

Summer Safety Tips



Summer Tips from Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

Kids can't wait for summer. However, along with school vacation, warm weather and outdoor sports comes an extra dose of responsibility for parents. Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 14 in the U.S. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta advises adults to take precautions so their kids can have a fun and safe summer vacation.

Water Wisdom: Constant Supervision is Key

Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional death of children age 14 and under, taking the lives of nearly 900 children each year. Most occur in swimming pools, but lakes, rivers and oceans can also be dangerous. Children playing in smaller bodies of water, such as wading pools, bathtubs, buckets, toilets, spas and hot tubs should also be supervised.

Children's is partnering to encourage parents to become "Water Watchers" this summer. Although many parents are nearby when their children are in or around the water, most do not devote 100 percent of their attention to supervising playtime. Recent research by Johnson & Johnson shows that 88 percent of children who drowned were under adult supervision and that parents are overconfident about their children's safety and abilities around water. Because drowning can occur silently and in a matter of seconds, at least one parent or adult should always be a completely focused "Water Watcher," dedicated to monitoring children playing in the water.

In addition to constant supervision, parents should also keep in mind the following water safety tips:

- Practice "touch supervision" by keeping children within reasonable reach at all times. It is especially vital to keep children in baby bath seats and rings within arm's reach. Because drowning often occur silently, "touch supervision" can save lives.
- Don't be over-confident of your child's swimming abilities, even if they have completed swimming courses.
- Be aware of which of your child's friends and neighbors have pools. Make sure your child will be constantly supervised by an adult while visiting.
- Tell children never to run, push or jump on others around water.
- Eliminate all potential drowning hazards such as empty buckets, large containers and wading pools. Keep toilet lids shut and use toilet locks.
- Make sure children swim only in designated safe areas of rivers, lakes and oceans. Outfit children in a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal safety device around oceans, rivers, lakes or when participating in water sports. "Water wings" or inflatable tubes do not replace life jackets. Georgia law requires children under 10 to wear an appropriately sized flotation device when on a boat or personal watercraft.
- Install four-sided fencing at least five feet high that completely surrounds all pools, spas, whirlpools and hot tubs to prevent direct access from the house or yard. Make sure the fence has self-closing and self-latching gates.

- Keep rescue equipment, a telephone and emergency numbers by the pool.
- Teach children to never dive into a river, lake, ocean or water less than nine feet deep.
- Never allow children age 14 and under to operate a personal watercraft.

Sun Safety: Avoid Unnecessary Aches and Burns

Now that the warm weather is in full force, kids are eager to enjoy outdoor activities. Unfortunately, excessive exposure to the sun can cause suffering and even permanent damage if the proper precautions are not taken.

- Apply sunscreen specifically made for children with an SPF of at least 15. While swimming, children should wear waterproof sunscreen. Sunscreen should be re-applied every 90 minutes or according to directions.
- Outfit children with a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses with 100 percent UV protection.
- Even when precautions are followed, it is best to minimize the amount of sun exposure during the peak hours of 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Precautions as Summer Sports Heat Up

Playing sports in hot weather can be enjoyable, but sometimes dangerous. Each year, young athletes die from heat-related illness. With their heavy uniforms and intense practices, football players are especially vulnerable. Also at risk for heat-related illness are overweight or out of shape children, as well as those who are new to a warm climate. Additionally, children who have suffered from a heat-related illness in the past, or are currently taking cold or allergy medications or certain treatments for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), should be carefully monitored.

The severity of heat injury ranges from mild heat cramps to heat stroke and even death. Heat stroke is the third most common cause of exercise-related death in U.S. high school athletes. But there is one important fact to remember — heat-related illness is preventable.

One of the key factors to avoiding heat illness is hydration. Parents can use the following tips to prevent dehydration and identify the signs:

- Never rely on thirst. Thirst is a poor indicator of how hydrated the body is. When a young athlete begins to feel thirsty, he or she may already be dehydrated.
- Prehydrate. Thirty minutes before activity, have your child drink until he or she is no longer thirsty — plus another eight ounces. Kids weighing less than 90 pounds should drink five ounces for every 20 minutes of activity. Kids weighing more than 90 pounds should drink eight ounces every 20 minutes.
- Choose the right drink. Water is best if the activity lasts one hour or less. For activities lasting more than one hour, kids should drink a fluid with carbohydrates (sugar) and electrolytes. Drinks like Gatorade and Powerade were specially designed for re-hydration during exercise and contain the right amount of carbohydrates. Fluids like fruit juice and soda have too much sugar and can cause cramping.
- Drink it, don't pour it. Your child may think pouring cold water on his head or face feels great, but it will not make him more hydrated.

In addition, parents should consider these workout tips during warm weather months:

- Schedule workouts for the cooler times of the day.
- Allow overweight or out-of-shape kids time to adjust to the heat.
- Schedule timed water and rest breaks every 30 minutes during activities. During these breaks, require kids to drink fluids. This also gives the coach or trainer a chance to monitor the athletes.
- Have shade, ice and a kiddie pool available for emergency treatment and rapid cooling.
- Athletes should wear hats with brims and light-colored, breathable clothing, if possible.
- Parents of children with asthma should closely monitor their children. Exercise is often a trigger for attacks, and outdoor air quality can also be a factor.

Kids in Hot Cars: Any Length of Time is Too Much

Every year, millions of terrified parents hear the stories of children who were left in a car during the summer, too often resulting in severe illness and even death. Sadly, all of these tragedies were 100 percent preventable. Parents can avoid such a tragedy by remembering a few simple rules.

- Temperatures inside a car rise at alarming rates during the summer, even when it is only moderately warm outside.
- Never leave a child in an unattended car for any amount of time, even with the windows rolled down.
- Double-check that all children exit the vehicle when you reach your destination. Take special care to ensure that sleeping infants are not overlooked.
- Prior to restraining your children, check the temperature of the child safety seat surface and seat belt buckles to avoid unintentional burns or discomfort.

Summer shouldn't be a scary time, but it also shouldn't be spent in the hospital. By taking a few extra measures, parents can make sure that more time is spent poolside than bedside this summer.

About Tips Provider:

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, a not-for-profit organization, is dedicated to making kids better today and healthier tomorrow. Our specialized care helps children get better faster and live healthier lives. Managing more than 850,000 patient visits annually at three hospitals and 24 neighborhood locations, Children's is the largest healthcare provider for children in Georgia and one of the largest pediatric clinical care providers in the country. Children's offers access to more than 60 pediatric specialties and programs and is ranked among the top children's hospitals in the country by U.S. News & World Report. With generous philanthropic and volunteer support, Children's has impacted the lives of children in Georgia, the United States and throughout the world. Visit www.choa.org for more information.