SEVERE WEATHER, STORMS AND THUNDERSTORMS

What the weather service's warning levels mean and how to get safely through storms, thunderstorms, hail, snow and black ice – at home, on the road and afterwards.

Last updated: 05/11/2026

DO NOW

1. **Stay indoors, close windows and doors, keep away from windows**
2. **Secure loose objects on the balcony and in the garden – while there is still time**
3. **In a thunderstorm get out of the water, away from trees, masts and peaks – into a building or car**
4. **Don't drive in a storm; keep away from trees, scaffolding and power lines**
5. **After the storm don't touch power lines, avoid woods; in danger call 112**

Storms, thunderstorms, hail, snow and black ice are part of the weather in Germany. Most of the time things turn out fine – especially if you do two things: take the warning seriously and stay indoors while the bad weather lasts. The Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (BBK) puts it simply: the most important rule is to stay at home. This guide explains what the warning levels of the German Weather Service mean, how to prepare your home, balcony and garden, and what to do if a thunderstorm catches you outdoors. Heavy rain and flooding are covered in the guide Floods and heavy rain.

AT A GLANCE

- **Know the warning levels:** The German Weather Service (Deutscher Wetterdienst, DWD) warns in four levels: yellow (weather warning), orange (significant weather), red (severe weather) and violet (extreme severe weather). From red, the DWD advises avoiding being outdoors.
- **In a storm, stay indoors,** away from windows, and secure loose things beforehand. A car is not a safe place in a storm. From wind force 10 or a hurricane warning, the ADAC (German automobile club) advises not driving at all.
- **In a thunderstorm:** If you can hear thunder, you are within range. Get into a building or a car with a metal body, out of the water, away from isolated trees, peaks and masts. The storm is only over 30 minutes after the last thunder.
- **Outdoors without shelter:** crouch down, feet close together, ideally in a hollow, with distance to other people – don't lie down.

- **In winter:** When there are warnings of black ice or heavy snowfall, stay at home if you can, keep clear of roof edges and don't clear roofs yourself.
- **Afterwards:** never touch power lines that have come down or are hanging, avoid woods, and photograph the damage before you clear up.

START SMALL

You hardly need any equipment for severe weather. Pick one of these each day – none takes more than ten minutes:

- **Set up warnings:** Under Warnings, choose the districts where you live and work – the DWD's official weather warnings appear there too. The DWD also has its own free app, WarnWetter (see Recommended apps).
- **Balcony and garden walk-round:** What could blow away in a storm? Plant pots, furniture, trampoline, wheelie bins, bikes. Think about where you will put everything or how you will tie it down.
- **Check light and radio:** Do you have a radio with batteries or a crank and a torch with fresh batteries ready?
- **Where's what:** Enter the fuse box and the fault number of your grid operator (it's on your electricity bill) under Where's what.
- **Photograph your home:** Walk once through your flat, cellar and garden and photograph everything. The BBK advises documenting your property with photos and keeping the files safe. A copy goes in your document folder.
- **Read your policy:** Are storm, hail and lightning included in your contents and buildings insurance? Is there a clause for power-surge damage?
- **Practise the thunderstorm rules:** Count the seconds between lightning and thunder with your family and show the crouch position once. You set a meeting point in the family plan.

UNDERSTANDING

The weather service's warning levels

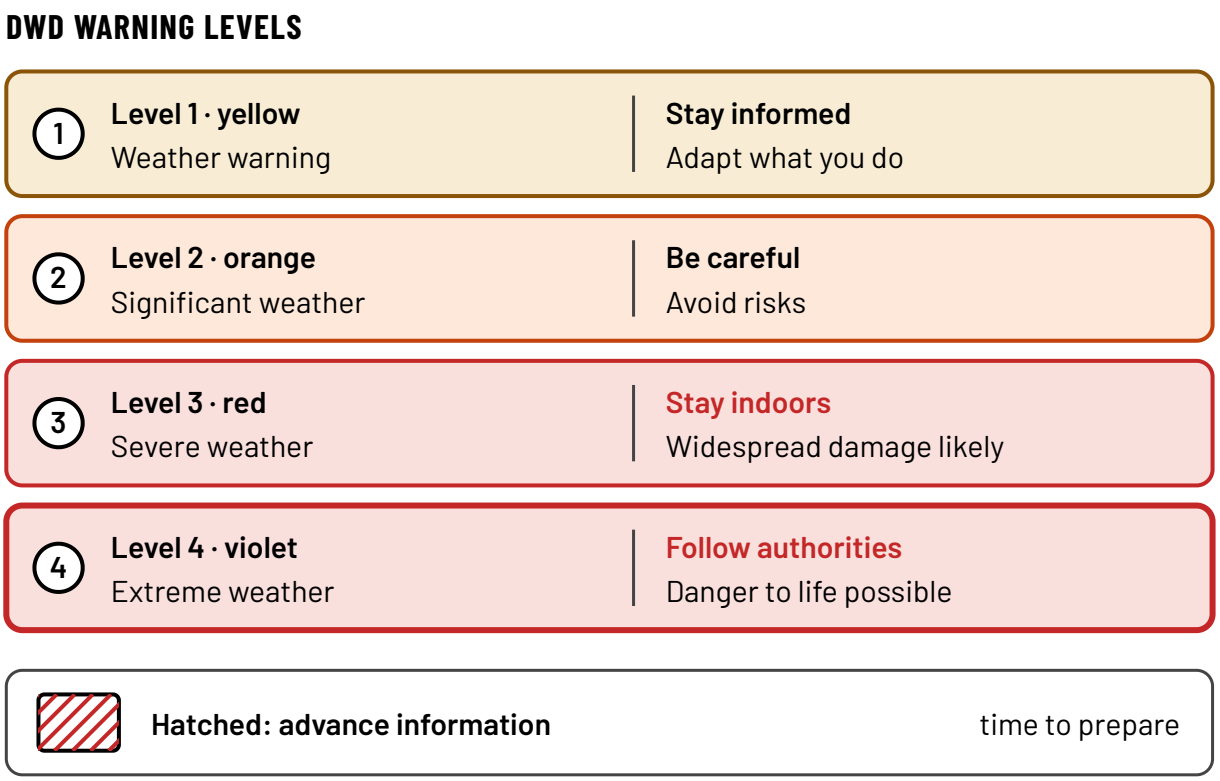
The DWD issues warnings down to district and municipality level. The colours are the same on its website and in the WarnWetter app:

LEVEL	COLOUR	WARNING	WHAT THE DWD ADVISES
1	yellow	Official warning	The weather is not unusual but can bring hazards. If you are outdoors: keep informed, adapt what you do.

