

Warm Weather Safety Warnings and Tips For The 4th of July and Summer

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The 4th of July and warm weather bring long hours at the beach, barbecues, picnics and fireworks; but while the summer holiday is lots of fun, it also can be hazardous.

UC San Diego Healthcare and the California Poison Control System (CPCS) offer these tips and guidelines for preventing accidents, so parents can assure that kids enjoy the sun and fun without running into potential hazards during the summer, and what to do in case of emergency.

Sunburn

The UC San Diego Regional Burn Center expects to treat numerous children and adults with severe sunburns during the summer season.

“Often someone has dozed off while lying in the sun by the pool or at the beach. Even if the weather is not extremely hot, severe sunburn can occur on gloomy days due to the intensity of the ultraviolet rays,” said Daniel Lozano, Clinical Director, UC San Diego Regional Burn Center. Additionally, sun reflected off the water is even more intense and can lead to more serious burns.

The UC San Diego Burn Center recommends covering up, avoid falling asleep in the sun, and always apply sunscreen of 25 SPF or higher to prevent sunburn.

It is generally recommended that children of all ages be kept out of strong, prolonged sunlight, however, sunscreen can be safely used from age six months forward. Children younger than six months should be kept out of prolonged, intense sunlight. However, if for some reason, it is unavoidable for an infant to be in the sunlight, sunscreen is probably safe at any age.

Hot Coals

Each year the UC San Diego Regional Burn Center treats patients who have stepped or fallen on burning coals at the beach and bay. Kids hit the beach running and before they realize it they are walking or falling on hot coals buried under the sand. Parents should always keep a watchful eye on toddlers and children, and adults should be cautious of fire rings or fire pits and avoid these areas.

Hot coals covered by sand can retain an intense heat for up to 24 hours. Anyone who walks or falls on the hot coals can be severely burned and a child can sustain life-threatening burns. Hot coals should always be disposed of in designated containers at the beach or bay.

Fireworks

Fireworks are illegal in San Diego County and extremely dangerous, especially those purchased in Mexico. Each year the UC San Diego Regional Burn Center treats patients who have suffered fireworks related injury, including from small fireworks called “poppers” that can explode in a child’s pocket and set the child’s clothes on fire, resulting in serious burns.

Lamp Oil and Lighter Fluid

Oil-filled lamps or torches on patios and backyards can cause life-threatening pneumonia in young children and adults if the fuel is inhaled.

“A common source of exposure occurs when lamp oil or lighter fluid is placed in a drinking cup or other container in order to transfer it to the lamp, torch or barbecue,” said Richard Clark, MD, UC San Diego Emergency Department and Medical Director, California Poison Control System (CPCS).

If someone mistakenly drinks from the cup, the person risks inhaling the lamp oil or lighter fluid. Inhalation into the lungs can cause life-threatening pneumonia, especially in young children. The person will aspirate lamp oil into their lungs and require hospitalization. Each year, the Poison Center receives an average of 400 calls regarding the ingestion of lamp oil and lighter fluid. The majority of these cases involve children under the age of five.

Never transfer lamp oil or lighter fluid in a container normally used for eating or drinking. Lamp oil and lighter fluid should be stored in the original child-resistant packaging and insure the lid is securely tightened and out of the reach of children immediately after use.

A Safe Picnic

For a worry-free picnic, keep perishable food—ham, potato or macaroni salad, hamburgers, hot dogs, lunch meat, cooked beef or chicken, deviled eggs, custard or cream pies—in a cooler with ice.

“Put leftovers back in the cooler as soon as you finish eating,” said Dr. Clark. “When possible, store the cooler in the passenger area of the car during the trip home. It’s cooler than the trunk.”

Toddlers can choke trying to swallow large bites of picnic foods, such as hot dogs, hard-boiled eggs, or marshmallows. Cut hot dogs lengthwise in narrow strips before serving, slice up other foods into small bite-sized pieces, and keep children seated while they are eating.

Alcohol

Alcohol poisoning is common in children throughout the year, but increases during holidays.

“This often occurs when children drink the left over-cocktails after parties, or when adults allow them to drink from their glasses,” said William Norcross, MD, UCSD Family Medicine.

Adults should make sure alcoholic drinks are cleaned up and out of reach during and after a party or picnic.

