

Looking forward to a great summer at home/stay-cation OR vacation??? Probably, and so are your kids! Here's the thing. When you have younger and/or school age children -- you really need to plan ahead for summer. Sure, it's fun for them to chill out at home for the first few weeks. But the general consensus from the parents I've chatted with, is that this hanging out business gets old. With summer finally in full swing, you and your family are probably spending a lot more time outside. This can be great for your health, but it can also increase chances for certain accidents and injuries. Long summer days are great for family time and lots of excursions; camping, hiking, boating, picnics and parks. Unfortunately, these activities can also bring with them an increased risk of injuries as children spend more time outdoors in active play and often receive less supervision. Here are a few Summer fun activity ideas AND safety tips.

Vacationing in your own Backyard

- Take advantage of free days at local museums and zoos...it's usually a day during the first week of the month.
- Some cities (Sacramento being one) have museum day - where local museums OPEN their doors for free admission, definitely worth it!!!
- Get outside! Gas prices are lower than last year BUT, many folks think twice about frequent road trips but you can definitely throw a few into your summer plans. Sacramento has the luxury of two rivers!!! So you can go fishing, take a fun hike and end it with a picnic. We are also close to the coast, take the kids to check out beaches for some low-tide exploring.
- Take field trips using public transportation. My step-kids and nephews loved spending the day on the train. We would stop in towns with parks and cool areas that they could explore.
- "I'm Bored!" You'll hear it. Many times. Have a supply of "I'm bored" projects and games on hand. .. it helps to be prepared with a stash of games and activities that can "un-bore your kids. Some ideas...sidewalk chalk to draw amazing, elaborate mazes. A bucket filled with water and paint brushes/rollers so your kids can "paint" your fences and house. Create water paint murals --: Fill handle squirt bottles with colored water (add food coloring or washable paint), and spray large pieces of butcher paper or newspaper clipped to a fence. Children love to create and will enjoy blending colors on a large scale, with the size of your mural paper as their only limitation. Make Ice Sculptures-It's easy and requires a day or two or prep...plan ahead...freeze ice blocks in a variety of shapes and sizes, have squirt bottles of colored water, salt (be aware to do this on the patio/cement, as the salt that 'binds' the ice together will kill the lawn when it melts!), and let the kids go to town building and coloring their own sculptures.
- Have your child(ren) record and journal their summer adventures and shenanigans - Hand over your video camera or regular camera so they can turn into mini journalists.

Now for other summer safety precautions... Keep your summer safe and healthy by keeping the following tips in mind. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that you take the following precautions to make sure your children are safe.

Sunscreen Protection

Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15; apply 30 minutes before going outdoors and reapply frequently. Avoid sun exposure between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Infants under 6 months of age should be kept out of direct sunlight; and never leave infants to play or sleep in the sun. Sunscreen should be stored out of reach of children.

Don't rely on sunscreen alone to protect children from skin cancer. To provide the best protection utilize a combination of protective clothing, caps & hats with broad brims, shade covers/umbrellas, and sunglasses (look for sunglasses that block 99 to 100 percent of ultraviolet rays).

Heat Stress

Make sure children drink plenty of water before any strenuous activities, and periodically while they are exercising, even if they don't feel thirsty. When the weather is warm, pick activities that are not too strenuous for the temperature and humidity, and make sure children are dressed in light-colored and long-sleeved lightweight clothing. Do not let young children stay in the sun for long periods, even when wearing sunscreen. Consider placing a canopy or shade tent in one section of your outside play area, so that activities can take place in a shady spot..

Water Safety

- For **ALL** kids, make sure there's an adult present when they swim.
- Don't dive into an unknown body of water or shallow pool. Ease in or jump feet first.
- Never run near a pool. Water on the side can make it easy to slip and fall.

Never leave children alone in or near a pool, pond, river, or any body of water - even for a moment. Children can be exposed to water-play as early as infancy, however, they should begin to learn water safety and be 'water safe' as a toddler. There are many accredited swim programs for children of all ages that teach basic water skills. When in or around water children should always wear the required protective devices as needed such as; water wings, ear plugs, and ski vests when rafting or boating. (boating and water safety information is plentiful thru the Dept. of Boating and Waterways). Children should never be left unattended near water, a small child can drown in an inch of water. Buckets, tubs, dishpans, plastic containers, shallow wading pools and even the toilet can be dangerous, as small children are 'top heavy', meaning that their heads are large in proportion to the rest of their bodies. A toddler who has fallen into a toilet or bucket may not have developed the muscles in their waist or arms to be able to pull themselves out. **An adult should be within arm's length whenever infants or toddlers are in or around water.**

Fire Safety

During good weather months it is natural to be out of doors: camping, bar-b-q's, picnics, etc. Please review, teach your child(ren) and practice safety around B-B-Q's, campfires fire-pits in the home, at the beach or park. SUPERVISION at all times is imperative-- Never leave children alone near open flame. Watch your child the entire time he/she is near a fire, allowing the opportunity to provide ongoing fire education to your child AND to instantly act if your child gets too close to a flame. Read more: <http://www.livestrong.com/article/231006-fire-safety-for-kids-while-camping/#ixzz1stpJJCBG>

Insect Protection

- The most effective insect repellents that have been registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) contain DEET, Picaridin or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus. When using them, follow the directions on the label exactly. Use the appropriate concentration for the amount of time you will be exposed. Never

use insect repellents on infants under age 2 months, and use them with caution on children ages 2 months to 12 years of age.

