

## SUMMERTIME SAFETY: The Top Five Hazards

Everyone looks forward to summertime, but few of us recognize the added hazards the season brings. As an emergency room (ER) physician at Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital, I can tell you that summer means a busy season for us. The kids are off from school, people take vacation time, and everyone seems to be outside. Summer should be fun, so keep it that way by being aware of the top five causes of injury we see in the ER during summer.

### Number Five: Poisonings

Medications, food, plant life, and insects are all culprits. Grandparents, be sure to keep your medications out of reach from grandchildren who might visit in summer more than usual. Think about food when the mercury climbs, too. For example, let's say you go to a picnic and try the killer potato salad that's been off ice for an hour. Better yet, don't. That sort of nasty food poisoning is very common. Keep perishable foods cold.

Then there are the plants. Everyone knows about poison ivy and sumac, but there are also mushrooms that kids pick and eat, or in the garden, there are foxglove, morning glories, and yew berries (the little red ones on evergreens), to name a few. Check out [www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org](http://www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org) for a full listing of plant hazards. And, if insect stings or bites cause shortness of breath, difficulty swallowing, or fever, get to a doctor for treatment. It can be serious.

### Number Four: Alcohol and drug abuse

It's a year-round danger, but complications from alcohol and drug abuse are frequent flyers to the ER in summertime. This is especially true for young people who seem to experiment more in warm weather. Beaches, pools, and boats practically invite people to do things they wouldn't normally do – or drink more than they should. We often see plenty of heatstroke fueled by alcohol-related dehydration as well.

### Number Three: Water hazards

Know where not to swim. Never dive into unknown waters. Lakes and rivers have their own dangers, like undertows or submerged junk that can tangle up a swimmer. And for boaters, it's not just about keeping you and your passengers safe. Watch the waters for people surfacing, or for potential collisions with other boats. A collision in a boat is as dangerous as in a car, even more so since boats usually ride on water that's over your head. And please, wear your life vests while on the water.

### Number Two: Dog bites

In the summer, it seems everyone with dogs lets them out to run around. Approach every unfamiliar canine with caution. Always ask the owner's permission, hold your palm open so the dog can smell you, and only pet it on its back – never its head – at first introduction. Yes, we see vicious maulings, but most commonly we see nasty lacerations to the hands, arms, and face. Sadly, most incidents are preventable.

### Number One: Falls

Potential falls are everywhere: Kids fall from playground equipment, grown-ups fall from houses and ladders during painting, and teens fall from bikes, skateboards, and scooters (which should be used only while wearing a protective helmet). Falls from windows can also be tragic. Screens on double-hung windows are meant to keep bugs out, not people in. Use safety locks if you have younger children. You can find the locks at any hardware store.

### Dishonorable mention: Fireworks

People in our communities last year lost fingers, hands, and eyes, all because of a momentary lapse in judgment. Such explosives are illegal and they maim. But we can also count on seeing plenty of kids with nasty burns from legal sparklers, too; they sizzle at 1,800°F, the same temperature used



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for melting down gold bullion. Leave the fireworks to the professionals.

Good Shepherd's state-of-the-art emergency department and Level II Trauma Center is 100 percent staffed by emergency medicine physicians and trauma nurses. We're here for you, but keep these "Top Five Hazards" in mind and enjoy the summer; we'd prefer to meet our neighbors and community members outside of our work. U