



# Outdoor Health Tips

Warm, sunny weather usually means more family time, fresh fruits and vegetables, and outdoor activities. While outdoor activities such as hiking, swimming, or gardening are fun, they can also lead to some common health problems like sunburn or poison oak. You can help prevent some of these problems by following the tips in this handout.

You can often treat common skin problems at home using information from this handout. But some problems may be more severe and even require medical attention. If you feel that your health problem is not improving or is getting worse, please call your doctor or nurse practitioner right away.

## Sunburns

Staying out in the sun for a long time is not good for anyone's skin, especially infants and children. Infants and children can easily burn because their skin is very tender. Teach your children good sun habits that will last a lifetime.

- A good way to avoid sunburns is to wear long-sleeved shirts, pants and a hat when in the sun.
- Wear sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Be sure to apply a good amount of sunscreen to you and your child. Most sunscreens need to be reapplied every 3 to 4 hours as well as immediately after swimming or heavy exercise (sweating).
- A "waterproof" sunscreen usually stays on for about 30 minutes in water. Sunscreen will stay on longer if it is applied 30 to 60 minutes before getting into the water. This will give it time to dry.
- Try to stay out of the sun from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., when the sun is strongest.
- The sun can damage your eyes, too. Always wear sunglasses with ultraviolet (UV) protection when you are outside.

## Insect Bites (Mosquitoes and Bees)

Insect bites can often cause redness, swelling, and itching. In some people, especially children, the redness and swelling may be worse. Unless you or your child is allergic, these bites will go away on their own in a few days. Wearing clothing that covers the skin and using insect repellent are two of the best ways to avoid insect bites.

- When needed, apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothing and shoes, as well as to any exposed skin areas. Check the label of the product. For children, insect repellent should not contain more than 10 percent DEET. Do not put repellent on the hands of small children, because they often put their hands in their mouths. If repellent is put on the skin, wash it off at the end of the day.
- Insect repellent brands such as Off®! or Cutter®\* are good for children and work for 6 to 12 hours.
- For mosquito bites, use ice or a cold pack to help with itching.
- For bee stings, make sure the stinger is removed and then apply ice or a cold pack.

## Poison Oak

The best way to avoid getting a rash from poison oak is to stay away from the plant altogether. Learn what poison oak looks like and watch for it when walking outdoors. Poison oak leaves usually grow in clusters of three. They can be green or red in the spring and summer, and orange or brown in the fall.

- If you come into contact with poison oak, wash the area where you touched it with cool water within 10 minutes to remove the plant oil from the skin.
- Wash anything that may have come into contact with the plant including your clothes, shoes, shoelaces, and even your dog.
- If applied early, a steroid cream like Cortaid\* can reduce the itching. Put the cream on the area with the rash 3 to 4 times a day for 10 to 14 days.
- The sores should dry up and stop itching within about 2 weeks. In the meantime, cut your child's fingernails short and encourage him or her not to scratch.

## Tick Bites

A tick is a tiny insect that attaches itself to the body. Ticks are often hard to remove, so it's best not to let them get on your skin at all. Tick bites have been associated with Lyme disease, but Lyme disease is very rare in California.

- When hiking in the woods, wear long sleeves and pants and tuck the ends of your pants into your socks. Apply insect repellent containing DEET to shoes, socks, and any exposed skin areas.
- If you are out in the woods, check regularly for any ticks on you and your child. Look especially in the hair where ticks like to hide.
- To remove a tick, use tweezers to gently pull the tick straight out. When pulling, grab the tick as close to your skin as possible. Wash the area and apply an antiseptic such as Neosporin or Bacitracin\*. If a rash, fever, headache, or fatigue develops after four days, call your doctor or nurse practitioner.

## Water Safety

Drowning is the leading cause of death, disability, and injury for children under 5 years of age in California. Teaching your child how to swim is very important, but it is not a guarantee against drowning.

- Watch your child **at all times** near any water (pools, lakes, beaches, hot tubs, buckets, toilets, bathtubs, etc.). Never leave a child alone near water for any reason, even to answer the phone, the doorbell or go to the bathroom. A child can drown in less than two minutes, even if he or she knows how to swim.
- Swimming pools should be fenced on all sides and have a self-latching gate. The latch should be out of your child's reach and facing the pool side.

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.