LEVEL	COLOUR	WARNING	WHAT THE DWD ADVISES
2	orange	Warning of significant weather	Not unusual, but dangerous; isolated damage possible. Be careful, avoid risky behaviour.
3	red	Severe weather warning	Very dangerous, widespread damage possible. Avoid being outdoors.
4	violet	Warning of extreme severe weather	Extremely dangerous; life-threatening situations and major destruction possible, often over large areas. Stay out of it, follow the authorities' instructions, prepare for extraordinary measures.

A **hatched area** on the warning map is **advance information about severe weather** (Vorabinformation Unwetter): very dangerous or even extreme weather is possible, but the area, time and strength are not yet certain. It gives you time to prepare. Not every type of weather has all four levels – for fog, for example, there is only level 1. And the DWD stresses that its recommendations are non-binding: you adapt them to the situation where you are.

How you get warnings, even without power or a network, is explained in the guide Warnings and communication.



The four warning levels of the German Weather Service: level 1 yellow, weather warning, stay informed. Level 2 orange, significant weather, be careful. Level 3 red, severe weather, stay indoors. Level 4 violet, extreme severe weather, follow the authorities. Hatched means advance information: time to prepare.

Storms and hurricane-force winds

The DWD warns according to the strength of the **gusts**, measured about 10 m above open ground. The scale is based on the Beaufort scale (Bft):

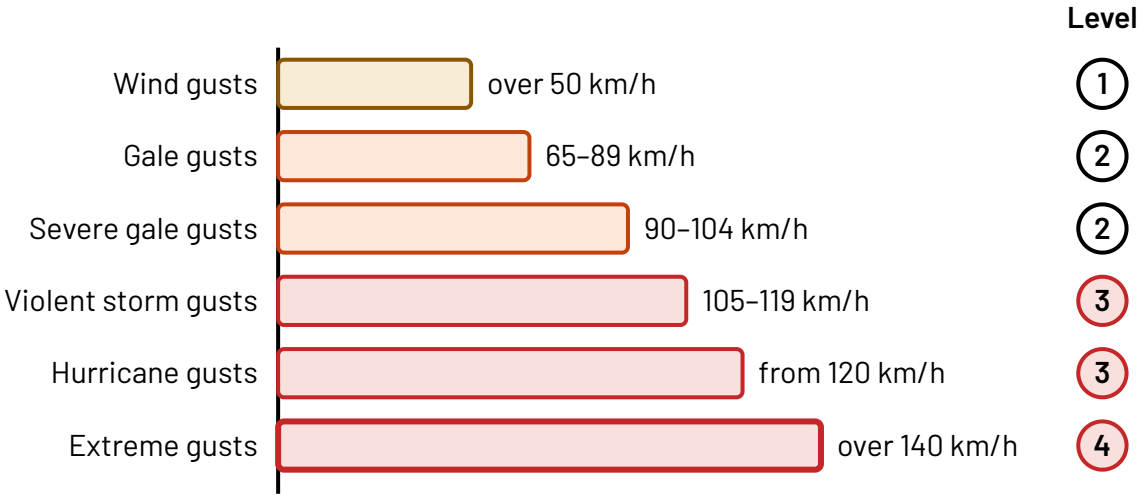
WARNING	GUSTS	BEAUFORT	LEVEL
Wind gusts (Windböen)	over 50 km/h	7	1
Gale-force gusts (Sturmböen)	65 to 89 km/h	8 to 9	2
Severe gale-force gusts (schwere Sturmböen)	90 to 104 km/h	10	2
Violent storm gusts (orkanartige Böen)	105 to 119 km/h	11	3
Hurricane-force gusts (Orkanböen)	from 120 km/h	12	3
Extreme hurricane-force gusts (extreme Orkanböen)	widely over 140 km/h	–	4

For each warning, the DWD describes what can happen: with **gale-force gusts**, individual branches break off and objects fly around. With **severe gale-force gusts**, some trees fall. From **violent storm**

gusts, there is danger to life and limb from falling trees, power lines and scaffolding and from falling branches and roof tiles. With **hurricane-force gusts**, trees fall in many places and buildings are damaged. With **extreme hurricane-force gusts**, roofs are torn off, even large objects fly around, and you should be ready for power and mobile network failures.

For insurance purposes, by the way, wind only counts as a storm from **wind force 8 (about 62 km/h)** (Verbraucherzentrale, the German consumer advice centres) – more on this under "Afterwards".

GUSTS AND WARNING LEVELS



Gusts, measured about 10 m above open ground

DWD wind warnings as bars: wind gusts from 50 kilometres per hour, gale-force gusts from 65, severe gale-force gusts from 90, violent storm gusts from 105, hurricane-force gusts from 120, extreme gusts over 140. The colours show warning levels 1 to 4.

