

SUMMER SAFETY ISSUES

Lets talk about summer! There is no word more pleasant in a school child's vocabulary, and maybe no more word more ambivalent in a parent's vocabulary! Regardless of how you may feel, summer is here and with it come the safety issues associated with the typical Texas Heat Wave!

Sunburn

Yikes! Your teen wants to burn so she can tan, and maybe you were guilty of this when you were a pre-adult too! However, as you now know, sunburn is definitely NOT good for you! You are your child's first best protection against the fierce Texas sun and it is okay to say NO when she asks you if she can have Crisco so she can spread it on her body and bake! Protection begins when your child leaves the hospital for the very first time, not after she has been out in the sun for a few years! Studies have shown that younger children seem to be more sensitive to sunburns, and in fact, early and serious sunburns are more predictive of skin cancers than are later sun exposure. Dress that infant or child in cool, light colored clothing (cotton is good) and keep her in the shade. If she must venture into the sunlight, put a hat with a wide brim on her. Try to stay out of the sun when it is most intense, between 10am and 3 pm. Cover all exposed skin with a sunscreen. Be aware that those cloudy days can be even more dangerous to your little one's skin than the sunny days, so don't skimp on the protection even when the sun is hidden!

Let me address a few points about sunscreen:

1. The SPF refers to the Sun Protection Factor. This SPF usually only refers to UVB protection, but sunlight contains both UVB and UVA waves, both of which can be harmful. Be sure to find a sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB waves. Use an SPF of at least 15.
2. Use water resistant sunblocks which contain PABA (I could give you the chemical name but I can't even spell it, much less say it!) Apply the sunscreen regularly and liberally. Don't think that because it says waterproof, it won't ever come off! Be vigilant about applying sunscreen to your child regularly.
3. There has been some concern about sunscreen and children under 6 months old. I say that if your infant must be in the sun, it is much better to protect her with sunscreen than allow her to be burned! When the sunscreen is no longer needed, you can simply wipe it off.

Sometimes, despite all our precautions, our little ones still see a bit too much of the sun and get a little pink. There are many "treatments" out there, but studies show the most effective treatment still seems to be the old standby: cold water, aloe vera, and Tylenol or Motrin for pain.

Bites

Mosquitoes are prevalent at this time of year, and the best medicine for them is prevention! Keep your yards free of standing water. Use insect repellent for those pesky mosquitoes, though keep the DEET concentration to less than 10% and wash it off your child's skin as soon as you come back inside. It is also best to stay indoors during the time mosquitoes are most prevalent, the early morning and late evenings. Just be aware that those times are their most active, but those little bugs are out looking for blood anytime!

Ants - Fire ants are Texas' bane of existence in my opinion! Actual fire ant allergies are not common though the reactions to the bite can be impressive with lots of swelling, redness, and pain. If your child is unlucky enough to park himself in the middle of an ant bed, multiply those symptoms by three or four hundred bites and you have a real mess! Benadryl will help allay the worst of the itching, and a paste of baking soda and water will take some of the sting out. Do your best to keep fire ant beds out of the yard or any area your child plays, and have him wear shoes when outside.

Snakes - More concerning is the snake that lives unbeknownst in your back yard! In my opinion, you should treat every snake bite as very serious. You may feel fairly certain that your child was bitten by a nonvenomous snake, but if you are wrong and don't get your little one treatment, there could be dire consequences! There are two interventions proven to minimize any complications your little one will have if he is bitten. Get him to the hospital as soon as possible, and minimize movement of the bitten extremity. You can use a splint to immobilize the extremity if you are far from the hospital but be sure that the splint doesn't turn into a tourniquet as the extremity swells, thus cutting off the blood supply. For this same reason, remove rings and constrictive clothing from the bitten extremity. There are a few remedies that you shouldn't try:

- Don't "cut and suck" at the snake bite – this remedy, besides being gross to perform, doesn't remove enough venom to do any good, and it potentially harms the underlying tissue.
- Alcohol applied to the bite actually makes the blood vessels larger and spreads the venom farther into the body – something you need to try to avoid!
- Don't tighten a tourniquet around the bitten extremity – again, it cuts off blood supply and may cost your child an arm or leg!
- Electric shocks applied to the bite have even been used occasionally – they have never been shown to be effective, and, for obvious reasons, should not be used!

Spiders - There are approximately 20,000 venomous spiders in the world, though only 50 of them have fangs large enough to cause us problems. Unfortunately, two of those live in our neck of the prairie! The black widow and the brown recluse spiders can be dangerous, but actually only 10-25% of the bites of these spiders actually cause symptoms. Black widow bites may be initially painless though within two hours there may be pain, including abdominal pain, and muscle cramping. Some children will just be fussy with the bite, though others may experience sweating of the hands and face. The peak time for symptoms is about 12 hours after the bite, and most symptoms will

have faded by 2-3 days. The brown recluse bite is often described as “red, white, and blue”, because it often will show up as a blue center surrounded by a white ring, which is then surrounded by a red ring. However, not all brown recluse bites look this way. Healing time for this nasty bite is a little longer, about 2.5 weeks. Both bites should be treated with RICE (rest, immobilization, cold compresses or ice, and elevation) and pain medications, usually Tylenol or Motrin.

Scorpions – Another creature common to this area is the scorpion. Scorpions are nocturnal, hunting for food at night and hiding under rocks and in cracks and other things (like your clothing and shoes) during the day. I won't bore you with my opinion of this...umm, thing, but you can know that most scorpion stings in this area are not deadly. Do be sure to seek emergency medical help immediately if the victim has a history of serious reactions to stings or if a serious reaction seems to be developing. Serious reactions may include heavy sweating, difficulty swallowing, blurred vision, loss of bowel control, jerky muscular reflexes, and difficulty breathing. These serious signs are cause for a QUICK trip to a medical facility. If you are unlucky enough to be stung by a scorpion, clean the area with soap and water and apply a cool compress or ice to the sting. Avoid keeping the ice on the sting so long that you cause frostbite! Avoid panicking and try to keep your child calm – if a child is screaming and struggling, the venom is spreading farther into the body. Use Tylenol, Motrin, or Advil as pain control.

RULE OF THUMB:

Teach your children not to put their hands where they can't see them! Stay out of long grass if possible, and always wear shoes that extend above the ankle. Keep the yard free of ant beds and standing water. Shake out the clothing and clear the shoes of any little critters before you dress your child. Tell them not to poke at long hissing animals or small things with 8 legs or curved tails, because most snakes, spiders, and scorpions will leave children alone if the children do the same! As always, call us if you have concerns or questions!