

### ■ SOURCE

Most military sites come from the Federation of American Scientists Nuclear Notebook, which lists where US nuclear forces are based (FAS 2025). Three it does not cover come from official pages: Y-12 (NNSA), Strategic Command at Offutt (USSTRATCOM), and the Navy's submarine communications wing at Tinker (Tinker AFB). Cities are the 30 largest US metro areas in Census estimates for July 2025 (Census Bureau). Princeton's Plan A simulation targets "the most populated cities and economic centers" in its final phase (Plan A slides), but it does not publish a city list, so the city list is ours. Real war plans are classified. This is a selected list of public sites, not a prediction, and many other sites are not on it.

## WHAT THE DISTANCE MEANS

The number is a straight-line distance, not a driving distance, from the center point of your ZIP code area to each listed site. The center point comes from the Census Bureau's ZIP Code Tabulation Areas, which are "generalized areal representations" of ZIP codes (Census Bureau, ZCTAs), so the distance from your own address will differ, more so in a large rural ZIP code. It is not a risk score, it is not a safe distance, and it does not say whether a site would be struck. A site that is not on the list can still matter. The number tells you which hazards are worth planning for.

**Blast and heat are local.** FEMA's guidance says the risk of injury from blast and heat "increases with proximity to ground zero" (FEMA Planning Guidance, sec. 3.3). As one example, it puts light damage, such as broken windows and damaged building fronts, out to about 3 miles from a 10 kiloton explosion (sec. 2.1.2). Larger weapons reach farther, and FEMA's guidance covers them as well.

**Fallout depends on wind more than distance.** Fallout comes mainly from explosions at or near the ground; a high air burst may produce "limited or very minimal fallout" (FEMA 72-Hour Guidance, Tactic 3). When there is fallout, FEMA says the most dangerous concentrations "often occur within tens of miles downwind of ground zero and typically fall within the first few hours," and lower but still significant levels can extend hundreds of miles downwind (FEMA Planning Guidance, sec. 1.5 and 1.6). So the direction a site lies from you matters as well as the miles.

**Direction tells you about wind.** The calculator shows which way each site lies from you. Across the US, winds aloft generally blow from west to east (NOAA, The Jet Stream), so a listed site to your west is, on a typical day, upwind of you. That is a tendency, not a forecast: FEMA notes that wind direction and speed change with altitude and can deposit fallout in more than one direction, and that rain can create hot spots far from ground zero (FEMA Planning Guidance, sec. 1.5 and 2.1.1).

**Missile fields are bigger than a dot.** For the three ICBM bases, the calculator measures to the base. Each missile wing has three squadrons of 50 Minuteman III silos spread across the surrounding region, and the F.E. Warren wing covers parts of Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming (FAS Nuclear Notebook 2025). If you live in Montana, North Dakota, or that tri-state area, a silo may be closer than the base.

**Official instructions cover a wide area.** Because the size and direction of fallout are uncertain at first, FEMA tells officials to give the “get inside, stay inside, stay tuned” instruction to everyone within 50 miles of a detonation, unless specific fallout areas have been identified (FEMA Planning Guidance, sec. 2.1.1). Near the blast, FEMA says fallout will take 10 minutes or more to arrive, and in many areas farther out, an hour or more (sec. 2.1). That time is for getting inside.

## WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR RESULT

Whatever your distance, the first action is the same. Ready.gov says to “get inside, stay inside and stay tuned” and to remain in the most protective location, a basement or the center of a large building, for the first 24 hours (Ready.gov). CDC says being inside any building is safer than being outside, and brick or concrete multi-story buildings or basements are best (CDC, Get Inside).

Your result tells you what to plan for now:

- **Pick your shelter spot.** Find the most protected place in your home, work, and school, and a sturdier building nearby if yours is a single-story house without a basement. See Shelter in place.
- **Learn the first hours.** What to do in the first hour, first day, and days 2 and 3: The first 72 hours.
- **Stock the shelter.** Water, food, a radio, and other supplies for at least 24 hours inside: Fallout shelter kit.
- **Plan routes for later.** If a listed site sits near your usual roads, or to your west, plan evacuation routes and destinations now, to use when officials call an evacuation: Evacuation route planning.
- **Set up alerts.** Ready.gov advises having several ways to receive emergency alerts, and a place your family will meet if you cannot meet at home (Ready.gov).

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**TRACK** Nuclear emergency

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**SHEET** 1 of 11

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**COMPILED FROM THESE SOURCES**

1. Kristensen, Korda, Johns, Knight, United States nuclear weapons, 2025 (FAS Nuclear Notebook)
2. Princeton Program on Science and Global Security, Plan A
3. Glaser, Plan A: How a Nuclear War Could Unfold, APS webinar slides (2022)

- 4.** US Census Bureau, Metropolitan Statistical Area Population Totals, Vintage 2025
- 5.** NNSA, Y-12 National Security Complex
- 6.** US Strategic Command, About USSTRATCOM (archived 2026-10-11)
- 7.** Tinker Air Force Base fact sheet (archived 2024-12-12)
- 8.** Ready.gov, Nuclear Explosion
- 9.** US Census Bureau, ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs)
- 10.** US Census Bureau, ZIP Code Tabulation Area Gazetteer File
- 11.** FEMA, Planning Guidance for Response to a Nuclear Detonation, Third Edition (2022)
- 12.** FEMA, Nuclear Detonation Response Guidance: Planning for the First 72 Hours (2023)
- 13.** CDC, What to Do: Get Inside
- 14.** NOAA, The Jet Stream

Every safety claim on this sheet links to its primary source.