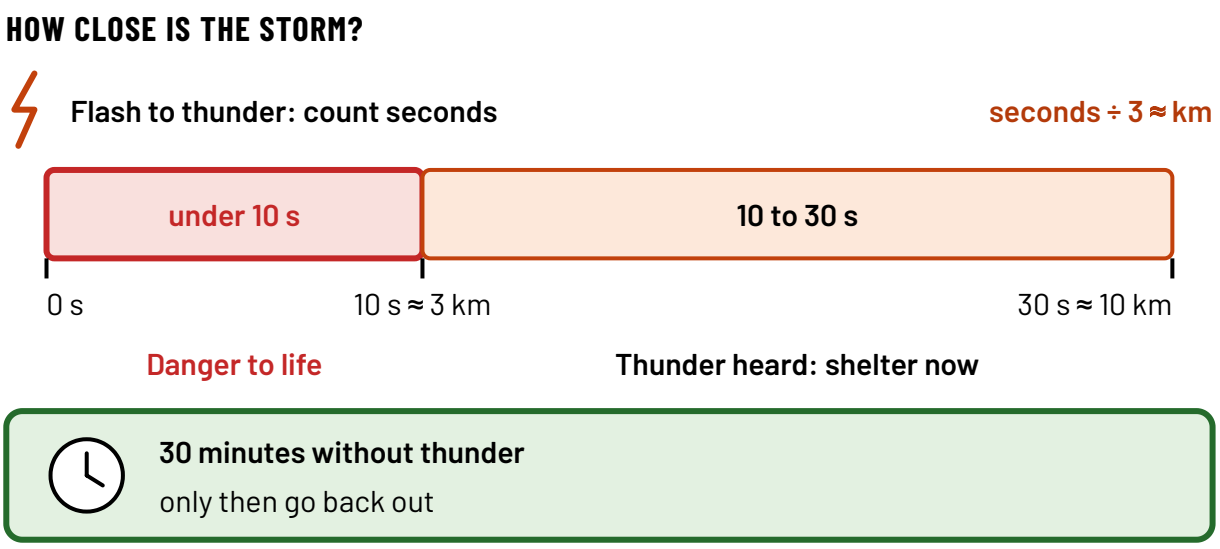
Thunderstorms and lightning

Thunderstorms mainly develop on humid, warm days and often come with heatwaves (BBK; see guide Heat). Lightning prefers to strike the highest point around. People and animals can be struck directly or indirectly – through the ground around the point of impact or through conducting metal parts (BBK). A lightning strike can be fatal. The German folk saying that you should avoid oaks but seek out beeches is wrong: lightning strikes all kinds of tree equally (VDE, BBK).

How far away is the storm? Count the seconds between lightning and thunder and divide by three – that gives you roughly the distance in kilometres. So 9 seconds means about 3 km (DWD). From this, the VDE Committee for Lightning Protection and Research (VDE|ABB) derives three simple rules:

1. **You can hear thunder:** the storm is less than about 10 km away. Leave exposed places such as open fields or isolated trees immediately.
2. **10 seconds or less** between lightning and thunder: a strike near you is possible – danger to life.
3. **No thunder for 30 minutes:** only then is the storm over. That applies even if the cloud seems to be moving away.

The DWD adds: lightning "out of a clear sky" really does exist – usually from storms 10 to 20 km away. Distant thunder, on the other hand, often can't be heard at all. So blue sky above you does not yet mean the danger is over (DWD, CDC).



Lightning and thunder: count the seconds and divide by three to get kilometres. Thunder audible means under 10 kilometres, take shelter. 10 seconds or less means danger to life. Only go back out 30 minutes after the last thunder.

The DWD warns of thunderstorms in four levels: a simple **thunderstorm** (1), a **strong thunderstorm** with gale-force gusts, heavy rain or hail (2), a **severe thunderstorm** with hail, very heavy rain or hurricane-force gusts, possibly with a risk of tornadoes (3), and an **extreme thunderstorm** (4).

Hail

Hail comes from large thunderclouds. In Germany, hailstones are usually 0.5 to 3 cm across and weigh up to about 20 g; much bigger ones are extremely rare here. Hail can occur in any season, but is most common between May and August. It mainly damages windows, glass roofs, roof tiles, facades and roller shutters – and can block drains and gutters so that water backs up (BBK).

Tornadoes

Tornadoes do happen in Germany too, but they are usually small and short-lived. From 2000 to 2025 there were on average **49 a year** according to the DWD, around 29 to 69 depending on the year. Strong tornadoes (IF2 and above, from about 220 km/h) number only around 1 to 9 a year. The main season runs from late May to September.

Tornadoes can't be predicted precisely. The DWD can point out an increased risk in a region at most about 18 hours in advance. If funnel-shaped, rotating cloud tubes are spotted, there is a tornado risk for the next 15 to 60 minutes; the DWD then issues a severe weather warning with a note about the tornado risk (DWD).

Snow, ice and slippery roads

Glätte (slippery conditions) is the umbrella term for ice on the ground and on objects. Among other things, the DWD distinguishes **black ice from freezing rain** (Glatteis) – supercooled rain or drizzle freezes instantly on impact – and **ice from refreezing water** (Eisglätte), where meltwater or puddles freeze. The latter is particularly treacherous because no precipitation needs to fall beforehand. The warnings range from isolated slippery patches (level 1) to **extreme black ice** with heavy ice build-up and widespread ice breakage (level 4). Even with **significant slippery conditions** (level 2), ice deposits can break branches and bring down trees.

For **snowfall**, the DWD warns according to amount and altitude. In lowlands up to 800 m, "heavy snowfall" (level 3) means, for example, 10 to 20 cm in 6 hours or 15 to 25 cm in 12 hours.

For the roof, what counts is not the depth of the snow but its **weight**. Layers of ice in the snow are hard to see: **1 cm of ice weighs about as much as 10 cm of powder snow** (BBK). On top of that come snow sliding off roofs and icicles above pavements.

Why severe weather often cuts the power

Falling trees can damage power lines (BBK). A storm can also disrupt the mobile network or internet access (BBK guide). For extreme severe weather, the DWD explicitly advises preparing for network failures. What you need then is in the guide Power cut.

Sources for this section: DWD warning levels and colour scale, DWD warning criteria, DWD hazard notes and recommendations for each warning event, DWD "Die Entfernung von Gewittern" (6/2020), DWD tornado brochure (4/2022), DWD tornado season review 2026 (10/2026), DWD glossary, BBK "Naturgefahr Gewitter", "Naturgefahr Hagel", "Schneelast", BBK "Vorsorgen für Sturm, Gewitter und Hagel", BBK guide (11/2025), Max und Flocke "Blitzgescheit" (2017), VDE|ABB (2018, 2019), Verbraucherzentrale (8/2026), CDC (6/2026).

