

Make Health and Safety a Priority this Summer

By Allison Walsh

Avoid viruses

This summer we are all facing potential infection from the coronavirus, so it's more important than ever to listen to our experts and do what we can to be our healthiest selves.

Know and follow the CDC guidelines and listen to your local government to take the precautions necessary to avoid contracting the virus.

Additionally, strengthen your immune system by getting plenty of sleep, eating nutritional foods and managing your stress.

Protect your skin

One of the best things about summer is getting outside and enjoying the warm sunshine—all day and evening long. While the sun is a great (and mood-boosting) source of Vitamin D, its ultraviolet (UV) rays are a risk factor for sunburn, skin cancer, premature aging of the skin and more.¹ Here are precautions you can take to avoid the “dark sides” of sun exposure:

- Keep in mind that sunlight and UV exposure is highest in summer months and between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.² The sun's rays reflect off of pavement, sand and water—and shine through clouds—so be careful even when you're in the shade.**
- At least 15 minutes before going outside, cover exposed skin with a broad-spectrum sunscreen that has a minimum SPF 30, and reapply every 2 hours and after swimming or sweating.³**
- Wear protective clothing, such as sunglasses with full UV protection, a wide brimmed hat and a long-sleeved shirt. ³**

Get more information in Sunlight and Your Health.

Stay cool and hydrated

All that fun in the sun and you're bound to break a sweat. Just make sure your body doesn't get overheated, because heat-related illnesses, including heat stroke

and heat exhaustion, are among the nation's top weather-related killers.⁴ Keep in mind that the warmest temperatures usually occur from 2-4 in the afternoon. Here are some things you can do to stay safe:

- Get familiar with the warning signs of heat-related illness and seek immediate medical attention if you suspect someone may have:
 - Heat stroke. Heatstroke may be characterized by an altered mental state; fainting or loss of consciousness; rapid and strong pulse; throbbing headache; confusion; nausea; dizziness; shallow breathing; body temp above 103F; or hot, red, dry, or moist skin.⁵
 - Heat exhaustion. Heat exhaustion symptoms include heavy sweating; weakness; cool, pale, clammy skin; fast, weak pulse; muscle cramps; dizziness; nausea or vomiting; or fainting.⁵
- Drink water or other fluids every 15-20 minutes and avoid alcohol and too much caffeine and sugar. And if you feel thirsty, you're already dehydrated...so bottoms-up!⁶
- Dress for the weather in lightweight, loose-fitting, single-layered and breathable clothing.

Mind those bug bites

Summer months bring out the insects—and they're sure to “bug” you at some point. While most bites and stings heal on their own, it's important to know when you need to call for care⁷:

Call 911 if you spot symptoms of a severe allergic reaction:

- Hives: sudden raised, red areas all over the body
- Swelling of the throat, mouth, lips, or tongue
- Trouble breathing
- Losing consciousness
- Feeling very lightheaded, weak, confused, or restless

Call your doctor if you notice symptoms of an allergic reaction:

- A rash or hives
- Itching
- Swelling
- Belly pain, nausea or vomiting

You'll also want to contact your doctor if there's a sign of infection around the area of the sting, such as increased pain, swelling, redness, or warmth; red

streaks; pus draining; or a fever. If there are any overall health changes after the incident or recovery is taking longer than expected, don't be shy: call your doctor.

On the other hand, if you're looking for relief from minor pain and a little itching or redness at the site of the bite or sting, you can apply an ice pack, elevate the affected area of the body or try a nonprescription medicine.

Look out for poisonous plants

A misstep along the trail (or even your garden!) can lead to contact with oil from poison ivy, poison oak or poison sumac plants—and that means contact dermatitis. Itching, red rash, and blisters can start up any time from a few hours to several days after exposures, so know how to help protect yourself:

- **Know how to ID them** so you can avoid them.
- **When walking among plants, wear long sleeves, long pants, boots and gloves.**⁸
- **Clean your gardening tools (and clothing) regularly.**⁸
- **Wash your skin in soap and cool water as soon as possible if you come in contact with a poisonous plant.**⁸

Take water safety seriously

It's easy to forget the rules, throw caution to the wind, and focus on just having a good time when you're at the pool, lake or ocean, but this is precisely when you need to be on guard. According to the CDC, drowning is the **#5** leading cause of unintentional injury-related death in the country,⁹ and in 2017, the Coast Guard reported that there were 4,291 boating accidents that resulted in 658 deaths.¹⁰ Protect yourself and your loved ones by keeping these reminders in the forefront, and vow to follow them no matter how much fun you're having or how safe the situation feels:

- **Remind children, (and adults for that matter!) not to dive into shallow water.**
- **Never allow anyone to swim alone**
- **At the ocean, make sure everyone knows how to survive a riptide**
- **Insist that all children on boats and swimming in deep lakes and rivers wear lifejackets**

- Don't rely solely on lifeguards to watch your children.

Bonfires

Warm summer evenings can be the perfect setting for s'mores around the bonfire. Teens, especially, seem to love this activity, and it can be a great setting for telling stories, singing songs and building friendships. Take these precautions to make sure everyone stays safe:

- Never use an accelerant to start or refuel the fire, and beware of any gas cans in the area. They can heat up and explode and cause significant injury.
- Pay special attention to pets and small children that they steer clear of playing near the fire.
- Keep a bucket of water or a hose nearby
- Don't throw fireworks into the bonfire
- Ensure all embers are extinguished before calling it a night

Accident Insurance

As diligent as we may be, accidents still happen. According to the National Safety Council, around 1 in 7 Americans sought medical attention for non-fatal injuries in 2018.¹¹ Accident insurance is designed to pay you whether you are on or off the job, 365 days per year, if a covered event occurs. To find out more, contact one of our agents today!

Want more ideas for a safe and healthy summer? Don't miss:

4 Common Summer Activities that Cause Back Muscle Strains and Sprains

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- ¹¹ Overview. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/all-injuries/overview/>