

REPORTS

Safety first

Take precautions now to survive the summer sun's rays

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Heat and sun can be a deadly combination, whether it's at the beach or a barbecue, on a soccer field or golf course. Health experts like Marianne Simanek say it's easy to keep the entire family healthy this summer by following a few rules for fun in the sun.

One of the most common questions Simanek hears is about exercising safely in summer heat and sun. Simanek tells participants enrolled in St. Mary Mercy Hospital health programs to drink plenty of water. She and her family spice up theirs with fresh fruit.

"I tell people when exercising to do it in morning or evening, not in the heat of the day between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.," said Simanek, a registered nurse and director of community outreach at St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia. "Eight ounces or a tall glass of water before, another eight ounces during and another eight ounces after. You dehydrate faster, not only because of heat, but activity."

Don't eat big meals. Eat light and more often. Avoid foods high in protein that increase metabolic heat.

"Enjoy fruits and vegetables, eat healthy," Simanek said. "It's easier this time of year with fresh fruits and vegetables in season. To stay hydrated, slice up lemon and pop in water or add a slice of orange or lime to give a different flavor. At our house, we wait for the raspberries to ripen and then pop in a glass of water with ice cubes. It's the best tea to drink."

Dr. Michael Calice sees an increase in patients with heat-related illness in the Emergency Center at St. Mary Mercy Hospital when temperatures soar into the 90s and the humidity is high. Toward the end of last week, the waiting room was filling with patients who didn't practice prevention. Elderly relatives and neighbors and small children are especially prone to heat exhaustion, so keep an eye on them.

Dehydration is common among elderly and young children," said Calice, interim director of the Emergency Center. "They have less capacity to deal with fluid losses and they're less likely to take a drink when they need it."

Water, vomits or becomes unconscious. He or she could be having a heat stroke, which is a life-threatening emergency. Continue to cool the body until help arrives.

"You need to keep well-hydrated," Calice said. "Gatorade and the exercise drinks are helpful, because they're well-balanced with sugar and salt."

"With heat stroke, the body loses the ability to maintain a normal temperature. The body stops sweating. The skin feels hot. The best thing to do is to avoid it in the first place. If you don't have air conditioning, go to the mall. A fan is helpful, but if you're starting to notice some of the symptoms, seek medical attention. They should be seen by somebody."

Danger lurks even after the sun goes down on a summer day. Dusk to dawn is prime mosquito biting time and with



It comes the risk of contracting West Nile virus, a potentially severe illness with flu-like symptoms. Cases flare up in summer and fall. For more information on the virus, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at www.cdc.gov/westnile.

"It's going to be important with the heat and after all the rain to protect yourself from mosquito bites," Calice said. "West Nile virus can cause encephalitis and there's no known treatment for it."

"Evening is not the time to be doing gardening or lawn cutting," Simanek added. "Don't stir them up. Be aware of standing water, including bird baths and fountains. People like to sit around and observe, but don't. Be aware of repellents. Read them carefully. Some say keep small children and pets away, some even for up to 24 hours. Self-applied repellents with DEET are most effective against mosquitoes."

Wear protective clothing and

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Dr. Michael Calice
St. Mary Mercy Hospital

spry clothing, as mosquitoes are able to bite through thin materials. This advice is just as essential when participating in activities under the sun.

"Guys go out without a shirt and women sleeveless, but you still need to be protected," Simanek said. "Try to wear a shirt with sleeves, appropriate tennis shoes and socks."

And don't forget the family pet.

Bug bites, heat exhaustion and stroke can seriously affect the family pet as well. Don't let your dog overdo. If outside, provide a shaded area and plenty of water.

Excessive panting is a sign of heat exhaustion. If your dog is weak or staggering, cool him down immediately. This is an emergency situation and there's no time to get him to a veterinarian. Apply an ice pack to his head and put him in a tub of cool water. If he's too large, use the hose to lower his body temperature. As soon as it stabilizes, drive him to the vet.

As in humans, heat stroke can leave permanent damage, so don't leave a dog in the car. An open window will not stop the car from heating to dangerous levels.

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Immunizations

St. Mary Mercy Hospital of Livonia is sponsoring a free immunization clinic with the Redford Union school district. Vaccines are free for any child 18 years of age and under who meets one of the following eligibility requirements: no health insurance; enrolled in Medicaid insurance; underinsured (does not pay full cost of vaccines); or American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Children must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian to receive immunizations. Bring your child's immunization record to the clinic at Redford Union's Beck Education Center Library, 2700 Bennett Road, located between Six Mile and Seven Mile roads.

The program will be offered 1:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 19. To schedule an appointment call (313) 592-3347. If no one answers, please leave your name and daytime phone number for a return call.

Screening

Beaumont Hospital will offer blood vessel disease screening 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, July 25, at Beaumont Hospital in the Vascular Services Center (3601 W. 13 Mile Road) in Royal Oak.

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