PREPARING

Warnings and information

1. Under Warnings, choose the districts where you live, work and go to school. Weather warnings also come through the NINA warning app and the DWD's WarnWetter app (see Recommended apps).
2. Keep your phone able to receive alerts at night too (BBK guide).
3. Keep a radio with batteries or a crank ready – it still works when power and the mobile network fail (BBK).

According to the BBK, it's best to do anything that needs lead time while there is **no** severe weather warning yet – at the latest when advance information is issued.

Basic preparedness

For severe weather, the BBK mainly lists these points:

- **Supplies:** Build up a supply of food and drink bit by bit. When there is a severe weather warning, you should avoid leaving home if possible, even to go shopping. See the guides Drinking water and Building up food supplies.
- **Medicine cabinet:** So you don't have to go to the pharmacy during a warning. See guide First aid.
- **Power cut:** Keep a battery radio and torches ready, power banks charged. More in the guide Power cut.
- **Prepare your emergency bag and document folder,** with backup copies (see Packing an emergency bag and Document folder).
- **Document your property:** photos of your home and valuables, saved digitally and in your emergency bag.

House, roof and trees

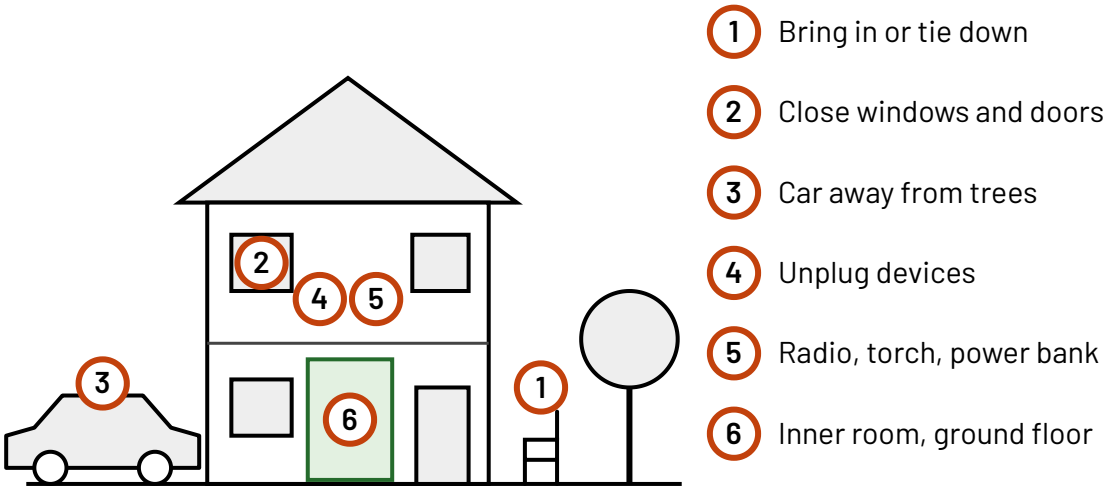
- **Renting:** Building work is a matter for your landlord or property management – ask them (BBK).
- **Roof and lightning protection:** Have the roof and the lightning protection system checked regularly by professionals. Check the masonry for cracks (BBK).
- **Keep gutters and drains** clear of leaves so water from hail and thunderstorm rain can drain away instead of backing up (BBK).
- **Trees:** Cut back long, heavy branches over the roof (BBK). Take a look at your other trees too: if a healthy tree falls in a storm, that counts as force majeure. If a visibly rotten tree causes damage, the owner is usually liable (Verbraucherzentrale).
- **Power surges:** Lightning can cause surges in cables, even from strikes some distance away. You are always safe – even in the shower – only in buildings with a lightning protection system. Surge protection devices help but don't replace complete lightning protection (VDE|ABB). Insurers usually only pay for surge damage with a separate clause (Verbraucherzentrale).

When a storm or severe weather warning comes

1. **Change your plans:** Postpone appointments and journeys, work from home if possible. Get urgent errands done before the bad weather starts (BBK).
2. **Check supplies and batteries** (BBK).
3. **Secure things outside:** Tie down or bring in movable objects such as bikes and garden furniture (BBK). Bring in or secure bins and plant pots, turn a trampoline upside down or peg it to the ground, lock the shed (Met Office). Fasten or take down tents, tarpaulins and covers in good time (DWD).
4. **Close windows and doors,** especially on the windward side, plus large doors such as garage doors. Close shutters (Met Office). Don't forget skylights (BBK).
5. **Car:** In a garage if possible. Otherwise park away from buildings, trees, walls and fences (Met Office) – and not next to scaffolding (DWD).

6. **Unplug sensitive devices** or use surge protection (BBK).
7. **Charge your phone and power banks,** including spare batteries for medical equipment (GOV.UK).

BEFORE THE STORM ARRIVES



The house before the storm in six steps: 1. bring in or tie down loose things. 2. close windows, doors and skylights. 3. car away from trees and walls. 4. unplug sensitive devices. 5. radio, torch and power bank ready. 6. stay in an inner room on the ground floor.

Winter: snow and ice

- **Have the roof checked:** For older buildings, have the roof's load-bearing capacity checked. Fit snow guards against snow sliding off and have them maintained, cut back long branches over the roof, clean the gutters. Small extensions such as conservatories can suffer from sliding snow (BBK).
- **Supplies:** For snow and ice, the BBK recommends food and drink for at least three days; if you want more security, keep supplies for up to ten days.
- **Car:** When ice or snow is forecast, fill up the tank if possible and take blankets and warm drinks (DWD). Add warm clothing, something to eat, a torch and a charged phone with a charging cable or power bank (Met Office).
- **Warmth without power:** When ice or storms bring down the lines, the heating often fails too – see guide Keeping warm without heating.

