



LIGHTNING & THUNDERSTORM SAFETY POLICY

Football Development East Limited (FDE)

Policy owner	Football Development East Limited
Version / effective date	Version 2.0 September 2026
Next scheduled review	30 th December 2027
Applies to	All FDE outdoor activities, including coaching, events, matches, camps and programmes



1. Purpose and policy position

Lightning is a low-frequency but potentially fatal hazard. FDE will take a precautionary approach: no football session, fixture, camp or outdoor activity is important enough to justify exposing a child, participant, staff member, volunteer or spectator to an avoidable lightning risk.

This policy replaces FDE's previous short lightning procedure, which relied primarily on the 30/30 rule. The 30/30 rule remains an important minimum trigger, but FDE will also act earlier where thunder is heard, lightning is seen, a Met Office warning or forecast indicates a credible local risk, or the person in charge considers conditions unsafe.

CORE RULE

If thunder is heard or lightning is seen close enough to create concern, stop the activity and move people to safe shelter. Do not wait for rain, and do not wait for the storm to be directly overhead.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all FDE employees, coaches, session leads, volunteers, contractors and participants at outdoor activities organised or delivered by FDE. It covers training, matches, holiday activities, SEND provision, community sessions, festivals, tournaments and other outdoor events.

Where FDE is using a school, council, club or third-party venue, the venue emergency arrangements must also be considered. Where another competent authority has responsibility for a match or event, FDE will cooperate with that person; FDE staff retain responsibility for the welfare of children in FDE's care and may withdraw them where FDE considers conditions unsafe.

3. Planning before an outdoor activity

The Session Lead must consider foreseeable weather hazards as part of normal session planning. Where thunderstorms are possible, the plan should include:

- checking the current Met Office forecast and relevant weather warnings before the activity and monitoring changes where conditions are developing;
- identifying in advance where participants can shelter safely and how they will get there quickly;
- considering whether the venue has sufficient safe shelter for the number of participants, including children with SEND, mobility needs or communication needs;
- ensuring staff know who has authority to suspend or cancel the activity and how parents/carers will be contacted if collection is required;
- considering safe arrival and departure as well as the period of the activity itself; and
- cancelling, delaying, relocating indoors or modifying an activity before participants arrive where the forecast makes safe delivery doubtful.

A weather warning does not automatically mean every FDE activity must be cancelled. The Session Lead must assess the warning, timing, location, available shelter and developing conditions. Equally, the absence of a warning does not justify continuing where thunder or lightning is actually present.



4. The FDE stop rule - 30/30 and earlier intervention

The established 30/30 rule is retained as a clear operational threshold. If lightning is seen, count the seconds until thunder is heard. If the interval is 30 seconds or less, the storm is close enough to present danger and outdoor activity must stop immediately.

However, 30 seconds is not a target to be reached before action can be taken. The Met Office advises that when thunder can be heard, a person is already within range of where the next ground flash may occur. Accordingly, FDE may suspend an activity before the 30-second threshold whenever thunder is heard, lightning is observed, conditions are rapidly deteriorating or the Session Lead has any reasonable safety concern.

NO DEBATE AT THE POINT OF SUSPENSION

The Session Lead may stop or cancel an activity immediately. Commercial, competition, timetable or parental pressures must not override the safety decision.

5. Immediate actions when activity is suspended

- Stop play or activity clearly and immediately. Do not finish a drill, game period or exercise.
- Account for all children and direct the group calmly to the predetermined safe shelter.
- Keep children under appropriate supervision. SEND participants may need individual communication, visual prompts, reassurance or physical guidance consistent with their support arrangements.
- Leave exposed pitches, open fields, elevated areas, water and metal fencing, goals, floodlight structures and other conductive or isolated tall objects.
- Do not shelter beneath or close to trees. Dugouts, open-sided shelters, tents, sheds and similar structures must not be treated as lightning-safe shelter.
- Do not send children across an exposed site simply to reach a parent if the route itself creates greater risk. Manage handover from the safest practicable location.
- If conditions also create flooding, high-wind or hail risks, those hazards must be managed at the same time.

6. What counts as safer shelter?

The preferred shelter is a substantial enclosed building. A fully enclosed hard-top metal vehicle with the windows closed can also provide protection. Participants should avoid touching exposed metal parts where practicable.

Open-sided structures, dugouts, gazebos, tents, temporary canopies, small sheds and standing beneath trees do not provide appropriate lightning protection. If there is no safe shelter available, this must influence the decision whether an outdoor activity should proceed when thunderstorms are forecast.

If someone is unexpectedly caught in the open with no safer option, move away from water, isolated trees, poles, fencing and metal objects and seek lower ground. As a last-resort measure, minimise contact with the ground by crouching low with the head tucked; do not lie flat. This is an emergency measure, not an alternative to proper shelter.



