

# Talking Points for Severe Storms

## Talking points and message maps for local health professionals

If you are approached by the media regarding a reported severe storm health risk in your jurisdiction, the following talking points may be used. Start with message A1 or A2, then follow the instructions within that box.

**A1** We were notified by the medical examiner/coroner about a fatality possibly due to extreme weather conditions. Our condolences go out to the family.

*Go to message B1 or B2.*

**A2** We have not been notified of any recent fatalities linked to severe storm conditions.

*Go to message C.*

**B1** Out of respect for the family, we are unable to share any details.

*Go to message C.*

**B2** On [insert date], a [gender] ["\_\_\_ years old" or "between the ages of \_\_\_ and \_\_\_"] died during the storm.

*Go to message C.*

**C** The after-effects of a severe storm can result in many adverse health effects. Please remain safe by:

- Listening to safety messages of response teams that are assessing the damage.
- Checking on family, friends, and neighbors who do not have air conditioning, who spend much of their time alone, or who are more likely to be affected by severe storms.
- For more information visit *[insert relevant website]*.

Message mapping is one of the most important risk communication tools that public health agencies can employ. The goal of a message map is to convey important information in a concise and easy to understand fashion.



### General Guidelines for Completing a Message Map

- Stick to three key messages or one key message with three parts for each underlying concern or specific question.
- Keep key messages brief. The reader should ideally spend less than 10 seconds per line.
- Develop messages that are easily understood by the target audience. (For communications with the general public, use a 6th to 8th grade readability level.)
- Place messages within a message set. The most important messages should occupy the first and last positions.
- Develop key messages that cite credible third parties.
- Use graphics and other visual aids to enhance key messages.
- Keep a positive tone. Messages should be solution oriented and constructive. Try to balance negative messages with positive ones.
- Avoid unnecessary use of “absolute” words, such as no, not, never, nothing, and none.<sup>5</sup>

The following is a message map that could be used when addressing the general public regarding severe storm safety.

<b>Key Messages</b> <i>Three key messages</i>	<b>Supporting Information</b> <i>Three pieces of supporting information for each key message</i>
<b>Message 1</b> Severe weather can happen at any time.	<b>Supporting Info 1</b> Severe storms can come with little warning. Follow your local radio stations and news channels for up-to-date information on incoming storms.  <b>Supporting Info 2</b> Heed storm watches in our area, and take appropriate shelter when storm watches turn into storm warnings.  <b>Supporting Info 3</b> Acting quickly and being informed on weather patterns in your area are important steps in being prepared.
<b>Message 2</b> Develop a home emergency plan for your family before a severe storm hits.	<b>Supporting Info 1</b> Find an area in your home where your family can take shelter during severe storms. These rooms should have no windows to the outside.  <b>Supporting Info 2</b> Identify two different ways to exit the house, should the need occur. Be sure to practice with your family.  <b>Supporting Info 3</b> Develop an emergency communication plan, with important phone numbers and information. These include: medical and emergency contacts, work and school information, and insurance information.
<b>Message 3</b> Check on your neighbors and those most vulnerable to injury from extreme weather.	<b>Supporting Info 1</b> People with limited mobility, those who live alone, the elderly, and children may be more vulnerable to injury during severe weather.  <b>Supporting Info 2</b> Mental health can be affected during and after severe weather. Stay calm and follow your family's emergency plan.  <b>Supporting Info 3</b> Call 911 or seek medical attention if you or someone you know has been injured.



**Wisconsin Department of Health Services**

Division of Public Health

Climate and Health Program

P-01037d (Rev. 05/2019)