

How to Spot a Tornado

1. A tornado **watch** means the weather conditions exist for a tornado to form. If a tornado **warning** is issued, a tornado has been sighted. Take refuge if a warning is in effect in your area. Use a battery-powered NOAA weather radio, TV or radio to keep updated on the path of the storm and when it is safe to resume normal activities.
2. Learn how to recognize severe weather signs when tornadoes may develop. Tornadoes often develop when the weather is unseasonably hot and humid. Fairly calm winds may shift rapidly just before a tornado strikes. Look for a dark, sometimes greenish sky. A wall cloud often spawns a spinning tornado. Large hail may indicate that a tornado is near. If a tornado is imminent, a loud roar, similar to a freight train, is common. Focus on your personal safety immediately, seeking the nearest shelter in a basement, ditch or an interior room at the lowest level of a sturdy structure for protection from violent winds and airborne debris.
3. Know what a tornado looks like. Violently spinning clouds are sufficient cause for locating a safe shelter. A twisting “rope” or funnel can extend down from the base of a thundercloud in a moment or develop over 15 minutes. More intense tornadoes are shaped somewhat like an elephant trunk. A roar like a large plane or freight train indicates the tornado is very near.
4. Be more vigilant during the “high-frequency” tornado periods. In Arkansas, November and January through May have historically had more tornadoes than the summer months (see Tornado Safety, FSA-1024). Over the last 50 years, at least 18 tornadoes have occurred yearly. Most tornadoes in Arkansas occur from 3 to 8 p.m. At least seven Arkansas tornadoes had destruction paths at least one mile wide, according to National Weather Service records.
5. Heavy rains may obscure the sky, preventing you from seeing funnels that touch the ground, rise up and reverse direction. Violent weather, including multiple tornadoes, tornadoes which change direction and vary speed and funnel clouds which rise and drop in patterns that are impossible to predict, endangers people and property.