Planning trips and outings

- **Check the weather first:** If thunderstorms are forecast, postpone outdoor activities or make sure you can reach safe shelter (CDC).
- **Plan mountain tours** so that you reach a hut with lightning protection, your car or accommodation in the valley before the storm arrives (VDE|ABB).

- **Car journeys:** When a storm warning is out, avoid tree-lined routes and allow enough fuel or battery for diversions and closures (ADAC).
- **Camping:** No pitches on hilltops, next to masts, at the edge of woods or under isolated trees. At least 3 m from neighbouring tents and caravans, no metal guy lines between tents (VDE|ABB).

Variations for your household

Flat

- Your balcony is your "garden": secure or bring in window boxes, furniture and sunshade.
- In a top-floor flat, close skylights and check during hail that they stay watertight (BBK).
- Avoid cellar storage rooms during thunderstorm rain – they can flood quickly (BBK, see Floods).

House and garden

- Lock the shed, secure the trampoline, put ladders away – they can be blown into windows (Met Office).

With children

Child-friendly rules from the BBK's "Max und Flocke" learning materials, good for practising together:

- In a thunderstorm, get out of the lake or outdoor pool and a few metres away from the water.
- Don't climb tall towers, don't fly a kite.
- Go into a building. A car protects against lightning, but not against a storm.
- In an open field, make yourself small: crouch, feet close together, arms around your legs.
- A tree is a tree – don't shelter under any of them.

In winter: don't let children play alone on frozen water, and warn them that hard, icy snow and snowball fights can cause serious injuries (BBK). If schools close because of a storm, you'll need childcare (GOV.UK). More in the guide Children in a crisis.

With care needs or a disability

- Top up medication and the medicine cabinet beforehand so nobody has to go out during the warning (BBK).
- Charge spare batteries for medical equipment (GOV.UK) and work out what happens if the power is off for longer. See the guides Power cut and People who need care, and pets.
- Agree who checks on whom. For extreme severe weather, the DWD advises informing neighbours, friends and relatives about the situation. More in the guide Helping your neighbours.

With pets

- Severe weather frightens animals a lot. Calm them and make sure they can't leave the home or stable (BBK).

- Don't leave animals outdoors in a thunderstorm or tied to a tree (CDC).

Sources for this section: BBK "Vorsorgen für Sturm, Gewitter und Hagel", "Was tun bei Sturm, Gewitter und Hagel?", "Naturgefahr Gewitter", "Naturgefahr Hagel", "Schneelast", "Vorsorge und Handeln bei Kälte und Schneefall", BBK press release (1/2025), BBK guide (11/2025), Max und Flocke "Blitzgescheit" (2017), DWD hazard notes, VDE|ABB (2019, 2021), ADAC (1/2026), Verbraucherzentrale (8/2026), Met Office, GOV.UK "Storms", CDC (6/2026).

IN AN EMERGENCY

Emergency mode has the short version: Emergency – severe weather. Instructions from the authorities and emergency services always come first.

Storms and hurricane-force winds at home

1. **Stay indoors.** In a severe storm, only leave the house in an emergency – outside there is a risk of falling branches, roof tiles and flying objects (BBK).
2. **Keep windows, doors and shutters closed** and stay away from unprotected openings (BBK).
3. **Choose the safest room:** an inner room on the ground floor. Avoid cellars, because they can flood quickly in thunderstorm rain, and rooms with a large ceiling span such as halls (BBK).
4. **Don't go outside to repair anything** while the storm lasts. If you have to go out, use a door on the sheltered side and close it behind you (Met Office).
5. **Stay informed:** radio, warning app, Warnings. Be ready for power and mobile network failures (DWD).

Storms outdoors and on the road

- **Seek shelter in a solid building.** Until then, keep well away from buildings, trees, scaffolding and power lines and watch out for falling branches and roof tiles (DWD).
- **Don't shelter behind walls and fences:** if they fall, they fall towards the sheltered side (Met Office).
- **A car is not a safe place in a storm** – the wind can push it off course (Max und Flocke/BBK).
- **If you have to drive:** slow down, which makes it easier to correct for a gust; both hands on the wheel, steer against it in a controlled way. Bridges, cuttings through woods and tunnel exits are particularly dangerous, as is overtaking lorries and buses. Motorhomes, caravans, buses and lorries can even tip over. **From wind force 10 or a hurricane warning,** don't drive a car or ride a motorbike at all (ADAC).
- **Bikes and motorbikes:** Gusts can push cyclists and motorcyclists off course (GOV.UK). As a driver, give them more room than usual (Met Office).
- **At the coast:** Breaking waves can sweep people off the shore into the sea. Keep away from the waves and cliff edges, keep dogs on a lead (Met Office).

Thunderstorms indoors

1. **Close windows, doors and skylights** (BBK) and keep away from windows and doors (CDC).
2. **Unplug sensitive devices** – power, aerial, data and telephone cables from TV, computer and receiver. Surges can also come from strikes further away (VDE|ABB, BBK).
3. **If the building has no lightning protection system:** don't shower or bathe and don't touch metal pipes and cables that come into the building from outside (water, gas, electricity, district heating, aerial). Don't use a corded landline; mobiles and cordless phones are safe (VDE|ABB, BBK, CDC).
4. **Don't go into a cellar with water in it** (BBK) – see Floods.

