



ATHLETIC TRAINERS
ASSOCIATION



NAIA Championship Outdoor Events Lightning Safety Medical Policy

Whenever there are concerns about severe weather, specifically lightning safety, related to the health and safety of student-athletes at NAIA outdoor Championship events, multiple tools and resources must be considered for use in making decisions about the efficacy of continuing with the outdoor physical activity. Best practices in making determinations on continuation to play include the following:

1. Players, spectators, and event officials at NAIA Championship events should be reminded/informed over the PA system throughout the event that lightning safety through prevention is important. Simple slogans like: "When thunder roars, go indoors," or "If you can hear it, clear it."
2. For outdoor events where inclement weather is possible, designate a "weather watcher." This person's primary responsibility is to actively monitor for threatening weather. Indicators of possible inclement weather include: high winds, darkening clouds, or lightning and/or thunder activity. This person reports directly to the event Medical Director/Athletic Trainer. This individual monitors the weather through a two pronged approach. They should watch/monitor local weather forecasts and know understand local weather patterns. In addition, they should be in contact with regional representatives from the National Weather Service (NWS) at www.weather.gov , or through local weather forecasting agencies in order to acquire accurate, real time information about weather concerns in that region.
3. In addition, there are a number of commercially available (typically for a fee) weather monitoring/notification resources to consider using as an adjunct in determining severe weather. The WeatherSentry Sports and Recreation monitoring system by DTN claims to provide real time weather information, including forecasts, precision lightning detection, wet bulb globe forecasts, and storm corridor information. The Thor Guard System is another commercial product that is widely used at golf facilities throughout the country. This product claims to be able to predict lightning before it actually strikes, allowing for early intervention in decision making. Additionally, weather apps like WeatherBug (including Spark) or the Weather Channel's App are highly rated tools that provide helpful information to inform critical safety decisions.

***" Notification systems may be useful as supplements, but they should never replace the designated weather watcher and NWS monitoring."**

It is the responsibility of the host Medical Director/Athletic Trainer at NAIA Championship events to determine when an event should be suspended and when it is safe to return to play as the result of lightning. The host medical director (or their designee) has unchallengeable authority to suspend play. The AT is to notify the NAIA Championship Manager who, in collaboration with the appropriate personnel (i.e. games committee), will implement the predetermined action plan for both player and spectator safety.

The following criterion shall be used when making decisions about lightning safety:

1. When lightning is within 8 – 10 miles, steps need to be taken to evacuate players, spectators and game officials from the venue until the threat of the storm has passed. Additionally, if severe thunderstorms are in the vicinity or if lightning /thunder has been observed (lightning strikes have been reported as far as 25 miles from the edge of a storm front) the venue must be cleared until the storm passes. Thunder may be hard to hear because of things like crowd noise. Lightning has the ability to strike even when blue sky is visible and there is no rainfall.
2. Everyone needs to be directed to a **safe location** away from the lightning hazard. Safe locations include fully enclosed buildings. In the event that access to this type of building is unavailable, buses, cars, and vans are considered safe alternatives. Please note that **unsafe locations** include structures like shelters, dugouts, storage sheds, picnic areas, tents, concessions, press boxes, etc.
3. Activities shall be suspended until at least 30 minutes following the last lightning strike and sound of thunder. The 30-minute clock restarts in the event that additional lightning is seen or thunder is heard.

Resources:

1. The National Weather Service website: <https://www.weather.gov/safety/lightning-safety-overview> (2018)
2. NATA Position Statement on lightning safety: https://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/2013_lightning-position-statement.pdf (2013)