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## tornado

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*A tornado passes over an open field.*

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### Introduction



A tornado is a type of **storm** in which powerful rotating **winds** form a column, which reaches from a **cloud** down toward the ground. The winds of a tornado are the strongest on **Earth**. They may reach speeds of up to 300 miles (500 kilometers) per hour. Such violent winds can flatten buildings and whip heavy objects, such as cars, into the air. However, most tornadoes are short-lived and do not cause much damage.



### Did You Know?

*Tornadoes may be transparent at first. They get their dark color from dust and debris they pick up.*

## When and Where Tornadoes Form



Tornadoes usually develop during **thunderstorms**, mainly in the spring and summer. Only a small portion of thunderstorms produce tornadoes, though.

Sometimes a single thunderstorm produces a series of tornadoes, called tornado families. The appearance of several tornadoes over a broad region is called a tornado outbreak. During the Super Outbreak of April 2011, more than 300 tornadoes formed in 15 U.S. states.

Tornadoes can occur almost anywhere on Earth. The **United States** has the most reported tornadoes per year, especially in the Great Plains region.

## Tornado Features



**Water** droplets in the air make the whirling winds of a tornado visible. The visible column is called a funnel cloud. A funnel cloud may be shaped like a cone, pillar, or tube. It can range from a few feet to hundreds of feet wide. The winds usually turn counterclockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere.

Once a tornado touches the ground, it travels across land at about 28 miles (45 kilometers) per hour. Tornadoes usually move from west to east.

Tornadoes typically last only two or three minutes. Strong tornadoes can last 15 minutes or longer.

## Tornado Safety



**Meteorologists** can predict when and where tornadoes might form. When **weather** conditions are likely to result in a tornado, meteorologists announce a tornado watch. When a tornado has been spotted, a tornado warning is issued.

If a tornado is near, people should take shelter in sturdy buildings. Basements and rooms without windows are the safest places. Mobile homes and cars do not offer enough protection. If caught outside, a person should stay close to the ground, preferably in a ditch.