7. Resuming activity - 30 minutes means 30 minutes

An outdoor activity must not restart until at least 30 minutes have passed since the last thunder was heard. If thunder is heard again, the 30-minute period starts again from zero. FDE may wait longer where the forecast, visible conditions or local circumstances indicate continuing risk.

Before restarting, the Session Lead must reassess the whole environment. Thunderstorms may also bring heavy rain, standing water, flooding, hail, debris, damaged equipment and strong winds. The pitch or activity area must be safe, and participants should be given an appropriate opportunity to re-warm before returning to strenuous activity.

RESTART TEST

30 minutes since the last thunder + storm has moved away + forecast/conditions are acceptable + pitch/site is safe. If any element is doubtful, do not restart.

8. Matches and activities involving other organisations

For a formal football fixture, the match official has authority over whether the match is postponed, suspended or abandoned in accordance with applicable competition arrangements. FDE will provide relevant local information and cooperate with the referee, opposition and venue.

Nothing in that arrangement requires FDE to leave children in its care exposed to a risk it considers unacceptable. If necessary, FDE may remove its participants to safe shelter while the position is resolved. Competition consequences are secondary to immediate safety.

For FDE training and other FDE-led activities, the designated Session Lead or person with overall authority makes the decision to delay, suspend, cancel or abandon the activity.

9. SEND, disability and additional support needs

FDE is a SEND-inclusive provider. Emergency planning must therefore be realistic for the children actually attending, rather than assuming every participant can understand a shouted instruction and independently evacuate an exposed pitch.

Where relevant, staff should anticipate communication, sensory, mobility, behavioural, anxiety or regulation needs. A child may require a familiar adult, simple or visual instructions, additional processing time, physical guidance within agreed support arrangements, mobility assistance, medication or another reasonable adjustment to reach and remain in shelter safely.

The need to support one child must not delay the wider group's move to safety. The Session Lead should allocate staff roles in advance where a child is known to need additional emergency support.

10. Parents, carers, spectators and collection

Where a session is suspended or cancelled, FDE will communicate with parents/carers as soon as reasonably practicable. Children remain subject to FDE's normal safeguarding and handover arrangements until safely collected or otherwise released in accordance with the programme arrangements.

Parents/carers and spectators should also be directed away from exposed areas. FDE should not encourage people to congregate beside pitches, under trees or in open shelters while waiting for a storm to pass.



11. Lightning strike or medical emergency

A person who has been struck by lightning does not retain an electrical charge and can be touched. If a lightning strike or suspected strike occurs:

- Call 999 immediately and state that lightning strike is suspected.
- Before approaching, consider whether rescuers and the casualty remain exposed to an immediate lightning hazard and move to safer conditions where this can be done without creating greater risk.
- Check responsiveness and breathing. If the person is not breathing normally, start CPR and use an automated external defibrillator (AED) as soon as one is available, following the device prompts.
- Provide first aid within the responder's competence and continue until emergency services take over.
- Arrange appropriate supervision and safeguarding of the other children and participants.
- Record the incident and notify FDE management and the parent/carer of any child involved as soon as practicable.

12. Responsibilities

FDE management

FDE management is responsible for maintaining this policy, ensuring appropriate risk-management arrangements, communicating expectations to staff and reviewing significant weather-related incidents or near misses.

Session Lead / person in charge

The Session Lead is responsible for checking relevant conditions, identifying shelter, briefing staff where necessary, making timely suspension/cancellation decisions for FDE-led activities, accounting for participants and deciding whether conditions are safe for restart.

All staff and coaches

All staff must follow a stop/shelter instruction immediately, supervise children, raise developing concerns and avoid encouraging participants to remain outside for convenience or to complete an activity.

Participants and parents/carers

Participants and parents/carers are expected to follow safety directions promptly. FDE may refuse or end participation where an individual's actions create an avoidable safety risk during severe weather.

13. Recording, review and learning

Routine precautionary suspensions do not require a safeguarding incident report. A significant event should be recorded where there is an injury, lightning strike, emergency-service attendance, failure of the planned shelter/evacuation arrangements, significant distress, a child temporarily unaccounted for, or another material safety concern or near miss.

Following a significant event, FDE should review what happened, whether the venue and emergency plan were adequate, whether SEND adjustments worked as intended and whether this policy, staff briefing or risk assessment requires amendment.



14. Guidance and legal framework

This policy is informed by current Met Office thunder and lightning safety advice, The FA's Thunderstorm Guidance for Grassroots Football and referee storm guidance, and RoSPA lightning-safety guidance. FDE will follow updated official guidance where it supersedes the operational detail in this policy.

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated risk-management duties require employers to manage foreseeable risks to staff and others affected by their activities. FDE applies the same precautionary approach to children, volunteers, families and other participants within its programmes.

15. Policy approval and review

Policy owner: Football Development East Limited

Approved by: J HAINES

Approval date: 30/09/2026

Next scheduled review: 30th December 2027

This policy may be reviewed earlier following a significant incident or near miss, material change to FDE provision, venue arrangements, legislation or relevant national guidance.

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