



Mobile phones and lightning

A recent letter published in the *British Medical Journal*¹ (BMJ) referred to an incident where a 15-year old girl was witnessed being struck by lightning. At the time of the incident the girl was reportedly using her mobile phone in a large park during stormy weather.

The letter suggested that the mobile phone was somehow associated with the lightning strike. The injuries suffered in this case are unfortunate but cannot in any way be attributed to the use of the mobile phone.

In response to the BMJ letter, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) (part of the US Department of Commerce) released a statement² on its website:

NOAA DEBUNKING LIGHTNING'S CONNECTION TO CELL PHONES

Contrary to recent media reports, NOAA lightning experts state that lightning is not attracted to people carrying cell phones.

"Cell phones, small metal items, jewelry, etc., do not attract lightning. Nothing attracts lightning. Lightning tends to strike taller objects," said John Jensenius, a NOAA National Weather Service lightning expert. "People are struck because they are in the wrong place at the wrong time. The wrong place is anywhere outside. The wrong time is anytime a thunderstorm is nearby."

Guidelines for decreasing the risk of lightning strike are available from organisations such as NOAA, Environment Canada³ and Standards Australia.⁴

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¹ See: <http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/332/7556/1513-b>.

² See: <http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2006/s2645.htm>.

³ See: http://www.msc.ec.gc.ca/education/lightning/safetypublic_e.html.

⁴ See: <http://www.standards.org.au>.