

# Lightning safety: 10 myths— and the facts

To stay safe in a storm, know the truth about  
lightning dangers

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“When thunder roars, go indoors!” is a truism that actually holds up. But much of what we think we know about lightning is fiction. Here are some common myths, along with the facts that will keep you and your loved ones safe in a storm.

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At any given time on our planet Earth, there are 1,800 thunderstorms in progress—and with them comes lightning. Property damage from lightning is covered by [standard homeowners insurance](#) for your home, and the comprehensive portion of [an auto policy](#) for your car—but bodily harm from lightning isn't easily remedied.

During a thunderstorm, it's best to take shelter in a house, other structure or a hard-topped, fully enclosed vehicle. But as one of these options may not be available to you, your safety and wellbeing may depend on knowing the difference between these lightning myths and the facts.

- **Myth #1 – Lightning never strikes twice in the same place.**
  - **Fact:** Lightning often strikes the same place repeatedly, especially if it's a tall, pointy, isolated object. The Empire State Building was once used as a lightning laboratory because it is hit nearly 25 times per year, and has been known to have been hit up to a dozen times during a single storm.
- **Myth #2 – Lightning only strikes the tallest objects.**
  - **Fact:** Lightning is indiscriminate and it can find you anywhere. Lightning may hit the ground instead of a tree, cars instead of nearby telephone poles, and parking lots instead of buildings.
- **Myth #3 – If you're stuck in a thunderstorm, being under a tree is better than no shelter at all.**
  - **Fact:** Sheltering under a tree is just about the worst thing you can do. If lightning does hit the tree, there's the chance that a “ground charge” will spread out from the tree in all directions. Being underneath a tree is the second leading cause of lightning casualties.
- **Myth #4 – If you don't see rain or clouds, you're safe.**

- **Fact:** Lightning often strikes more than three miles from the thunderstorm, far outside the rain or even the thunderstorm cloud. Though infrequent, “bolts from the blue” have been known to strike areas as distant as 10 miles from their thunderstorm origins, where the skies appear clear.
- **Myth #5 – A car's rubber tires will protect you from lightning**
- **Fact:** True, being in a car will likely protect you. But most vehicles are actually safe because the metal roof and sides divert lightning around you—the rubber tires have little to do with keeping you safe. Convertibles, motorcycles, bikes, open shelled outdoor recreation vehicles and cars with plastic or fiberglass shells offer no lightning protection at all.
- **Myth #6 – If you're outside in a storm, lie flat on the ground.**
- **Fact:** Lying flat on the ground makes you more vulnerable to electrocution, not less. Lightning generates potentially deadly electrical currents along the ground in all directions—by lying down, you're providing more potential points on your body to hit.
- **Myth #7 – If you touch a lightning victim, you'll be electrocuted.**
- **Fact:** The human body doesn't store electricity. It is perfectly safe to touch a lightning victim to give them first aid.
- **Myth #8 – Wearing metal on your body attracts lightning.**
- **Fact:** The presence of metal makes very little difference in determining where lightning will strike. Height, pointy shape and isolation are the dominant factors in whether lightning will strike an object (including you). However, touching or being near metal objects, such as a fence, can be unsafe when thunderstorms are nearby. If lightning does happen to hit one area of the fence—even a long distance away—the metal can conduct the electricity and electrocute you.
- **Myth #9 – A house will always keep you safe from lightning.**
- **Fact:** While a house is the safest place you can be during a storm, just going inside isn't enough. You must avoid any conducting path leading outside, such as electrical appliances, wires, TV cables, plumbing, metal doors or metal window frames. Don't stand near a window

to watch the lightning. An inside room is generally safe, but a home equipped with a professionally installed lightning protection system is the safest shelter available.

- **Myth #10** – Surge suppressors can protect a home against lightning.
- **Fact:** Surge arresters and suppressors are important components of a complete lightning protection system, but can do nothing to protect a structure against a direct lightning strike. These items must be installed in conjunction with a lightning protection system to provide whole house protection.

**Next steps links:** Learn more about [protecting your home against lightning damage](#).

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