Rulindo: Lightning strikes 11 more students - Rwanda

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Rwanda Meteorological Agency has predicted heavy rains mixed with strong winds and lightning strikes from March 21 to March 31.

Rulindo district has urged all schools to install lightning protection systems as victims of lightning strikes keep increasing during the raging torrential rains in the country.

The call follows the latest disaster where lightning struck 11 students from GS Ngarama in Rulindo district on the evening of Tuesday, March 22.

 “The struck students are doing well except two students who were transferred to the district hospital. The hospital told us they could be discharged today,” Judith Mukanyirigira, the Mayor of Rulindo district told *The New Times* on Wednesday.

 Rulindo district is among districts in which lightning strikes cases are on the increase.

On February 22 this year, [lightning also struck 30 students](https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/weatherman-warns-lightning-strikes-heavy-rains-intensify) from GS Gihinga in Kinzuzi sector also in Rulindo, and damaged four classrooms, the school administration block and damaged an electrical transmission line.

“We have written to schools recommending that they install lightning rods. The residents are also urged to avoid any activity that can make them vulnerable to lightning strikes amidst thunderstorms,” she said.

According to the advisory by the Ministry of Emergency Management (MINEMA), people should seek shelter inside houses instead of under trees and children should stop playing with rainwater during rainstorms.

“Avoid using phones outside when it is raining and people have to unplug electronic equipment. The residents are advised to avoid riding bicycles and motorcycles during storms,” MINEMA warns.

**Why are some districts vulnerable?**

Rwanda is prone to several natural hazards including thunderstorms and lightning.

Researchers say that lightning has become one of the most alarming hazards to affect Rwanda in recent years as these have caused deaths and injuries to people and livestock, damaged residential houses and public infrastructure.

Jean Baptiste Nsengiyumva, a researcher on disasters and natural hazard risks told *The New Times*that different districts are prone to lightning at different levels due to different reasons.

Some of the [vulnerable districts](https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/govt-urged-expedite-acquisition-lightning-rods) include Rulindo, Karongi and Rutsiro districts.

“One of the factors that may cause lightning include the number of clouds in the area. It can also be caused by geographical features in the area or how people are behaving during thunderstorms. Such behaviours can facilitate lightning strikes,” he said.

He said that, according to research, Western Province is more prone to lightning than its neighbours DRC.

“This is because, in DRC, there is a high magnetic field making the area a very high-risk zone to lightning. Every year the areas record a high number of lightning strikes. This is why districts such as Karongi, Nyamasheke, Rutsiro are in a high-risk zone to such disasters,” he explained.

Explaining why Rulindo District in Northern Province is among the districts prone to lightning, he said that high mountains which attract a lot of rains is another factor.

“It requires deep research that shows more real reasons that make districts prone to lightning strikes,” he said.

**What can be done?**

Nsengiyumva recommended the establishment of [lightning protection systems](https://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/180872) in public and critical places like schools.

“There are lightning rods that have big capacity to protect such big public spaces at once. Most of the schools facing lightning strikes have no protection systems. Some children play in rainwater while it is raining, touching metallic objects and others which make them vulnerable to lightning” he said.

He said the cost of lightning rods should be subsidized to make them more affordable for communities that are prone to lightning.

In 2018, Members of Parliament urged the government to fast track the procurement and installation of lightning rods or lightning conductors in public spaces to avert lightning-induced deaths and other damages although the installation status is yet to be known as of now.

Rwanda Meteorological Agency has [predicted heavy rains](https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/weatherman-warns-strong-winds-0) mixed with strong winds and lightning strikes from March 21 to March 31.

According to the ministry in charge of emergency management, over `170 people have succumbed to weather-induced disasters since last year while over 240 were injured.