

Your Health Matters

BOOM!

When I was little, I was terrified of thunderstorms. My Mom would tell me that the angels were bowling when it thundered and lightning meant they had a strike.... Wow, I love my Mom! The stories we believe as kids.

This week, there is stormy weather in the forecast. As spring weather continues to bring thunderstorms, I want to remind families to protect against lightning. Most lightning deaths and injuries occur when people are caught outdoors in the summer months during the afternoon and evening. Even though there is advance warning, people may not hear it or may choose not to respond.

Some people believe if it is not raining or there are no storm clouds overhead, they are not in danger of being struck by lightning. But lightning can strike up to 10 miles away from a thunderstorm, and many of the people who are struck are not even in the area where rain is falling. If you can hear thunder, you are in danger from lightning.

If you are outdoors, keep an eye on the sky. Watch for darkening skies, increasing wind or flashes of lightning. If you hear thunder, get away from water and go inside a sturdy building immediately. Avoid high ground, tall isolated trees, and metal objects like fences or bleachers. Do not take shelter in places like sheds, picnic areas, or a baseball dugout. If there is no shelter nearby, get into a car with a hard top and roll up the windows.

Lightning usually strikes objects that are tall, pointy or isolated, but it can strike anywhere, and it can strike the same place more than once. There is no safe place to shelter outdoors when lightning strikes.

If someone is struck by lightning, call 9-1-1 immediately for medical help. Check the person for burns and other injuries. If the person has stopped breathing, start CPR. A person who has been struck by lightning does not hold an electrical charge – it is safe to touch them.

When sheltering in a building, stay away from windows or glass doors. Do not sit on the porch or on cement walls. Water can conduct electricity, so avoid washing your hands, doing laundry or showering until the storm is over. Do not use electrical equipment or telephones. Turn off appliances, air conditioners, and computers to protect against power surges. Stay inside for at least 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder.

There are 25 million lightning strikes in the U.S. each year, making lightning one of the top three storm-related killers in the U.S. Play it safe – postpone outdoor activities when thunderstorms are expected.

To learn more, visit www.montgomerycountyhealth.org, Facebook or Twitter, or call 573-564-2495.

The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. ■



Linda Hasman