

## Summer's Lovely, But Watch Out For Hazards

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Living Well

A column from SVNA by Cyd Emmons

Life in New England requires patience. March brings cherry blossoms to Washington and Pennsylvania can enjoy summery days in April. We, though, can't expect a string of warm sunny days that early. My mother always insisted that anticipation is as good as the real thing, but by the time June comes around, we're ready for some decent weather—now.

As welcome as summer is, though, it presents hazards, for children, adults, and our pets, too. So much of staying safe and healthy in the summer is common sense, but there's something so relaxing about warm weather that we easily can let our guard down.

Rule number one is beware of the sun. A sunburn does not fade to a tan, nor does a sunburn act as a "base" for a tan, a popular myth from my teenage years. (We also slathered ourselves with baby oil mixed with iodine before lying in the sun, another truly poor idea.) A sunburn is a burn, period, and can lead to skin cancer as well premature aging. It's simple, really. If you don't want your face to look like an old saddle or to develop a terrible disease, go easy on the sun.

Lori Riley, R.N., of the Salisbury Visiting Nurse Association advises that you be diligent about applying sunscreen with a SPF of 15 or higher. Apply it on cloudy days as well as sunny. "Parents should remember to apply sunscreen a half hour to an hour before their kids go outside," she said. "Reapply after they go in the water unless the sunscreen is waterproof."

### Safety In The Water

Rule number two, learn to swim. It's not only wonderful exercise, but a skill that can save your life. Children and non-swimmers should wear U.S. Coast Guard approved life vests when in or on the water. Inflatable "floaties" are not a substitute.

When swimming in an open body of water, swim with a buddy and be aware of changes in the weather. If a storm threatens, whether swimming or boating, get out of the water, pronto. Keep in mind, also, that alcohol and water are a risky combination. The Red Cross notes that more than half of all drowning deaths are the result of boating mishaps involving alcohol.

If you have a backyard pool, Riley said, fence the pool completely with a self-locking, self-closing gate and install the new sliding doors that automatically close and lock. Do not leave furniture that would make it possible for a child to climb over near the fence. Learn CPR and insist that babysitters, grandparents and anyone else in charge of your children learn it, too.

Every summer brings a sad story of a child drowning in a home pool because he or she was left unattended for “just a minute.” A child in the water must be monitored constantly. Install a phone or bring a cordless or cell to the pool area so help can be summoned immediately. For those times when no one is supposed to be using the pool, Riley recommends a pool alarm, which alerts you that a child or pet may have fallen in.

Interestingly, the age-old rule about not swimming for a half hour after eating isn't really valid. Neither the American Red Cross nor the American Academy of Pediatrics makes a specific recommendation about waiting before going in for a swim. While going for a vigorous swim after a big meal may make not be wise, no instance of drowning due to suffering cramps while swimming on full stomach has been documented.

### Ticks And More Ticks

To the hot weather dangers presented by the sun and water, we must also add ticks and Lyme disease, which is so prevalent in our area. Most cases of Lyme disease are associated with the nymphal black-legged tick, of which 10% to 36% carry the disease. Because they're so tiny, about the size of a pinhead, they're difficult to spot. In the fall and early spring, a tick bite is more likely compliments of an adult tick, which is larger and easier to see, but more likely to be infected.

Not every tick bite results in Lyme disease, but the sooner you spot and remove a tick the better the odds of avoiding infection. After attachment it takes 24 to 36 hours for transmission of the bacterium, and Riley suggests that parents make a habit of checking each child for ticks at the same time every day, such as at bath time or bedtime. If you don't succeed in removing the entire tick, including the head, she said, you should see your doctor.

While doing a daily body check of yourself and your children, don't forget to do the same for your pets. Both dogs and cats can contract Lyme disease from infected ticks as well as carry them into your living area, so any animal that goes outside should be treated with one of the very effective tick preventives available. Remember, too, that hot weather hazards, including heat stroke and sunburn, affect your pets, too. That means lots of fresh water, no strenuous exercise on very hot days, and a cool comfortable place to spend lazy summer hours.