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Tornado Sheltering Guidelines during the COVID-19 Pandemic

A Statement of the American Meteorological Society
(Adopted by the AMS Council on 9 April 2020)

Call to Action

Do not let the virus prevent you from seeking refuge from a tornado. If a public tornado shelter is your best available refuge from severe weather, take steps to ensure you follow CDC guidelines for physical distancing and disease prevention.

Motivation

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped nearly all aspects of everyday life as the world implements unprecedented strategies to reduce transmission of the virus. While communities continue to respond to the virus, the public must now identify how their severe weather refuges will be affected by the pandemic. We have already seen major tornado events in the midst of the pandemic, demonstrating the urgency for communities across the nation to prepare to simultaneously respond to the spread of the pandemic while dealing with the impacts of deadly severe weather.

Audience

The guidelines below are recommended by the American Meteorological Society for use by the media, emergency managers, weather forecasters, and the general public as they prepare for severe weather threats during a pandemic.

How to Prepare Now

Make your severe weather plan now and identify the best storm refuge available. Determine if your home can provide you with a good location to take refuge, such as a basement or an interior, windowless room. If you cannot take refuge in your home, discuss sheltering with neighbors, friends, or family. If your community has shelters, verify now which will be open and operating during the pandemic.

Use of Public Storm Shelters

Many communities have announced that they will not open public storm shelters during the pandemic. If you rely on public shelters, like schools, stores, or community facilities, determine if that shelter will be available during the COVID-19 pandemic. This information can be found through websites and official social media accounts or by contacting your local emergency management agency.

When to Seek Shelter

The American Meteorological Society recommends that you use multiple trusted sources to monitor the threat of approaching severe weather and be prepared to take refuge at home when a tornado warning is issued. If you need to travel to seek shelter, and the shelter you travel to is open, make sure that you complete your travel before a tornado warning is issued for your area.

Virus Transmission Precautions within Storm Shelters

It is recommended that you follow Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for COVID-19 transmission prevention, including physical distancing, and any additional guidelines set by your local emergency management agency.

For more information about CDC guidelines, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/>.

For more guidelines on tornado preparedness, visit <https://www.ready.gov/tornadoes>.

About the American Meteorological Society

The American Meteorological Society (AMS) advances the atmospheric and related sciences, technologies, applications, and services for the benefit of society. AMS is a scientific and professional society headquartered in Boston, with its Education and Policy Programs located in Washington, DC. For more information, visit <https://www.ametsoc.org/>.