



NORTH DAKOTA
STATE CLIMATE OFFICE

SEVERE WEATHER SAFETY

Severe weather can happen suddenly.

Prepare by staying informed about the types of severe weather, and how to keep yourself and your community safe!

- **Severe Thunderstorms**
- **Tornadoes**
- **Tornado Drills**
- **Lightning**
- **Flash Flooding**

Have a way to receive alerts!

Weather radio, phone, TV, or social media are a few ways to stay weather aware.

HAVE A PLAN IN
PLACE BEFORE
SEVERE WEATHER
STRIKES!



Severe Weather Awareness Week

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Severe Thunderstorm Watch vs. Warning



The National Weather Service issues watches and warnings based on criteria to warn the public of inclement weather.

A Severe Thunderstorm **Watch** is issued when conditions are favorable to develop a thunderstorm, well before it may occur.

A Severe Thunderstorm **Warning** is issued when a thunderstorm is active and the intensity has met at least one of the following criteria:

- 58+ mph wind gust
- Hail greater than one inch diameter (quarter size)

A **Special Weather Statement** is issued for less hazardous conditions, but weather may still pose a potential threat to life and property.



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SEVERE THUNDERSTORM HAZARDS



WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT TO ENCOUNTER DURING SEVERE THUNDERSTORMS?

From lightning to wind and hail, always plan ahead and be aware of potential hazards you may encounter during severe weather.

Lightning

If you can hear thunder, it means lightning is close enough to strike. Stop activity immediately and seek shelter.

Hail

Thunderstorms can unpredictably drop hailstones from pea size to well over 2" in diameter. It is best to avoid being outdoors! If you are driving and encounter hail, pull over safely until it is clear.

Wind Gusts

Wind is a component of every Severe Thunderstorm, and strong gusts can carry debris, break large tree branches, or make travel difficult.

Flash Flood

Torrential rainfall can flood roadways. Never drive through flooded roadways; just a few inches of water can sweep away a vehicle.

Turn around, don't drown!



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TORNADOES

Funnel Clouds

- A funnel cloud is a spinning column of air descending from a storm. It is not a tornado until the condensation funnel has touched the ground, but rotation does warrant a Tornado Warning and sirens may sound.

Tornado

- Once the funnel has contact with the ground it can immediately cause damage to its surroundings. Debris can be thrown at high speeds no matter the size of the tornado.

Rain-Wrapped Tornadoes

- Oftentimes tornadoes become “rain-wrapped” — when the rain shaft of the thunderstorm reduces visibility of the tornado. This is very dangerous, as it is nearly impossible to see where the funnel is. Stay sheltered until safety is confirmed.

Plan Ahead!

- Know beforehand where to seek shelter and what to do in an emergency. Locate tornado shelters in buildings you attend throughout the day. A tornado can occur at any time day or night.

Phone Alerts

- When enabled, your phone will automatically be alerted of a tornado warning in the area. Stay up to date on changing weather conditions via phone, TV, or radio.





TORNADO DRILLS

In the event of a Tornado, seek shelter immediately!

Know where your closest designated tornado shelter is

In the event of a tornado:

- Sirens will sound.
- If you are outside, seek shelter in a nearby sturdy building if time permits, or lie flat in a ditch or low-lying area.
- If you are inside a building, seek shelter immediately in the lower level or interior hallway or room of the building.
- If you are in a vehicle in the immediate path of the tornado, get out immediately and seek an area of safety if time permits. If unable to leave the vehicle, ensure the seatbelt is on, and cover your head with your arms and/or any other protection items available to you.
- Remain in an area of safety until an ALL CLEAR bulletin has been provided by weather announcements or other emergency authorities.
- **NEVER** exit a building to find a shelter!
- The tornado sirens are tested the first Wednesday of every month at 1 p.m.

Tornado Watch vs. Warning

Watch

Conditions are favorable to develop tornadoes. Issued before severe weather.

Warning

A tornado has been reported to the National Weather Service. Sirens will sound if the warning is within city limits.

**Always have a method to receive weather information:
[weather.gov](https://www.weather.gov), TV, radio, or trusted weather app!**



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LIGHTNING

**LIGHTNING CAN STRIKE UP TO 15 MILES
AWAY FROM ANY THUNDERSTORM**

IF YOU HEAR THUNDER:

Stop all outdoor activities.

Seek shelter in a building or vehicle.

Wait 30 minutes after you last hear
thunder to resume activities.

Water conducts electricity.
Avoid being in any body of water
in the event of a thunderstorm.



**NEARLY 50 DEATHS OCCUR ANNUALLY IN THE
U.S. DUE TO LIGHTNING!**

WHEN THUNDER ROARS, GO INDOORS!



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Flash Flooding



Flash floods occur when excessive rain has fallen in a short amount of time.

DO NOT drive through flooded roadways!

Flooding can wash out roads and overwhelm infrastructure like dams or bridges and cause strong currents.

See [weather.gov/flood](https://www.weather.gov/flood) and your local authorities for the latest information.

"I can make it. I'll be fine."

NO!

It only takes around:

- 6 inches of fast moving water to sweep away an adult
- 12 inches to sweep away a vehicle
- 18-24 inches to sweep away a truck or SUV

TURN AROUND, DON'T DROWN!!!

Stay Weather Aware!

NDSU

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Management](#)

[NDSU Tornado Shelter
Locations](#)



- [Fargo/Grand Forks](#)
- [Bismarck](#)
- [Minneapolis/St. Paul](#)
- [Aberdeen](#)
- [Sioux Falls](#)



[Current Weather Conditions](#)



[Current Road
Conditions](#)

North Dakota State Climate Office

Severe Weather Awareness Week 2026

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