ENJOY SUMMER WITH THESE HEALTH AND SAFETY TIPS

Summer means longer days, warmer temperatures and all of the outdoor activities that come along with the nice weather. But it also means being aware of things that can be harmful to your health. Here are some important tips to help keep you, your family and friends safe and healthy all summer long.

SUN SAFETY

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. Everyone is at risk, especially those who frequent tanning booths. Examine your body monthly to check for abnormal growths or unusual skin changes. If a mole or age spot changes size or starts to bleed, see a doctor right away.

Following these tips will help protect your skin from the sun’s harmful rays:

• **Limit your exposure.** Wear protective clothing and sunglasses that block close to 100 percent of UVA and UVB rays, and avoid the sun completely during the peak hours of 11 am to 2 pm. Remember, the sun’s UV rays can reach you on cloudy or hazy days as well. Also, certain antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs can increase sensitivity to the sun.

• **Use sunscreen.** Make sure it’s water-resistant with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Apply it 30 minutes before going outdoors and reapply every two hours and after swimming, sweating excessively or toweling off.

BUG BITES

Being outdoors in the summer exposes us to various insects. The mosquito-borne West Nile virus has appeared more frequently in recent years during warm weather. This illness produces flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches and skin rash. Ticks are also more prevalent in summer months — some can carry Lyme disease. Side effects of this condition include muscle aches and stiff joints.

Read this information if you plan to spend time outside, particularly in areas with tall grass or woods:

• **Use insect repellent to ward off mosquitoes and ticks.** If you must use a repellent with DEET, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using formulations containing 30 percent or less DEET on children. DEET is not recommended for use on infants younger than two months. Infants in strollers or car seats can also be protected using bug nets.

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BUG BITES (CONTINUED)

• When walking in areas prone to ticks dress appropriately — wear long pants tucked into socks. Check yourself and children for ticks before bedtime.

• If you find a tick, remove it with tweezers. The CDC recommends that you also cleanse the area with antiseptic. Early removal can help reduce the risk of Lyme disease. An infected tick generally has to be on the skin for at least 36 hours to transmit the disease.

• A large rash that looks like a bull’s eye is a sign of Lyme disease. See a doctor right away if this appears.

• Avoid wearing perfumes, colognes or scented lotions, which attract insects.

FOOD SAFETY

Picnics and outdoor cookouts are fun, but please be aware of the following conditions that can lead to food poisoning:

• Mayonnaise-based potato salad and coleslaw are frequent sources of food-borne bacteria, but they are not the only culprits. Bacteria, whether in food or the air, grow faster in warmer weather. Be careful with all food, including melons, tomatoes and lettuce.

• The FDA suggests never leaving food out for more than an hour when the temperature is above 90 degrees, and never more than two hours at any time.

• Wash your hands thoroughly and often.

• Stay hydrated, especially on hot summer days. Drink lots of water and limit your alcohol intake.

BICYCLE SAFETY:

Riding a bicycle is a great way to exercise and spend time with friends and family. Have fun and stay safe by following these tips:

• Adults and children should always wear a proper-fitting helmet when riding.

• Be sure to obey traffic signs, signals and laws. Never ride against traffic or wear headphones.

• Keep both hands ready to brake at all times and wear bright-colored clothing.

• Wear sports sunglasses to keep dust and bugs from getting into your eyes.

• Use padded gloves to protect your hands.

• Avoid riding at night, but if you must, make sure you have a white headlight that’s visible from at least 500 feet and a rear reflector or taillight that’s visible up to 300 feet.

• Keep your bike in good working condition and check your brakes and tires regularly.

SWIMMING

While you’re at the beach or the pool, it is important to take these precautions, even if you’re an experienced swimmer:

• Know the basics of swimming (floating, moving through the water) and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

• Install a four-sided isolation fence, with self-closing and self-latching gates, around backyard swimming pools. This can help keep children away from the area when they aren’t supposed to be swimming. Pool fences should completely separate the house and play area from the pool. Check with your town about any specific requirements.

• Make sure kids wear life jackets in and around natural bodies of water, such as lakes or the ocean, even if they know how to swim. Life jackets can be used in and around pools for weaker swimmers, too.

• Closely supervise kids at all times when they’re in or near water (including bathtubs). Adults watching kids in or near water should avoid distracting activities like playing cards, reading books, talking on the phone and using alcohol.

Follow these simple tips and you, your family and friends are sure to enjoy a happy, healthy and safe summer!