that touched floodwater.
- All foods that need refrigeration but have not been refrigerated for more than six hours.
- Any frozen foods that have thawed.



### Make Your Own Disinfectant

#### Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup of bleach
- 1 gallon of water

#### Instructions:

- Pour bleach into water.
- Mix thoroughly.
- Dip a rag into the disinfectant and wipe dirty items.

### Wet Vacuum, Shampoo and Air Dry:

- Carpets

### Wipe Twice With a Disinfectant, Then Air Dry:

- Wood and metal studs
- Open windows and doors while cleaning and for at least 24 hours after cleaning. This will help surfaces to dry more quickly, and will help prevent mold. If you can, use fans or dehumidifiers to help dry things.

### Wash with Soap and Water, Wipe with a Disinfectant, and Dry:

- Furniture, such as wooden chairs and cabinets, that doesn't absorb water.
- All contaminated floors, counters, and other surfaces.
- All cooking and eating utensils that were touched or splashed by floodwater.
- Foam rubber items.

### Wipe with a Disinfectant or Wash in a Dishwasher in Hot Water:

- Children's toys: don't let children play with toys until they have been cleaned and disinfected!

## Thunderstorms and Lightning



All thunderstorms produce lightning and can be dangerous. Thunderstorms can create tornadoes, strong winds, hail, wildfires, and flash flooding. Flash flooding leads to more deaths than any other thunderstorm-related hazard.

Lightning is unpredictable and may be a risk to individuals and their property. This is why it is important to be prepared in this situation. Lightning often strikes outside of heavy rain and may happen as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall. Most lightning deaths and injuries occur when people are caught outdoors in the summer months during the afternoon and evening.

### Before a Thunderstorm

- Remove dead or rotting trees and branches that can fall and cause injury or damage during a severe thunderstorm.
- Postpone outdoor activities.
- Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage.
- 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 appliances, televisions, computers, and air conditioners. Power surges from lightning can cause serious damage.





# Thunderstorms and Lightning

## During and After a Thunderstorm

### During a Thunderstorm

- Stay inside a building or hard-top vehicle.
- Stay clear of tall, isolated trees, hilltops, open fields such as golf courses and athletic fields, beaches, or any metal objects that may act as lightning rods.
- Avoid showering, bathing, and using a phone that has a cord, except in an emergency.
- Cordless and cellular phones are safe to use during a thunderstorm.
- If outside, take cover immediately but never stand under a tall tree in an open area.
- Don't touch metal, electrical equipment, telephones, bathtubs, water faucets or sinks.
- 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.



**In a Park or Wooded Area:** Seek shelter in a low area under a thick growth of small trees, or a dry, low area, such as a ravine.

**In an Open Area such as a golf course or ball field:** Go to a low place such as a ravine or valley. Be alert for flash floods.

**On Open Water:** Get to land and find shelter immediately.

**Anywhere you feel your hair stand on end:** Standing hair indicates that lightning is about to strike. Squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands over your ears and your head between your knees. Make yourself the smallest target possible and minimize your contact on the ground. DO NOT lie flat on the ground.



### After a Thunderstorm

- Stay away from storm-damaged areas to prevent risks after severe thunderstorms.
- Stay away from downed power lines and report them immediately.
- If you have pets, make sure they are close to you and under your control.
- Continue to listen to NOAA Weather Radio or local radio and television stations for updated information and instructions. They will have information about road closures and possible power outages.
- Help people who require special assistance, such as those with disabilities, infants and children, pregnant women, or the elderly.



# Tornadoes

Tornadoes are nature's most violent storms. They can appear suddenly without warning. They can be invisible until dust and debris are picked up or a funnel cloud appears. Tornado winds can reach 300 miles per hour. They cause damage when they touch the ground. Tornadoes can damage an area one mile wide and 50 miles long.

Be aware that during severe thunderstorms and hurricanes, there may also be Tornado Watches and Tornado Warnings issued by the National Weather Service.