- Avoid scented soaps, hair sprays and perfumes and dressing in bright flowery prints as these may attract bees and wasps.
- Wear light-colored clothing with long sleeves and legs. Tuck shirts into pants and pants into shoes/socks and boots.
- Prevent insects from entering the indoors by fixing or installing window or door screens.
- After outdoor/nature play - examine children frequently for ticks and remove any ticks promptly. Avoid areas where ticks are known to occur, and stay on trails if you go to these areas. *** Children should not touch sick or dead animals.
- Avoid places where mosquitoes breed and live, such as areas with standing water or thick, wet grass. Drain and discard any receptacles on your premises where water can collect.

After an insect sting or bite:

- Move calmly away from the insect.
- If the stinger is still in the skin, use a credit card or stiff piece of paper to scrape it out.
- Use an ice pack on the bite or sting for 15 to 20 minutes at a time.
- If necessary, you can use a nonprescription medication such as an antihistamine or hydrocortisone cream to help relieve itching and redness. A natural remedy that relieves itching is baking powder paste (baking powder & water mixed to thick paste).

Safety Helmets & Protective Gear

Children should always wear helmets and protective gear when on bicycles, skates, skateboards, scooters, and should never ride in or near traffic, at dusk or after dark. Make sure children are ready and able to ride a wheeled toy before you let them use it, and that it is the right size for them. A child should be able to place the balls of both feet on the ground when sitting on the seat of a wheeled toy.

For scrapes and bumps:

- If your child skins a knee, use pressure to stop the bleeding, wash it thoroughly with soap and water, and apply antibiotic ointment and a bandage.
- If there's a bruise, apply an ice pack while elevating the injury.

Food Safety & Warm Weather

Warm summer weather also brings a natural increase in environmental bacteria that flourish in warm and humid conditions, which can result in food borne illness. Symptoms of food poisoning include loss of appetite, vomiting, and diarrhea. While these symptoms may be only a mild inconvenience to a healthy person, food borne infections can cause severe dehydration in infants, young children, or any persons whose immunity is weakened by chronic disease.

In addition, the food packed for summer outings may not appropriately discourage the growth of pathogens without remembering the following precautions.

- Just like at home, when you are on outings-wash hands frequently during food preparation. Bring instant hand-sanitizer or disposable towelettes for hand washing.
- Proper storage of perishable items can prevent a food related incident from spoiling your day. Perishable foods should be kept in the refrigerator until it is time to eat. For excursions, keep these foods in an insulated cooler, with ice packs or plenty of ice. Common sources of food poisoning in summer include potato salad, cold cuts, pasta salads, items w/mayo and other egg or dairy-based cold dishes.
- Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Never mix them when serving or storing.

- Cold food should be left out no longer than two hours at room temperature (one hour if the temperature is 90° or higher). After that, discard it.
- Keep the utensils, plates, cutting board, etc., used to prepare raw meat away from prepared ready to serve foods .
- Cook all meat to at least the recommended minimum internal temperature.

Internet Safety- Pre-teens (Tweens) & Teens

We parents, guardians, and grandparents must be on guard for cyber-threats. Sadly, children as young 7 or 8 on up are susceptible to predators. This being a wi-fi or 'wired' world – there are threats from internet predators that our children and loved ones may not suspect. Just as we lock our doors to “real-live” persons/threats....we must be on guard and vigilant for on-line threats! Child/parental blockers can be good and usually very effective...BUT nothing beats plain old fashioned supervision. Experts advise keeping the computer in the 'family space' (out of a child's room) and now that so much internet info is available on individual 'Smart' phones . . .limit the access your child has to ALL types of information on the internet and teach them about potential threats. Discussions about body privacy and internet predators are a must in this day and age.

Have a safe and enjoyable summer!—*Alix*

Submitted By: Alix Hall, M.S. Owner and Executive Director of Discovery Tree Schools, and an Educator, Consultant and Author on Early Childhood and Parenting Education. From the book "Practical Parenting" by Alix Hall

Ref.: California Early Childhood Sun Protection Curriculum (rev. 99) www.dhs.ca.gov/skin/images/skin_sunprotection
 USDA Fight Bac. This Summer at www.fightbac.org.