Hiking and Camping Hazards

In these warm months, many people head away from the beach and toward the hills for hiking, camping and other activities. But the hills and deserts are also home to rattlesnakes. The San Diego Division of the California Poison Control System, located at UC San Diego Medical Center, receives about 100 calls a year from people in San Diego and Imperial counties about rattlesnakes.

“Most bites occur when people handle the snakes or when they stick their hands down holes or under logs and touch one. There are between 30 to 50 bites a year,” said Dr. Clark.

With some rattlesnake bites, no venom is injected into the wound, but because it is impossible to know if venom has or hasn't been injected, getting medical treatment quickly is important.

Administration of antivenin in a hospital is the most important treatment. Traditional first aid treatments – applying ice, using a tourniquet, or applying suction to the wound – have little value and may cause more injury.

If the victim is in a remote area when bitten by a rattler, first immobilize the wounded area, especially for a hand or arm bite, then proceed slowly to a vehicle. Moving slowly will keep the heart rate low and help prevent the venom from spreading. (If bitten on the leg or foot, it might be necessary to use that limb to get to the vehicle, unless someone can carry the bite victim. If walking is necessary, it is very important to move slowly.) Drive to the nearest phone, call 911 and wait for assistance. If there is no phone nearby, proceed to the nearest hospital.

Bee Stings--What To Do

Spending the day outside on a summer day puts anyone at risk of a bee sting. First aid for bee stings includes removing the bee's stinger by scraping it out with a fingernail or blunt edge of a knife. Wash the area well with soap and water. Immediately apply ice wrapped in a cloth for 10 to 15 minutes. (Remember that ice applied directly to the skin can cause damage to sensitive tissue.)

If an individual who is stung experience difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, wheezing, swelling or itching eyes, or other symptoms of an allergic reaction, call 911 immediately.

Fortunately, most bee stings are easily treatable and cause only minor discomfort.

Ocean Hazards

The San Diego Division of the California Poison Control System at UC San Diego Medical Center receives many calls from beachgoers who report being stung by venomous marine animals such as jellyfish, scorpion fish or stingrays. If stung by a jellyfish do not rub the tentacles using hands, a towel, sand or clothing. Instead rinse the tentacles with household vinegar for at least 30 seconds to prevent further stings. If vinegar is not available, rinse the areas with large amounts of salt water. Do not use fresh water; this may cause the tentacles to release venom. With scorpion fish or stingrays, the stinger should be removed and the wound washed with soap and water.

UC San Diego Regional Burn Center offers these 25 burn safety tips:

- → Learn CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and first aid.
- → Prepare and practice exit drills. Learn "two ways out."
- → Check electrical plugs and cords for dirt or fraying.
- → Turn down your water heater to 120 degrees.
- → Check smoke detectors every month and change the batteries twice a year.
- → Store flammable liquids safely.
- → Use 25 SPF or higher sun block when in the sun.
- → Use caution with hot automobile radiators.
- → Supervise children near fireworks. Don't allow fireworks in the home and instead go to a professional display.
- → Watch for hot tar and coals on the beach, and discard coals in a designated receptacle.
- → Never leave a fire unattended.
- → Never play games near a fire pit or campfire.
- → Never use sand to extinguish a campfire. Sand insulates heat.
- → Douse all campfires with water.
- → Keep clothing irons and curling irons out of the reach of children.
- → Keep children out of the kitchen when cooking.
- → Keep hot liquids away from table and counter edges and turn pot handles in on the stove.
- → Use caution when removing the wrapping or lids from microwaved or steamed food—steam cause serious burns.
- → Don't pour hot liquids around children.
- → Don't serve hot food or liquids from a pan with children sitting at the table.

- → Do keep coffeepots, crockpots and deep fryers pushed to the back of the counter.
- → Don't put ice on small burns. Use cool water, and in the event of a serious burn immerse the affected area in a bath of cool water.
- → Always discard smoking materials in a deep or wet receptacle.
- → Keep matches out of reach of children.
- → Never leave children alone, not even for "a quick trip to the neighbors."

Burn injuries can be serious and in case of a serious burn injury call 911 for an emergency response. The California Poison Control System is a nationwide toll-free number, which instantly routes California residents to poison experts. CPCS is available for advice and information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling **800-222-1222**.

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