

[Front Page](#)[World](#)[UK](#)[UK Politics](#)[Business](#)[Sci/Tech](#)**[Health](#)**[Education](#)[Sport](#)[Entertainment](#)[Talking Point](#)
[On Air](#)
[Feedback](#)
[Low Graphics](#)
[Help](#)

Thursday, June 11, 1998 Published at 22:55 GMT 23:55 UK

Health

The fatal force of lightning



Lightning's magnetic field could be behind recent mysterious deaths

The magnetic field generated by lightning could explain the mysterious deaths of hikers found without a scratch on their bodies.

American scientists writing in *The Lancet* say the magnetic force generated by lightning could provide an electric jolt so powerful it could stop someone's heart.

The researchers from the Lightning Data Center in Denver, Colorado, came up with the theory while investigating the death of a 32-year-old golfer who died after sheltering under a tree in a thunderstorm.

No marks

The man's heart stopped, he went into a coma and died in hospital 18 days later. But no one could explain why he had no marks on his body.

Two of his companions lost consciousness briefly and another suffered burns to his neck, head and abdomen.

Previous lightning deaths have been linked to direct strikes, side flashes or ground currents. But the Denver researchers believe the golfer died after suffering the ripple effect of a massive magnetic force.

Magnetic fields

They say lightning bolts can generate currents of more than 100,000 amps, which can produce one metre-wide magnetic fields. These could be powerful enough to stop the human heart, even though the jolt may only last one millisecond.

Health Contents

[▶ Background Briefings](#)[▶ Medical notes](#)

Internet Links

[The Weather Channel](#)[Lightning safety institute](#)

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.

In this section

[Disability in depth](#)[Spotlight: Bristol inquiry](#)[Antibiotics: A fading wonder](#)[Mental health: An overview](#)[Alternative medicine: A growth industry](#)[The meningitis files](#)[Long-term care: A special report](#)[Aids up close](#)[From cradle to grave](#)[NHS reforms: A guide](#)[NHS Performance 1999](#)[From Special Report](#)[NHS in crisis: Special report](#)[British Medical Association conference '99](#)[Royal College of Nursing conference '99](#)

The theory could explain some of the unexplained deaths of hikers in exposed places.

The researchers suggest it should be tested by exposing mice or rats to strong magnetic pulses.

Traditional advice for people caught in a thunderstorm is to avoid sheltering under trees, as they act as lightning conductors, and to make sure you are not the tallest object on the ground.

[Advanced options](#) | [Search tips](#)

[Back to top](#) | [BBC News Home](#) | [BBC Homepage](#) | ©