## Before a Tornado

- Fill out a Family Emergency Plan, which will contain important contacts for you and your family in the event of any emergency.
- Plan and practice how and where you take shelter are matters of survival. Be prepared to act quickly.
- Determine a place where you will take shelter in case of a tornado warning. The basement or the lowest point of your home provides the best protection.
- If an underground shelter is not available, go to an interior room or hallway without any windows.
- Stay away from windows, doors and outside walls. Go to the center of the room. Stay away from corners because they attract debris.
- If you cannot find shelter, lie flat in a ditch or other low-lying area. Do not take cover under an overpass or bridge.
- If you need to evacuate, grab your Go Bag and leave right away.
- During a Tornado Watch, stay tuned to local radio and TV stations or a National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio for further weather information. Watch the weather and be prepared to take shelter immediately if conditions worsen.
- Sign up for emergency text and email alerts at [www.phila.gov/ready](http://www.phila.gov/ready).
- Never touch or go near downed power lines, even if you think they are safe.
- Look at the sky for the following danger signs: a dark, greenish sky, large hail, a large, dark, and/or low-lying cloud, especially if it is rotating. You may hear a loud roar that sounds like a freight train. If you see or hear any of the danger signs, be prepared to take shelter and follow the tips above.





## During a Tornado

### During a Tornado: In a Home or Building

- Check to see if the building you are in has a shelter area. Go to that shelter area. If the building has no shelter area, go to the basement, storm cellar, or the lowest level of the building. If there is no basement, go to the center of an interior room on the lowest level, such as a closet or a hallway, away from corners, windows, doors, and outside walls.
- In a high-rise building, go to a small interior room or hallway on the lowest floor possible. Stay away from windows, corners, doors, and outside walls.
- If possible, get under a sturdy table and use your arms to protect your head and neck.
- Put on sturdy shoes, such as boots.
- Do not open any windows or doors.



### During a Tornado: Outdoors

- Immediately seek shelter, if possible.
- If you are not near a building and you have a car, drive to the nearest sturdy shelter. Be careful while you are driving. If your vehicle is hit by flying debris, pull over and park.
- If you are outdoors, try and seek shelter in a vehicle. Put your head down below the windows. Cover your head with your hands and a blanket, coat, or other cushion, if possible.
- Do not go under an overpass or a bridge. Lower and flatter locations are safer.
- Be careful of flying debris. Flying debris causes the most deaths and injuries.
- Never try to outrun a tornado in urban or crowded areas in a vehicle. Instead, leave the vehicle and seek shelter.



## After a Tornado



### After a Tornado

After a tornado, you could get injured if you walk in debris. The number one injury caused by tornadoes is from stepping on nails. Risks of fire, electrocution, or explosion are also possible if a tornado damages power, gas, or electrical lines.

- Continue to listen to NOAA Weather Radio or local radio and television stations for updated information or instructions. They will have information about road closures or possible power outages.
- Be careful while entering any buildings that have been damaged. Contact local building inspectors for information on structural safety codes and standards.
- Be aware of possible building, electrical, or gas-leak hazards in your home or building.
- Wear appropriate clothes such as sturdy boots, long sleeves, and gloves while handling or walking near debris.
- Be aware of hazards from exposed nails and broken glass.
- Do not touch downed power lines. Report all electrical hazards to PECO.
- Cooperate with public safety officials. Do not go into the damaged areas unless you have been asked. Cooperate with public safety officials including police, fire fighters, and emergency managers. Do not block roads with vehicles so first responders can quickly get to the scene.



### Tornado Mobile App

If you are on the move, there is no better way to track incoming tornadoes than with your smart phone. The American Red Cross has developed the official tornado app which provides interactive quizzes and step-by-step advice on preparations for a tornado. The app provides a list of nearby shelters and an audible siren that is sounded when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration releases a warning. To download the app to your android or iPhone visit: <http://apps.usa.gov/tornado-app.shtml>.





