



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Having a safe and healthy summer in the Rockies

By Tess Cox, MEDDAC Dept. of Medicine

It's finally getting warm enough for increased outdoor activities for our families! To insure a fun and active vacation this year it is vital to remember some important child safety factors to keep our kids from getting hurt or sick as they enjoy the great outdoors.

SUN EXPOSURE: Children need at least 15 to 20 minutes of direct sunlight every day to make Vitamin D for healthy bones, heart, and muscles. Sunlight is not bad, except in prolonged doses.

We are closer to the sun here in Colorado Springs. That means we get MORE exposure to damaging sun rays and ultraviolet light that can lead to sun burns, which in turn can lead to skin cancer later in life.

Studies have shown that people get 75 percent of their lifetime exposure to the damaging/harmful rays of the sun prior to age 15! That means our children are being exposed NOW to harmful rays that will not show up as cancer until they are adults.

If your baby or child is going to be out in direct sunlight for more than 15 minutes, then be sure to apply an SPF 30 lotion. Reapply sunscreen often if in the water.

SWIMMING: Children, no matter what their age, should never be left alone near water. Even older children who have been taught to swim can be harmed or suffer drowning for a variety of reasons. Always be sure that an adult is present with "eyes on" when children are in or near the water, whether that is a backyard pool or a nearby lake. Adults who are barbecuing, talking on the phone or deep in conversation with others are not good "watchers."

Teach your children to never go around water alone, and to always let an adult know when they will be in or near the water. Swimming lessons for children and basic first aid and CPR lessons for adults are always a good idea.

Children in a boat should have a well-fitting life jacket on AT ALL TIMES, no matter how well they swim, and they should always be attended by a non-distracted adult.

FLUID INTAKE: It is very dry here at altitude in the Rockies. Children especially become dehydrated quite easily. If they are going hiking or will be playing outside for a prolonged amount of time (even swimming), be sure they take frequent breaks every hour to drink.



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Lack of fluids can cause chronic headaches, tummy aches, and fatigue in children. For younger children, Pedialyte® or Pedialyte® Popsicles (or similar products), regular popsicles and water are good for hydration. For older children (in grade school or above) half or full strength sports drinks or water/popsicles are good choices.

INSECT BITES: Fortunately, we do not have much of an insect problem here in this dry climate. However, there are still some mosquitoes and other venomous insects and animals that can potentially hurt our children. A strong insect repellent is an important tool to begin any activity in the forest such as hiking.

In addition, keeping arms and legs covered and wearing a hat will help prevent tick bites. A search for ticks on the body and on the head/scalp after any hike in the woods is a good practice. Ticks carry disease that can cause children to become very sick for a long time.

If a child is stung or bitten, immediately cleanse the area with soap and water and give Benadryl® by mouth (according to the directions on the bottle.) Then, apply an anti-bacterial ointment or cream and keep your child from scratching. The more they scratch, the more infected the bite/sting will become.

INJURIES/TRAUMA: Whether skateboarding, swimming or ATV/bicycle accident, if your child has a serious accident involving a head trauma, it's always a good idea to have someone evaluate them within 24 hours. Be sure that every child is wearing a helmet before allowing them access to their bicycle or ATV.

All it takes is one good knock to the head that can result in enough trauma to cause irreversible brain damage that will alter your child's ability to think, learn, and develop properly.

Here are some trauma guidelines:

Head Trauma: If no loss of consciousness, vomiting, difficulty with vision or speech or walking/running, then observe the child and have him/her evaluated by their PCMH Provider within 24 hours in Clinic. Apply a cool compress, give Tylenol and have the child rest.

If they lose consciousness, have amnesia regarding the trauma (can't remember what happened to them) or seem confused, OR if they are having trouble walking, talking, hearing, or seeing (double or blurred vision) or a severe headache not relieved by Tylenol, then have them evaluated as soon as possible either in a clinic or in the ER.

Open Wound: If your child receives a cut that seems deep or takes a long time to stop bleeding, if it is deeper than the top layer of skin or won't stay "closed," your child may need stitches. These are referred



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

to as “lacerations.” Apply pressure with a clean cloth or bandage and seek medical attention within 12 hours. Stitches applied within this window of time can help the wound heal within a matter of days and prevent infection.

Any laceration to the face should be tended to immediately and evaluated by a medical provider.

If your child receives a laceration, or any wound, immediately wash it with soap and water, or least with clean warm (not hot) water, cover it with a clean cloth or bandage.

Many of these injuries and illnesses can be avoided with proper planning, good safety equipment and proper supervision of your children. If you feel overwhelmed or frightened by your child’s condition, stay calm and seek medical attention as soon as you can.