

## PRINT-Summer Health Hazards: When to Get Urgent Care

It took a while getting here but summer is in high gear and with many people enjoying the outdoors over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July week, there are hazards that create problems that might go beyond what you should treat at home. How do you know when to seek medical treatment? Here are tips for some common summer hazards that are bringing people into OSF HealthCare Urgo urgent care centers.

### **Bug Bites and Stings**

Months of rain and flooding have created conditions ripe for floodwater mosquitoes, gnats and there are the usual bites and stings. Most bug bites and stings are minor but Melinda Cooling, OSF HealthCare vice president for advance practice and Urgo urgent care says clean the area but seek medical care if redness or swelling persists.

“If you get a bug bite that is getting red, swollen, tender starting to ooze a lot or causing you more discomfort, then those are things that are best to get evaluated by a health care professional.”

West Nile virus, which is transmitted through an infected mosquito causes flu-like symptoms, including fever, headache, stiff neck, body aches, and skin rash and should be treated early with intravenous anti-viral therapy.

Lyme disease is transmitted through the bite of an infected tick, and can cause fever, headaches, fatigue, and a skin rash that looks like a circular red patch, or “bull’s-eye.” Patients who are treated with antibiotics in the early stages of the infection usually recover rapidly and completely.

Most spider bites are not harmful but if possible, make sure to identify the type of spider responsible because a bite from a brown recluse, common in the Midwest, can be serious. The recluse spider has a dark violin-shaped mark on the combined head and midsection and its venom can cause flesh to die. Stay calm to prevent the venom from spreading and seek medical attention.

### **Sunburn and Sun Poisoning**

Ninety-five percent of all radiation from the sun is UVA which is not able to be absorbed much by ozone. These rays cause cancer. Wear sunscreen with at least a 30 SPF protection and reapply every two hours.

It takes only 15 minutes to get a sunburn and you can treat slight burns at home with over-the-counter pain relievers, cool compresses, baths, and soothing skin ointment but Cooling suggests medical attention if the skin is more than just hot to the touch.

“It’s blistering, it’s oozing, you find that you’re having fevers, you’re really nauseated, you’re having other symptoms that seem to be more extensive than sort of the normal burn; those are things you should seek medical attention for,” said Cooling.

At OSF Urgo urgent care, several patients who have come in with sun poisoning are also dehydrated. Cooling advises to keep drinking water in hot weather, even if you don’t feel thirsty.

## **Ear Pain**

Many children and adults suffer from swimmer's ear, an infection that happens when water remains in your outer ear canal. You should seek medical attention to avoid the infection from spreading and, as Cooling suggests, to make sure there's nothing else causing the pain.

"You feel like it's swimmer's ear but we never know has something flown into the ear? Have they put something in their ear that could be causing a problem? So, actually visualizing the ear and the ear drum is very helpful for a health provider to offer guidance."

## **Cuts and Wounds from Working Outdoors**

We've all heard the warnings about wearing protective eyewear, footwear and earplugs when running the lawnmower, chain saw, weed eater or even pruning trees and shrubs but not everyone heeds the advice. Even with some gear, cuts happen.

Cooling says you should seek urgent care if the wound is gaping so that you can't gently press sides together and stop the bleeding, if it is a result of an animal or human bite, or if it is a result of being impaled by an object. Also, you might want to seek medical attention if it is on a cosmetically significant place such as your face or near a sensitive area.

There are some general rules that can help in most situations:

- Don't attempt to remove foreign objects
- Clean and elevate wounds (don't use hydrogen peroxide)
- Apply direct pressure to bleeding wounds
- Bites and dirty wounds require special treatment
- When in doubt, seek medical attention

[OSF Urgo](#) urgent care can handle most minor injuries and ailments with the ability to provide x-rays, common prescriptions, and to serve walk-in patients.