

Don't Let Summer Be a Bummer!

If you're a parent, it's time to think summer safety ... even though it's only spring. That's safety tip No. 1: Plan ahead!

Summer safety starts at home and sometimes doesn't leave it for days at a time because, face it, it's just not safe out there. Especially in the summer!

But you can outsmart that sizzling season with these helpful tips about...

SUN: The sun is at its fiercest from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., so it's a good idea to keep the kids inside. This doesn't mean they have to miss out on the best season of the year! Just the hours between 10 and 4. And the hours around dusk, because that's when it's getting dark. And the early hours of the day, when the grass is dewy, which means wet, which means "drowning hazard." Best time for kids to go outside? 9:50 to 9:59 a.m. and 9:50 to 9:59 p.m. That's easy to remember!

INSECTS: Insect bites can be deadly. Remind your children of this and they won't clamor for their 18 "outside minutes." Explain to them that the pointy part of the bee—the "needle"—is like a shot at the doctor's office, except it could also deliver a deadly allergic reaction. And mosquitoes spread viruses, so anytime you get bitten you could end up in the hospital with your legs missing. Or your cellphone, depending on the nurse on duty. And don't forget ticks! Ticks suck your blood and then you BECOME a tick. Everyone knows that.

DEHYDRATION: What happens when you get dehydrated? Ask King Tut—he's not smiling. (Is he? Kind of hard to tell.) If your children are playing so hard that they forget to drink, well, that's not like their FATHER, is it? Phil never forgets to drink. So, make sure they drink just the right amount. But with Phil's genes, don't count on it.

WATER SAFETY: Never let your kids swim alone. That's what they tell you. But then when your 9-year-old says, "OK, how about I swim with that hammerhead?" somehow THAT'S wrong, too. There's no pleasing the "safety police."

POISON IVY: Leaves of three, leave them be. In other words, if a plant has three leaves, don't touch it. Since most plants and trees have at least three leaves, it goes without saying that there's not one you should touch, except corn. (Unless husks ARE leaves. Find out.)

BUBBLES: Bubble fluid is toxic, so even if your children are back to dehydrated (per usual!), try to find something else for them to drink. But in a pinch, the fluid's probably not THAT toxic, so you can save yourself a trip to the fridge.

GEAR: If somehow your child still clamors to go outside, lightly wrap her in mosquito netting and hope she doesn't trip. Give her sunscreen, moonscreen and, when Mars is rising, Marsscreen. Reapply every 10 minutes (after first taking off the mosquito netting). A good rule of thumb: By the time you have re-wrapped your child in mosquito netting, it is time to take it off and reapply sun/moon/Marsscreen. When she is halfway unwrapped, apply bug spray.

SPF: Only use sunscreen with an SPF number beyond what your house is worth. Children should be dipped into a vat of sunscreen on the half-hour. Better still, if you own a pool, fill it with sunscreen. Remind kids not to open their eyes underwater.

PICNIC FOOD: Food spoils after it has been out in the sun, unless it has roots and lives in the dirt. Then it's a tree and it is safe to eat, but not to touch.

JUST A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT SUNSCREEN: If your child can sit on a chaise lounge without sliding off, he's not wearing enough. For extra UV protection, consider sending him to a planet farther from the sun. For Jupiter, pack healthy snacks

that can stay fresh for 365,000,000 miles. Also, some games.

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