

risk alert



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Staying safe during the sunny days of summer

Along with the warm, joyous times of the summer come outdoor activities, days at the beach and fun in the sun. However, pesky insects and harmful ultraviolet rays also accompany this season and may present the possibility of injury or illness to those who participate in your religious institution's summer activities. Most often, a small bee sting or a rosy-cheeked face is not a matter that requires serious medical attention, but in rare cases, some insect bites and severe sunburns can be fatal.

According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC), every year, more than 5,000 people are bitten by the black widow and brown recluse spiders—two extremely poisonous arachnids commonly found in the Midwestern and Southeastern states of the United States. Of those bitten, more than 1,800 required medical attention and 36 experienced life-threatening symptoms. Additionally, each year, more than 11,200 cases of stings from bees, wasps and hornets are reported to the AAPCC—many requiring medical attention.

Another injury common to outdoor lovers in the summer season is sunburn. Although it is usually not deadly, sunburn can lead to skin irritation or pain and possibly complex health problems in the future.

Injuries occur when precautions are not taken

In most cases, run-ins with poisonous spiders, ticks and bees and overexposures to the sun are not planned, but the risks are usually not properly prevented either. This summer, keep those involved at your organization's summer events out of harm's way.

Bites and stings

- Black widow and brown recluse spiders live in dark, warm, dry environments—so stay aware of these spiders while in or near places, such as barns, attics, woodpiles and old tires.
- Wear protective clothing, such as gloves, when working outdoors.
- Always shake out clothing before returning indoors.
- Check camping equipment, like sleeping bags, before use.
- Check bed covers before climbing in at night.
- Comb through hair and check your body head to toe after any outdoor activity.
- Keep the facility's lawn well maintained.
- Move any brush or woodpiles out of areas that see a lot of activity.

(Over)

Sunburn

- Keep infants under one year old out of direct sunlight.
- Always use a sunscreen with at least SPF 15 when outdoors and periodically reapply sunscreen throughout exposure, as perspiration and water will hinder its protective effectiveness. Also consider using lip balm with a sun protection agent.
- Limit sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Stay aware of surrounding reflective surfaces, such as water.

Accidents may happen, so remain prepared

Your organization has taken all the precautions, but you can't control the sun or the bugs. Most injuries will not be serious, but always treat the bite or sunburn immediately to avoid any further problems.

Bites and stings

- Before any action is taken, always find out if the individual has allergies to the insect that caused the injury.
- Those with anaphylaxis (a severe allergic reaction to bee/wasp/hornet stings) may be aware of their allergy and carry an EpiPen. Always use this first.
- If the victim appears to have trouble breathing, call 9-1-1 immediately.
- Never use your fingers to remove a stinger. Instead, use a tweezers or the edge of a plastic card, such as a driver's license or credit card.
- Wash the area with warm, soapy water to avoid the possibility of infection.
- Apply a cold pack to the area to reduce swelling and, if the injury is poisonous, circulation of the venom.
- Always remove a tick immediately. To do so, grasp the arachnid with a tweezers where it is nearest to the skin and lightly pull until the tick lets go (this may take a couple minutes). Once it is removed, dispose of the tick.
- If a ring or rash around the area of the tick bite becomes visible or the victim experiences flu-like symptoms, visit your local health care center within 36 hours, as these may be early, but treatable, signs of Lyme disease. The doctor will likely prescribe oral antibiotics, which have proven to be effective in curing the disease in its primitive stages.

Sunburn

- Immediately leave the area of sun exposure when sunburn is detected.
- Apply an aloe-based moisturizer to the affected area.
- Use a pain reliever or take a cool (not ice cold) bath to alleviate pain.
- Avoid further sun exposure while sunburn remains present.
- Do not scrub or shave affected skin, as this may cause further irritation.

Leave serious injuries to the professionals

Although most injuries caused by insects will not be considered medically serious, some bites may be deadly. The AAPCC offers a Poison Help hotline, available to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The hotline serves as a key medical information resource and helps reduce costly emergency room visits.

- Poison Help hotline — (800) 222-1222
- AAPCC Web site — www.aapcc.org

For a complete collection of the Risk Alert series, visit our Web site and look in the Safety Resources section.