

MOBILE PHONE RISK DURING STORMS

There are, on average, about 1,800 thunderstorms in progress at any one time around the world with 100 lightning strikes every second and the chance of being hit by lightning is about one in three million.

Despite this minimal chance, tragedies do happen and now UK doctors have warned of the danger of lightning strikes when using mobile phones outdoors during stormy weather. They say the metal in the phone directs the current into the body.

In the British Medical Journal, they highlight the case of a 15-year-old girl who was struck by lightning while talking on her phone in a large park in London during stormy weather. She has no recollection of the incident but her heart stopped and she had to be resuscitated. In her right ear where she was holding the phone, she has a burst eardrum and persistent hearing loss.

The doctors who treated the girl found three other cases of people being hit by lightning while talking on a mobile phone - all of whom died of their injuries - in China, Korea and Malaysia. They said that although cases were rare it was a public health issue and people needed to understand the risks.

Linda Esprit, a doctor at Northwick Park Hospital in London said: "If you're struck by lightning, the current in it will flow over your body but if you're holding a phone, it will flow through your body and cause much worse injuries. It is obvious that people shouldn't carry mobile phones in stormy weather and mobile phone manufacturers should warn consumers of the dangers."

But Ramsey Farragher of the astrophysics group at Cambridge University said, "Stabbing a metal pole into the ground and holding onto it is asking for trouble. But holding a very small amount of metal which is inside a plastic case is unlikely to increase the risk of a strike."

Chris Abraham of the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association agreed. He added: "The real risk is when people do not have their mobile phones with them. If they do, they can call emergency services if someone is struck by lightning."

Anyway, next time you find yourself talking on your mobile phone in the middle of a thunderstorm, you may want to cut the conversation short.