

This is intended to clarify some confusion regarding the Football Mercy Rule and the NFHS Guidelines for Lightning.

**The Mercy Rule** was approved by the State CIF Federated Council. The rule is in accordance with NFHS Football Rules 3-1-2 and 3-1-3.

1. During the 1st, 2nd and 3rd quarters, by mutual agreement of the opposing coaches and the referee, a “running clock” may be used if the point differential between the two teams reaches 35 or more;
2. If at the start of the 4th quarter or at any time during the fourth quarter, the point differential is 35 or more points, a running clock shall be used for the remainder of the contest;
3. Once the “running clock” is in effect during the 4th quarter, it shall remain in effect for the balance of the contest, even if the team that is behind subsequently scores to make the deficit less than 35 points;
4. The “running clock” will be administered as follows:
  - A. The game clock will start with the snap or legal touch of a free kick on the first play following the establishment of the pertinent point differential, and continue to run uninterrupted when:
    - A. 1st down is awarded to either team, including following a change of possession;
      - The ball or runner is out-of-bounds;
      - A legal or illegal forward pass is incomplete;
      - A play results in a touchback;
      - An inadvertent whistle occurs;
      - During all penalty enforcements.
    - B. The game clock shall be stopped for:
      - The end of a period;
      - A score (including touchdown; try; field goal; safety);
      - The free kick following a fair catch or awarded fair catch;
      - A charged team time-out;
      - A coach-referee conference;
      - An official’s time-out (injury; equipment; 1st down measurement; other, as required);
    - C. Following a stoppage for any reason in B. above, the game clock will start when the ball is next:
      - Marked ready-for-play; or
      - Legally touched on the free kick following a score, a fair catch or awarded fair catch

## **NFHS GUIDELINES FOR LIGHTNING SAFETY**

**A chain of command and designated decision-maker should be established for each organized practice and competition.**

### **Recognition:**

Coaches, certified athletic trainers, athletes and administrators should be educated regarding the signs indicating thunderstorm development. Since the average distance between successive lightning flashes is approximately 2-3 miles, anytime the lightning can be seen or thunder heard, the risk is already present.

Weather can be monitored using the following methods:

**Monitor Weather Patterns** – Be aware of potential thunderstorms by monitoring local weather forecasts the day before and morning of the practice or competition, and by scanning the sky for signs of potential thunderstorm activity.

**Flash to Bang** – This method is used to assess how far away lightning is striking. It is determined by counting the number of seconds it takes to hear a clap of thunder after witnessing a flash of lightning. The number of seconds is then divided by five to get the distance, in miles, to the lightning flash. Generally a 30 second or less flash-to-bang count suggests removal of the athletes from the field to a safe shelter is advisable.

**National Weather Service (NWS)** – Weather can also be monitored using small, portable weather radios from the NWS. The NWS uses a system of severe storm watches and warnings. A watch indicates conditions are favorable for severe weather to develop in an area; a warning indicates severe weather has been reported in an area and for everyone to take proper precautions.

### **Management:**

**Evacuation** – If lightning is imminent or a thunderstorm is approaching, all personnel, athletes and spectators should evacuate to available safe structures or shelters. A list of the closest safe structures should be announced and displayed on placards at all athletic venues.

**Thirty-minute Rule** – Once lightning has been recognized, it is recommended to wait at least 30 minutes after the last flash of lightning is witnessed or thunder is heard. Given the average rates of thunderstorms travel, the storm should move 10-12 miles away from the area. This significantly reduces the risk of local lightning flashes.

**Any subsequent lightning or thunder after the beginning of the 30-minute count should reset the clock and another count should begin.**

### **Prevention:**

In order to prevent lightning-related injuries, it is important to formulate and implement a proactive, comprehensive lightning emergency plan. The plan should include:

- Advanced planning
- A systematic approach for monitoring local weather conditions
- Education of staff to recognize signs of nearby lightning activity
- Criteria for suspension and resumption of play
- Evacuation plan including nearby safe shelters
- Periodic review and practice of the plan by appropriate high school personnel.

Page 99 of the NFHS Football Rulebook states-  
NFHS GUIDELINES ON HANDLING CONTESTS DURING LIGHTNING  
DISTURBANCES

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)  
Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a default policy to those responsible for making decisions concerning the suspension and restarting of contests based on the presence of lightning. The preferred sources from which to request such a policy for your facility would include your state high school association and the nearest office of the National Weather Service.

Proactive Planning

1. Assign staff to monitor local weather conditions before and during events.
2. Develop an evacuation plan, including identification of appropriate nearby shelters.
3. Develop criteria for suspension and resumption of play:
  - a. When thunder is heard, or a cloud-to-ground lightning bolt is seen, the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play and take shelter immediately.
  - b. Thirty-minute rule. Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or flash of lightning is witnessed prior to resuming play.
  - c. Any subsequent thunder or lightning after the beginning of the 30 minute count, reset the clock and another 30 minute count should begin.
4. Hold periodic reviews for appropriate personnel.

For more detailed information, refer to the "Guidelines for Lightning Safety" section contained in the NFHS Sports Medicine Handbook.