

Summer Safety

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Backyard pools and lemonade stands. Camping trips and family vacations. These images of summer are as part of Americana as baseball and apple pie. But for children, summer also means hot days and easy sunburns, insect bites and the risk of injuries.

The safest summer is the most fun. No child wants to spend their summer vacation indoors recovering from painful sunburns or broken bones. No parent wants this either! Kids will be kids, and accidents will happen, but brushing up on preventing summer hazards can help make this summer as safe as can be.

Summer means fun in the sun. But know that children are more prone to sunburn than their parents. Protect your child's skin by applying a water-resistant, PABA-free, "broad-spectrum" SPF 15 sunscreen to your kids at least 30 minutes before they go outside. Don't forget the tips of their noses and ears! And don't forget to reapply sunscreen every two hours, or after swimming or sweating.

A baby's skin is very delicate and it's up to you to protect it. Babies under six months of age should be kept out of direct sunlight. For older children, limit sun exposure during the hours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are strongest. Children should wear clothing that is lightweight and light in color, and made of tightly woven fabrics that allow less sunlight through. Clothing made of cotton is both cool and protective.

Wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses are a plus, if the kids will wear them! Sunglasses must be labeled as meeting "ANSI" requirements for UV protection. Don't count on clouds; up to 80 percent of UV rays can still penetrate through them, so use sun protection even on cloudy days. And be especially careful of letting your child play in the sun near sand or concrete, which reflects the sun's damaging UV rays back on to your child.

Don't let a heat-related illness ruin your child's fun in the sun. Young children are especially vulnerable to heat illness. Dress them for the heat. Have them drink plenty of water throughout the day, even if they claim not to feel thirsty. Avoid caffeinated beverages, which dehydrate the body. And enforce frequent breaks inside or in the shade on hot days.

Insect repellants are safe for children so long as they contain 10 percent or less of the ingredient "DEET." Newer botanical, therefore chemical-free repellants are also fairly effective. As with sunscreen, reapply the insect repellant every two hours that your child plays outdoors. Avoid applying any insect repellant to the skin of an infant under age 2 months. Also avoid using insect-attracting scented soaps, perfumes, lotions or hair sprays on your child, or dressing your child in clothing with flowery prints.

If your child spends time in tall grass or wooded areas, check him for ticks at day's end. If you find a tick, remove it with tweezers, cleanse the area with an antiseptic, and dispose of the tick. Ticks are usually harmless, and it is nearly impossible for a tick bite to cause disease unless the tick has been embedded for a minimum of 24 hours. Be assured that Lyme Disease is rare in the Pacific Northwest.

Summertime brings more rashes, particularly from contact with poison oak. Teach children to recognize the plant, often found in wooded areas and along fence rows, and to remember the old and wise saying that "leaves of three, let it be".

Rashes from poison oak are caused by urushiol, a substance found on the leaves and vines of the plant. Poison plant rashes can't be spread from person to person, but it's possible to pick up a rash from urushiol that sticks to clothing, tools, balls, and pets. Handle all clothing worn in such areas with disposable gloves, and wash them immediately in hot water. A variety of products are available that when applied to the skin within 4 to 8 hours of exposure to poison oak may reduce the rash reaction. Have some on hand at home and in your camping gear for the summer.

When the weather heats up, kids look for ways to cool down. If you're headed to the pool, lake, or favorite water hole, keep your child's safety in mind. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around water is to learn to swim. Contact your local Red Cross chapter or Willamalane to learn more about swim lessons. Remember that children are not usually developmentally ready for swim lessons until after their fourth birthday. Swim programs for children under age 4 should not be seen as a way to reduce the risk of drowning.

Never leave children under age 10 alone in water unsupervised, not even for a moment, and always be within an arm's reach of any child under the age of four. Teach your child to always enter the water feet-first. Never allow your child to push another child under the water in fun. Older children should always swim with a buddy, and never alone. Always use a life vest when boating, fishing, or playing in or near a river, lake or stream.

Bike helmets must be worn whenever your child rides their bicycle. Helmets are now also required when using scooters, in-line skates, and skateboards. Parents often don't enforce this rule if their kids are "just in the driveway", but most driveways I've been on are just as hard as the street.

Trampolines are fun for kids and a great way to get exercise, but over 100,000 trampoline-related injuries occur annually in kids. To prevent serious injuries, allow only one person on at a time, bounce only in the center, and do not allow somersaults. Use a shock-absorbing pad that completely covers the springs, and place the trampoline away from structures. Kids under age 6 should not use trampolines.

Summer should be a season of memories and fun. Help make it that way by following these tips to keep your child safe this summer.