## Weather Words

### Flash Flood Watch

Flooding because of heavy rainfall is possible.

### Flash Flood Warning

Flooding because of heavy rainfall is expected.

### Severe Thunderstorm Warning

A severe thunderstorm will occur.

### Severe Thunderstorm Watch

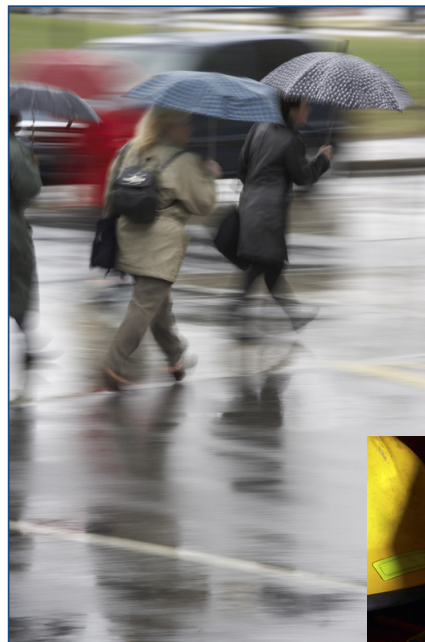
Thunderstorms might form that could produce wind gusts greater than 58 mph and/or hail greater than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch in diameter.

### Tornado Watch

A tornado could form in the next few hours.

### Tornado Warning

A tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar.





## How to Stay Informed



Here are some additional resources to consider when preparing for severe weather conditions:

### Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management

Follow the Office of Emergency Management on social media – @PhilaOEM on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Blogger, LinkedIn and its YouTube channel.

To learn how to prepare for an emergency:

Website: [www.phila.gov/ready](http://www.phila.gov/ready)

Email us at: [oem@phila.gov](mailto:oem@phila.gov)

Other resources: Philly 3-1-1, Channel 64 - Philadelphia's Government Access station.

### ReadyPhiladelphia

Sign up for emergency text and email alerts from the Office of Emergency Management through **ReadyPhiladelphia**.

In addition to emergency alerts, you can sign up for weather alerts, alerts from the Philadelphia Prisons in Northeast Philadelphia, and the PES refinery in Southwest Philadelphia.

Sign up at [www.phila.gov/ready](http://www.phila.gov/ready). Then, follow the sign up instructions to choose the alerts that you want to receive.

### Other Sources:

#### Local News Stations

Get the latest weather updates, road conditions, school closings, and the status of city agencies and court closings from KYW Newsradio.

#### Philadelphia Streets Department

Call: 215-686-5560

Website: [philadelphiastreet.com](http://philadelphiastreet.com)

#### Philadelphia Water

To report water main break and clogged drains:

Call: 215-685-6300

Website: [phillywaterheds.org](http://phillywaterheds.org)

#### PECO

Customer Service:

1-800-494-4000

Emergency Hotline:

1-800-841-4141

#### PennDOT

For road conditions on Pennsylvania interstate highways:

Toll Free: 1-888-783-6783

Out of State: 1-717-783-5186

Website: [www.dot.state.pa.us](http://www.dot.state.pa.us)

#### PGW

Contact PGW to report gas leaks and emergencies, 24 hours a day.

If you smell gas or have an unsafe condition, immediately call: 215-235-1212.

Customer Service - Billing, General Information, and Special Programs:

Call: 215-235-1000

Website: [www.pgworks.com](http://www.pgworks.com)

#### SEPTA

Bus, subway, trolley, regional rail, and CCT Connect travel advisories:

Website: [www.septa.org](http://www.septa.org)

#### National Weather Service

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

#### Project Home

If you see a homeless person who may need assistance, call Project Home Outreach Hotline at 215-232-1984. During the call, be prepared to provide the address, location and description of the person in need.