Thunderstorms outdoors

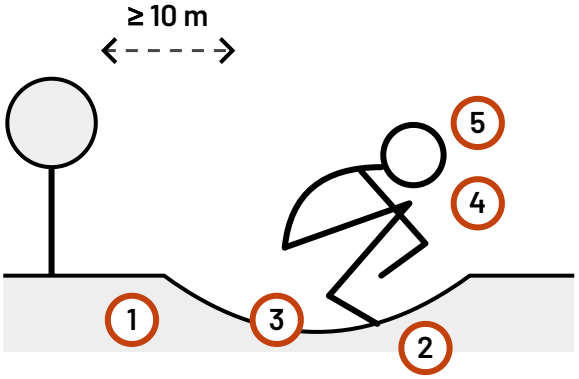
1. **Hearing thunder means acting.** Get into a building. If there isn't one, a car with a metal body (DWD, BBK).
2. **Get out of the water** – lake, outdoor pool, sea – and away from the shore (DWD, Max und Flocke/BBK).
3. **Away from high and isolated points:** open ground, mountain tops, isolated trees, groups of trees, edges of woods, towers, masts, aerials. Don't lean against fences (BBK). Ideally keep at least 10 m from trees and branches (VDE|ABB) and at least 50 m from overhead power lines (BBK).
4. **Put metal down:** leave umbrella, golf clubs and fishing rod behind, don't touch your bike (BBK, VDE|ABB, CDC).
5. **With no shelter at all:** crouch down, ideally in a hollow or dip. Feet close together, on the balls of your feet, arms around your knees, head on your knees. **Don't lie down** (BBK, VDE|ABB, Met Office).
6. **Spread out as a group:** everyone crouches alone, at least 1 m, better 3 m, from others – including your own children and your dog (VDE|ABB).
7. **In the woods:** Deep inside a dense forest of even height, the risk is lower than at the edge of the woods or under an isolated tree (VDE|ABB).
8. **Wait:** only move on 30 minutes after the last thunder (VDE|ABB, CDC).

SAFE	LAST RESORT	DANGEROUS
✓ Solid building	⚠ Crouch in a hollow	✗ Lone tree
✓ Car (metal roof)	⚠ Deep in a forest	✗ Mountain top
✓ Protected hut	⚠ Rock overhang	✗ Open field
		✗ Water and shore
		✗ Tent, wooden hut
		✗ Bike, fence, mast

Hear thunder? Take shelter at once

Safe and unsafe places in a thunderstorm. Safe: a building, a car with a metal roof and closed windows. Last resort: crouching in a hollow, deep inside a dense forest, under a rock overhang. Dangerous: isolated tree, mountain top and open field, water and shore, tent and wooden hut, bike, fence and mast.

CROUCH WHEN THERE IS NO SHELTER



1. Find a hollow or dip
2. Feet close together
3. On the balls of your feet
4. Arms around your knees
5. Head on your knees

✗ **Do not lie down**

At least 10 m from trees

1–3 m from other people

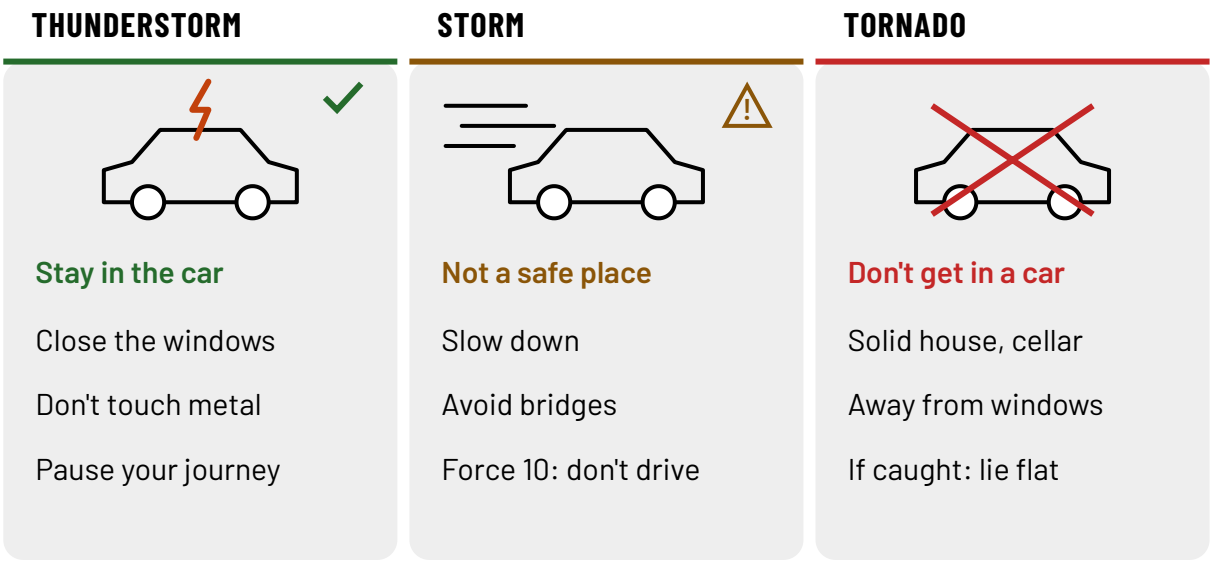
Crouch position in a thunderstorm without shelter: crouch in a hollow, feet close together on the balls of your feet, arms around your knees, head on your knees. Don't lie down. At least 10 metres from trees, 1 to 3 metres from other people.

Thunderstorms on the move

- **Stay in the car.** A metal body acts as a Faraday cage; the current flows away over the outside (VDE|ABB). Close the windows and don't touch any bare metal parts (BBK, Met Office). In a severe

thunderstorm, pause your journey – lightning and thunder are startling, heavy rain takes away your view, traffic lights can fail (VDE|ABB).

- **Convertible:** only protects with the roof closed and held by metal struts above the occupants. Motorhomes with a plastic body offer no protection (VDE|ABB).
- **Bike and motorbike:** stop immediately and look for a building. If there isn't one, crouch at least 3 m from your bike, ideally on tarmac (VDE|ABB).
- **Hiking and in the mountains:** get off peaks, ridges and hills (CDC). Caves, overhangs and the foot of rock faces offer some protection, keeping at least 1 m, better 3 m, from the rock wall. Don't touch steel cables, wet ropes, ladders or metal grids. Thunderstorms also increase the risk of rockfall (VDE|ABB).
- **Tent and hut:** A tent without a metal frame is as dangerous as an open field. Wooden huts and shelters without lightning protection are life-threatening. If there is a building or car nearby, go there (VDE|ABB, CDC).



