

ThedaCare: Keep July 4th holiday celebrations safe and fun

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NEENAH, Wis. – With the arrival of Independence Day, families and friends throughout Wisconsin are planning outdoor activities and gatherings to enjoy summer to its fullest.

Keeping those celebrations fun means thinking ahead about a few ways to ensure everyone stays safe, said [Dr. Kelly Mathes, Family Medicine Physician at ThedaCare Physicians-Neenah.](#)

“After winter and a cold spring, we’re all ready to jump with both feet into summer activities,” Dr. Mathes said. “Pausing to put on sunscreen or grab a water bottle, for example, can mean preventing discomfort or illness that can ruin a holiday.”

Heat Stroke and Exhaustion

Heat stroke and heat exhaustion can overtake people quickly, particularly when we’re not acclimated to hot weather, Dr. Mathes said. Heat-related illnesses and deaths are preventable, yet cause more than 650 deaths each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Symptoms of heat exhaustion may appear as:

- Heavy sweating
- Cold, pale and clammy skin
- A fast, but weak pulse
- Nausea
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness or weakness
- Headaches

A victim of heat exhaustion also may lose consciousness.

“Help someone with heat exhaustion by moving the person to cool place and loosening clothes,” said Dr. Mathes. “You want to lower the person’s temperature. If the person is vomiting or symptoms last more than an hour, seek medical attention.”

A person is in heatstroke when their core temperature exceeds 104°F and they are experiencing dysfunction of the central nervous system.

Symptoms of heatstroke can include:

- Red, hot and dry skin with no sweating
- Rapid or strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Upset stomach
- Dizziness, confusion, irritability or lost consciousness

Untreated heat stroke can lead to damage to the heart, brain and other organs, Dr. Mathes said.

“Call 911 if a person appears to be suffering from heat stroke,” she said. “Take action to cool the person down, such as with ice packs, or even a cold bath.”

People are more susceptible to heat stroke or exhaustion if they become dehydrated. Alcohol and caffeine can accelerate dehydration.

“Always drink enough water, especially when spending time outside in the summer,” Dr. Mathes said. “When you feel thirsty, you’re already dehydrated.”

The amount of water someone needs depends on a number of factors — eight glasses a day for adults is a good goal, but may not be necessary for those who are indoors and not engaging in much physical activity. Those who are playing sports or active in other activities, particularly outdoors in the sun, may need more.

Kids can get dehydrated in the summer heat, especially if they’re not drinking enough fluids while being highly active, and parents should watch for symptoms. Sometimes kids look tired, get irritable, or aren’t eating enough. If the child has diarrhea, vomits more than once or has dark yellow urine, those can be symptoms

of dehydration. Replacing fluids with small sips of clear drinks like Pedialyte, or giving popsicles or ice chips, as well as providing rest, can help, Dr. Mathes said.

“Always seek medical attention if a child doesn’t improve or appears severely dehydrated,” she said. “The child may need IV fluids to help recover.”

Sunburn

Sunburn can lead to skin cancer over time. Unprotected skin can burn in as little as 15 minutes, according to the CDC.

“Sunburns may not appear for 12 hours, so you may think you’re fine and then end up with a bad burn,” Dr. Mathes said. “Always wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen, which protects against damaging UVA and UVB rays.”

Sunscreen is recommended for adults, teens, children and babies older than six months.

A sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 is best. A higher SPF number doesn’t protect your skin any better than a lower number — it just protects it longer. Sunscreen should be applied at least a half an hour before going outside and then replenished every couple of hours or more, depending on if a person is in the water or sweating, she said.

“Consider staying out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when the sun’s rays are at their strongest,” Dr. Mathes said. “And consider additional protection, such as hats or umbrellas. The ears, neck and face are particularly vulnerable to sun exposure and damage.”

Water Safety

Many families will be enjoying time on Wisconsin lakes and rivers over the July 4th holiday, and keeping in mind key safety precautions can help ensure the celebration stays fun and happy for everyone.

When it comes to swimming, designate a person in your party to be the “water watcher” to ensure someone always has an eye on the lake, river, pond or pool, Dr. Mathes said.

“Always keep an eye on everyone in the water, particularly children of all ages, but

adults, too,” Dr. Mathes said. “Anyone can get fatigued in the water and be at risk of drowning.”

Always follow boating rules and regulations, and always make sure a lifejacket is on board for each person, she said. Additionally, water and alcohol never mix.

“Of course, whoever is driving the boat should not be using alcohol,” said Dr. Mathes. “We also ask that people remember that swimming and using alcohol is also very dangerous.”

Alcohol reduces inhibition and can mean that swimmers take risks such as swimming out further in the water or staying in too long, Dr. Mathes said.

Fireworks Safety

National Safety Council (NSC) statistics show that eight people died from home fireworks-related incidents and 12,000 people required medical attention from injuries in 2017 — half experienced by children and young adults.

“Home fireworks cause injuries every year,” Dr. Mathes said. “It’s best to enjoy the fireworks displays put on by our communities and experts.”

At those community fireworks shows, people should remember that babies and toddlers need extra hearing protection, she said.

For those who choose to use consumer fireworks, the NSC says people should:

- Only light legal fireworks on the ground in areas that are fire resistant.
- Never let young children handle the fireworks.
- Always supervise older kids using fireworks.
- Keep spectators at a safe distance.
- Always wear eye protection when lighting fireworks.
- Don’t point fireworks or sparklers at anyone.
- Don’t attempt to relight a “dud.” Instead, put it in a bucket of water for several hours.
- Never use alcohol while lighting fireworks.
- Always keep a fire extinguisher, water hose or buckets of water nearby.

Insect Bites

In Wisconsin, one of the favorite summer pastimes we enjoy is time outdoors with

friends and family — at the lake, at the cabin, ‘up north’ in the woods — also a popular locale for ticks and mosquitoes, which are likely to be found in abundance for anyone watching fireworks from a lakeshore or riverfront.

“People who spend a lot of time outdoors, particularly in areas around woods and water, can help prevent mosquito and tick bites by wearing long sleeves and pants,” Dr. Mathes said. “An EPA-registered insect repellent can also help. Carefully follow the directions and recommendations, particularly when it comes to younger kids and pregnant or breastfeeding women.”

Wearing light-colored clothing can help people more easily see and remove any ticks that hitchhike. Various types of ticks carry different diseases that can impact people if they’re bitten.

Deer ticks can pose a danger to humans by passing on a bacterium that leads to Lyme disease. Here are some signs and symptoms that can occur within a month after you’ve been infected:

- Rash. From three to 30 days after an infected tick bite, an expanding red area might appear that sometimes clears in the center, forming a bull’s-eye pattern. The rash expands slowly over days and can spread to 12 inches (30 centimeters) across. It’s typically not itchy or painful but might feel warm to the touch.
- Other symptoms include: fever, chills, fatigue, body aches, headache, neck stiffness and swollen lymph nodes can accompany the rash.

If you find a tick that needs to be removed, use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin’s surface as possible. Then, pull upward with steady, even pressure. Don’t twist or jerk the tick as this can cause parts to break off and remain in the skin. After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol or soap and water.

“The best prevention is not getting bitten,” Dr. Mathes said. “People should carefully check their skin and scalp for ticks after spending time outdoors, and check kids over carefully, too.”