

Fact Sheet

Tornadoes



Tornadoes are nature’s most violent storms, spawned from powerful thunderstorms with whirling winds that can reach 300 miles per hour. Damage paths can be in excess of one mile wide and 50 miles long! Occasionally, tornadoes develop so rapidly that little, if any, advance warning is possible. *Before a tornado hits, the wind may die down and the air may become very still. A cloud of debris can mark the location of a tornado even if a funnel is not visible.* Tornadoes generally occur near the trailing edge of a thunderstorm. It is not uncommon to see clear, sunlit skies behind a tornado.

Before a Tornado

- § To begin preparing, build an emergency kit and make a family communication plan.
- § Listen to radio or television newscasts for the latest information. *In any emergency always listen to instructions given by local emergency response officials.*
- § Be alert to changing weather conditions. Look for approaching storms.
- § Look for the following danger signs:
 - Dark, often greenish sky and large hail
 - A large, dark, low-lying cloud (*particularly rotating*)
 - Loud roar, similar to a freight train

Watch –vs- Warning

Watch: Tornadoes are possible in and near the watch area. Be ready to act quickly if a warning is issue or you suspect a tornado is approaching.

Warning: A tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. Move indoors and seek shelter.

During a Tornado

If under a tornado warning, seek shelter immediately! Most injuries associated with high winds are from flying debris, remember to protect head.

IF A PERSON IS IN:	THEN:
A structure such as a residence, small building, school, nursing home, hospital, factory, shopping center, high-rise building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Put on sturdy shoes and do not open windows. § Go to a pre-designated area such as a safe room, basement, storm cellar, or the <i>lowest building level, closet or interior hallway</i> away from corners, windows, doors, and outside walls. Put as many walls as possible between you and the outside. § Get under a sturdy table and use arms to protect head and neck.
A mobile home or office	Get out immediately and go to a pre-identified location such as the lowest floor of a sturdy, nearby building or a storm shelter. Mobile homes, even if tied down, offer little protection from tornadoes.
Outside with no shelter	<p>If not in a sturdy building, there is no single research-based recommendation for what last-resort action to take because many factors can affect the decision. Possible actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Immediately get into a vehicle, buckle seat belt and try to drive to the closest sturdy shelter. If vehicle is hit by flying debris while driving, pull over and park.

- § Take cover in a stationary vehicle. Put the seat belt on and cover head with arms and a blanket, coat or other cushion if possible.
- § Lie in an area noticeably lower than the level of the roadway and cover head with arms and a blanket, coat or other cushion if possible.
- § Do not get under and overpass or bridge. A person is safer in a low, flat location.

After a Tornado

Check for injuries. Do not attempt to move seriously injured people unless they are in immediate danger of further injury. *Here are some safety precautions that could help to avoid injury after a tornado:*

- § Continue to monitor battery-powered radio or television for emergency information. Be aware of possible structural, electrical or gas-leak hazards in the home. If there is damage, shut off electrical power, natural gas and propane tanks to avoid fire or explosions.
- § Be careful when entering any structure that has been damaged, wear sturdy shoes or boots, long sleeves and gloves when handling or walking on or near debris. Be aware of hazards from exposed nails and broken glass.
- § Do not touch downed power lines or objects in contact with downed lines. Report electrical hazards to the police and the utility company.
- § Use battery-powered lanterns rather than candles to light homes without electrical power. If using candles, make sure they are in safe holders away from curtains, paper, wood or other flammable items. Do not use generators, pressure washers, grills, camp stoves or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside the home, basement, garage or camper.
- § Respond to requests for volunteer assistance, but do not do into damaged areas unless assistance has been requested.

Quick Facts to Know About Tornadoes

- § They may strike quickly, with little or no warning.
- § They may appear nearly transparent until dust and debris are picked up or a cloud forms in the funnel.
- § The average tornado moves Southwest to Northeast, but tornadoes has been known to move in any direction.
- § The average forward speed of a tornado is 30mph, but may vary from stationary to 70 mph.
- § Waterspouts are tornadoes that form over water.
- § Peak tornado season in the southern states is March through May; in the northern states, it is late spring through early summer.
- § Tornadoes are most likely to occur between 3 pm and 9 pm, but can occur at any time.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov
US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY www.ready.gov
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC www.noaa.gov