The car in severe weather: in a thunderstorm a car with a metal body protects you, stay inside, windows closed. In a storm it is not a safe place, don't drive from wind force 10. In a tornado don't get into a car, go into a solid building.

Hail

1. **Take shelter** in a building or vehicle (BBK).
2. **Close windows, doors and skylights** and stay away from unprotected openings (BBK).
3. **Roller shutters:** If they are not hail-resistant enough, the BBK advises raising them – otherwise they may break sooner than the windows.
4. **Keep an eye on drains and windows:** blocked drains make water back up, damaged windows let rain in. In an emergency, 112 (BBK).
5. **In the car:** in heavy hail, pull over somewhere safe and stay in the car (Met Office).

6. **Outdoors without shelter:** for hail alone, the BBK advises lying flat and protecting your head and neck with your hands. If there is lightning and thunder at the same time, the thunderstorm rule applies: crouch, don't lie down (BBK, VDE|ABB).

Tornado

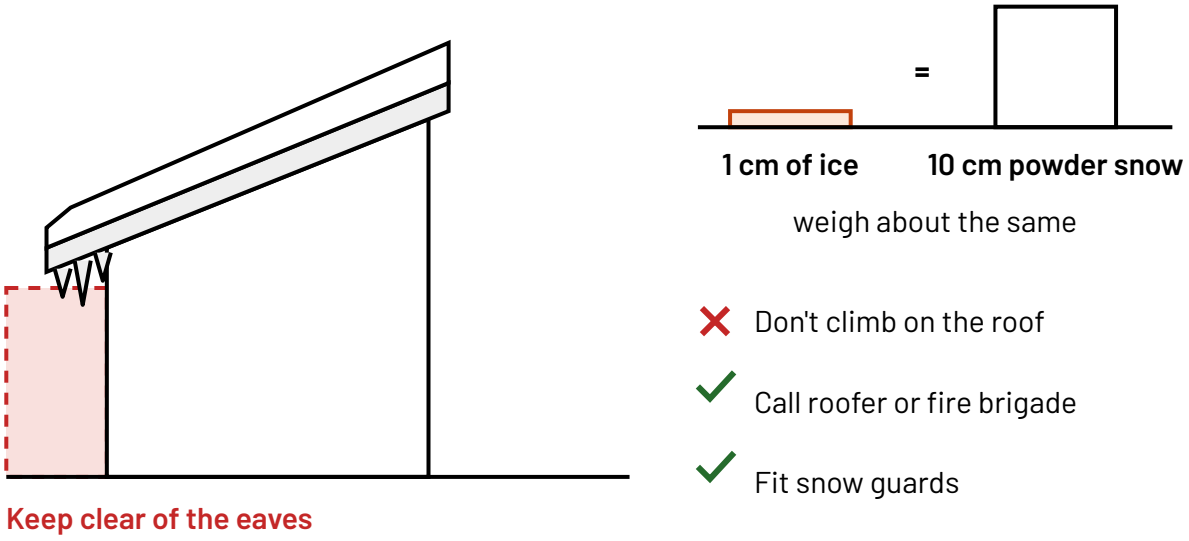
In a tornado, **different rules apply than in a thunderstorm** (DWD):

1. **Don't get into a car.** A tornado can lift a car dozens of metres into the air.
2. **Go into a solid stone house or the cellar.** If there is water in the cellar, stay out (BBK, see Floods).
3. **Away from windows and doors:** they don't protect you from flying debris.
4. **Outdoors, get out of the way:** most tornadoes are no wider than 100 m; a distance of one kilometre is enough.
5. **Caught by surprise?** If necessary, lie flat on the ground. Weaker tornadoes may then pass over you, and the risk of being hit by debris is lowest.

Snow, slippery roads and black ice

1. **Stay at home if you can** when there are warnings of heavy snowfall or slippery conditions (BBK). If you have to drive: adapt your driving, expect disruption up to road closures, fill up the tank, take blankets and warm drinks (DWD).
2. **When there is a warning of significant slippery conditions,** the DWD advises avoiding woods and the vicinity of masts and power lines – ice can break things there.
3. **On foot:** keep clear of sloping roofs and gutters – snow sliding off roofs and icicles can injure you (BBK).
4. **Don't clear the roof yourself:** in prolonged snowfall, call a roofer or the fire brigade to assess and clear the load – climbing onto the roof yourself is too dangerous because of the risk of slipping and collapse (BBK).
5. **Watch the roof:** How much snow is there? Are load-bearing parts sagging unusually? If snow that could slide off can't be removed straight away, keep pedestrians away with warning signs or a barrier (BBK).
6. **Only walk on ice on lakes and ponds** where the authorities have allowed it – the ice rules of the German Life Saving Association (DLRG) state at least 15 cm thickness. If it cracks or crackles: lie flat and crawl back the way you came. If someone falls through: 112 (BBK).

SNOW AND ICE ON THE ROOF



Snow on the roof: 1 centimetre of ice weighs as much as 10 centimetres of powder snow. Keep clear of the eaves because of sliding snow and icicles. Don't climb onto the roof yourself, call a roofer or the fire brigade. Snow guards help.

During a power cut

If the power goes off, the guide Power cut helps: switch on a battery radio, keep the fridge and freezer closed, save your phone battery. In winter see Keeping warm without heating.

If someone has been struck by lightning

This does not replace a first aid course.

1. **Watch out for yourself:** if the storm is still going on, there is still danger – for you and the injured person (CDC).
2. **Call 112.** Mobile phones are safe to use (CDC, BBK).
3. **Don't be afraid to touch them:** people struck by lightning carry no electrical charge, you can touch them straight away (CDC).
4. **Check breathing.** A lightning strike can cause cardiac arrest. If the person is not breathing normally: start chest compressions and keep going until help arrives. Steps in the guide First aid.
5. **If the person is breathing,** look for burns, shock and other injuries (CDC). Burns are often severe and the lightning may have affected the heart – so always get help (Met Office).

