

July 2, 2018

Be safe this July 4th holiday with these tips

MOBILE, Alabama — The Fourth of July is one of America’s favorite holidays. However, with the large amount of fun also come many health and safety challenges.

The holiday traditionally includes fireworks, cookouts and maybe a trip to the beach. Whatever people have planned, the American Red Cross, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer these tips to help them enjoy their holiday and steps they can follow to be safe.

FIREWORKS -- The safest way to enjoy fireworks is to attend a public fireworks show put on by professionals. Stay at least 500 feet away from the show. Many states outlaw most fireworks. If someone is setting fireworks off at home, they should follow these safety steps:

- Never give fireworks to small children, and always follow the instructions on the packaging.
- Keep a supply of water close by as a precaution.
- Make sure the person lighting fireworks always wears eye protection.
- Light only one firework at a time and never attempt to relight “a dud.”
- Store fireworks in a cool, dry place away from children and pets.
- Never throw or point a firework toward people, animals, vehicles, structures or flammable materials.
- Leave any area immediately where untrained amateurs are using fireworks.

GRILLING -- Every year people in this country are injured while using backyard charcoal or gas grills. Follow these steps to safely cook up treats for the backyard barbecue:

- Always supervise a barbecue grill when in use.
- Never grill indoors – not in your house, camper, tent, or any enclosed area.
- Make sure everyone, including the pets, stays away from the grill.
- Keep the grill out in the open, away from the house, the deck, tree branches, or anything that could catch fire.
- Use the long-handled tools especially made for cooking on the grill to keep the chef safe.
- Never add charcoal starter fluid when coals have already been ignited.
- Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions when using grills.

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PICNICS -- Plan to take only the amounts of food you will use. Most foods are safe for short periods when stored with ice or frozen gel packs in a proper cooler. Creamy or custard foods and salads using store-bought mayonnaise are safe, if kept cold in a cooler.

- No cooler? Not a problem. Plan your menu using the following items: Fruits, vegetables, hard cheese, canned/dried meats or fish, dry cereal, bread, peanut butter, crackers.
- Use separate plates and utensils for raw and cooked meat and poultry and ready to eat foods, like raw fruits and vegetables.
- Use a food thermometer to make sure meat and poultry are cooked hot enough to kill harmful germs.
- Don't leave food at room temperature for longer than two hours – one hour if the outside temperature is over 90 degrees. Keep perishable food in an insulated cooler packed with ice or ice packs.
- At the end of the picnic or as soon as you return home, clean your cooler with water and a mild detergent and rinse thoroughly. Then, make sure to wipe it completely dry before storing. If lingering odors are an issue, a quick wipe with a vanilla extract-soaked paper towel can freshen things up. Finally, if your cooler has a drain plug, make sure it is open to prevent moisture from accumulating during storage.

BEACH SAFETY -- If someone's visit to the shore includes swimming in the ocean, they should learn how to swim in the surf and only swim at a lifeguarded beach, within the designated swimming area. Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards. Other safety tips include:

- Keep alert for local weather conditions. Check to see if any warning signs or flags are posted.
- Always swim with a buddy.
- Have young children and inexperienced swimmers wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket.
- Protect the neck – don't dive headfirst. Walk carefully into open waters.
- Keep a close eye and constant attention on children and adults while at the beach. Wave action can cause someone to lose their footing, even in shallow water.
- Watch out for aquatic life. Water plants and animals may be dangerous. Avoid patches of plants and leave animals alone.

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RIP CURRENTS -- These are responsible for deaths on our nation's beaches every year, and for most of the rescues performed by lifeguards. Any beach with breaking waves may have rip currents. Be aware of the danger of rip currents and remember the following:

- If someone is caught in a rip current, swim parallel to the shore until out of the current. Once free, they should turn and swim toward shore. If they can't swim to the shore, they should float or tread water until free of the rip current and then head toward shore.
- Stay at least 100 feet away from piers and jetties. Permanent rip currents often exist near these structures.

SUN PROTECTION -- Limit exposure to direct sunlight between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., and wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a protection factor of at least 15. Reapply sunscreen often. Remember to drink plenty of water regularly, even if not thirsty. Avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine in them. Protect the eyes by wearing sunglasses that will absorb 100 percent of UV sunlight. Protect the feet, because the sand can burn them, and glass and other sharp objects can cut them.

TEMPERATURE -- During hot weather, watch for signs of heat stroke — hot, red skin; changes in consciousness; rapid, weak pulse; rapid, shallow breathing. If it's suspected someone is suffering from heat stroke:

- Call 9-1-1 and move the person to a cooler place.
- Quickly cool the body by applying cool, wet towels to the skin (or misting it with water) and fanning the person.
- Watch for signs of breathing problems and make sure the airway is clear. Keep the person lying down.

INSECTS -- Bugs, including mosquitoes, ticks, and some flies can spread diseases like Zika, Dengue and Lyme disease.

- Use EPA-registered insect repellents that contain at least 20 percent DEET for protection against mosquitoes, ticks and other bugs.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, socks and a hat. Tuck your shirt into your pants, and tuck your pants into your socks for maximum protection.
- Check yourself and your children for ticks.