Sources for this section: BBK "Was tun bei Sturm, Gewitter und Hagel?", "Naturgefahr Gewitter", "Naturgefahr Hagel", "Schneelast", "Vorsorge und Handeln bei Kälte und Schneefall", Max und Flocke "Blitzgescheit" (2017), DWD hazard notes and recommendations, DWD tornado brochure (4/2022), VDE|ABB (2018, 2019, 2021), ADAC (1/2026), Met Office, GOV.UK "Storms", CDC (6/2026).

AFTERWARDS

Safety first

- **Injured people:** give first aid and, if needed, call the ambulance service on 112 (BBK).
- **Power lines: never touch** electricity or telephone cables that have come down or are hanging, and keep well away – high voltage can jump gaps without warning (GOV.UK, Met Office). Fallen trees often bring poles and lines down with them (nidirect). In danger call 112, otherwise your grid operator's fault service.
- **Damaged house:** If your home is badly damaged, stay outside until professionals have declared it safe. If the roof is badly damaged, keep a good distance from the house and call the fire brigade (112). Broken roof tiles can still fall (BBK).
- **Trees, walls, woods:** What the storm has weakened can still fall – keep your distance (Met Office). In the woods, loose branches and fallen trees can still injure you. Follow the authorities' advice and if in doubt ask your municipality whether it is safe to go in (BBK).
- **Cellar with water:** Be careful if the main electrical connection box is in the cellar – risk of electric shock. Only use electrical devices if they haven't got damp. If heating oil has leaked: fire brigade 112 (BBK). Everything else in the guide Floods.
- **After a lightning strike,** have the lightning protection system checked (BBK). If your car was struck, have the electronics checked (VDE|ABB).
- **After a long period of snow load,** check the roof and roof structure for damage; if anything is deformed, get a specialist (BBK).
- **Check on others:** neighbours and relatives who might need help – and help them organise repairs (Met Office).

AFTER THE STORM

1	**Never touch power lines**	Keep away, danger: 112
2	**Avoid woods and trees**	Branches can still fall
3	**Damaged roof**	Keep away, fire brigade 112
4	**Take photos first**	then clear up, insurer
5	**Check on others**	Who needs help?

After the storm: 1. never touch power lines, keep away, 112. 2. avoid woods and trees, branches can still fall. 3. damaged roof, keep away, fire brigade. 4. photos first, then clear up. 5. ask neighbours whether they need help.

Documenting and insurance

1. **Look and take photos first, then clear up:** the BBK advises checking carefully and documenting before you clear up what has been damaged, for example by water or broken glass. Take detailed photos or videos of all the damage (Verbraucherzentrale).
2. **Inform your insurer immediately and truthfully** and get statements confirmed in writing (Verbraucherzentrale).
3. **Limit the damage:** have a damaged roof sealed temporarily, pump water out of the cellar. Only throw away broken things once the insurer has agreed (Verbraucherzentrale).
4. **Tradespeople:** agree scope, timing and price in writing and check with the insurer first. The insurer's loss adjuster is paid by the insurer – they are not an independent expert (Verbraucherzentrale).

Which insurance pays for what in Germany (Verbraucherzentrale, as of 8/2026):

- **Storm** only counts from wind force 8, i.e. about 62 km/h. If the wind force can no longer be established, storm damage is often recognised anyway, for example if neighbouring houses were damaged too.
- **Buildings insurance:** storm damage to roof, windows and roller shutters, hail damage and direct lightning strikes.
- **Contents insurance:** storm damage to things in your home.
- **Surges** caused by lightning are usually only covered with a separate clause.
- **Car:** partial comprehensive cover (Teilkasko) pays for a parked car hit by roof tiles or a tree, and for hail. If you drive into a fallen tree yourself, that's a case for fully comprehensive cover (Vollkasko).
- **Snow load and sewage backflow** need the add-on for **natural hazards** (Elementarschaden) – see guide Floods.

Learning from it

Once everything has calmed down: What worked, what didn't? What blew away? Restock supplies, batteries and power banks, adjust the family plan and improve one thing. If the storm is still on your mind, that's normal – help in the guide Stress and anxiety in a crisis.

Sources for this section: BBK "Handeln nach Sturm, Gewitter und Hagel", "Naturgefahr Gewitter", "Naturgefahr Hagel", "Schneelast", VDE\|ABB (2019), Verbraucherzentrale (8/2026), Met Office, GOV.UK "Storms", nidirect (10/2026).

COMMON MISTAKES

- **Quickly going shopping** or setting off when a severe weather warning is out.
- **Parking under trees** or next to scaffolding.
- **Driving in a storm** and thinking you're safe in the car.

- **Sheltering from a thunderstorm under an isolated tree** – whatever kind of tree.
- **Carrying on swimming** because the storm is "still far away".
- **Lying flat in a thunderstorm** or huddling together as a group.
- **Going back out too early,** although the last thunder was less than 30 minutes ago.
- **Fleeing into a car from a tornado.**
- **Climbing onto a snow-covered roof yourself.**
- **Touching fallen power lines** or getting too close.
- **Clearing up before the damage has been photographed.**

CHECKLIST

- [ ] Warnings set up for home and work districts, warning app installed
- [ ] Radio with batteries or crank, torch, spare batteries
- [ ] Supplies of food and drink, medicine cabinet
- [ ] Fuse box and the grid operator's fault number under "Where's what"
- [ ] Flat, cellar and garden photographed, photos saved
- [ ] Insurance checked: storm, hail, lightning, surges, natural hazards
- [ ] Plan for what comes in from the balcony and garden or gets tied down in a storm
- [ ] Roof, gutters and lightning protection checked (or landlord asked)
- [ ] Branches over the roof cut back, trees looked at
- [ ] Safest room in the house known: inner room, ground floor
- [ ] Sheltered parking place for the car, away from trees and walls
- [ ] Car ready for winter: blanket, warm clothing, torch, charging cable
- [ ] Thunderstorm rules practised with the family: counting seconds, crouch position, 30 minutes
- [ ] Agreed who checks on neighbours or relatives with care needs
- [ ] Pets: safe place indoors

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