

Stay safe on the water, part two

More sun and rising mercury mean people will head outdoors to lakes and forests. But something as simple as drinking river water can lead to an illness that derails your spring.

[Bethany Huelskoetter](#), APRN, a family medicine provider at OSF HealthCare, hits the major safety points about leisure time on the water.

- Bug bites: Coat yourself with bug spray to start the day, and avoid hanging out in tall grass where pests can hide. If your bug bite comes with skin tissue damage, chest pain, muscle cramps, sweating or nausea, see a provider right away. Also, watch for a rash in the shape of [a bullseye](#), which is common with tick bites. To remove a tick, use tweezers to get close to the skin, and gently pull the insect out. Avoid twisting and yanking.
- Life jackets: [Illinois](#) and [Michigan](#) outline their life jacket laws. And some additional suggestions from Huelskoetter: for young kids, use a life jacket that straps on like a diaper. Life jackets that go over the chest could come up over the child's head, and they could slip out or have trouble breathing. And read the life jacket label to make sure it's right for you based on your chest size and weight.

Huelskoetter also says a life jacket or any wet object has a risk of mold. So, dry the life jackets by hanging them in the sun.

- Fire extinguishers: Like life jackets, Illinois and Michigan laws require a United States Coast Guard-approved fire extinguisher on board most watercraft. Boat fires do happen, Huelskoetter says, and a fire extinguisher can mean the difference between a small fire and an explosion.
- Dirty water: It's tough for kids who want to explore, but Huelskoetter says you should keep lake water out of your eyes and mouth. For kids, that could mean wearing goggles.

"There are bacteria, parasites and other microorganisms that can get in your eyes. Also, don't open your mouth underwater. You don't want to drink that water," Huelskoetter says. "If you swim in a lake and your eyes get red or itchy, that's a sign you might have an infection from an organism in the water. So we want to put you on the proper antibiotic or whatever medication we feel is best.

If you drink the water, gastrointestinal upset can occur. If you have nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, you definitely want to be seen by a provider. We'll do testing to determine what bacteria or parasite you came in contact with so we can treat appropriately," Huelskoetter adds.

- Alcohol: Drinking responsibly can be a part of your day on the water. But Huelskoetter says the rules are just like on land: A blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08% is the legal limit, so be aware if you're the boat captain.
- Fumes: My group is in the open air. How much should we worry about boat exhaust?

Huelskoetter says you should be fine, but make sure your watercraft has good ventilation. You can also buy carbon monoxide detectors made to clip on boats or life jackets. This can be extra helpful if your boat has an enclosed cabin, Huelskoetter points out.

- Spoiled food: Of course, you'll want to eat on your boating or fishing trip. That could include perishable items like a sandwich.

Putting the food and drink in an ice-filled cooler isn't enough, Huelskoetter says.

"Keeping your cooler covered and out of the sun is going to do wonders. It'll keep that ice nice and cool," she says.

"Never eat anything that's been sitting out, and now it's hot," Huelskoetter adds. "Once food reaches room temperature, you want to be careful. You can go by smell, too. If it doesn't smell right, don't eat it."

Getting help

Have a first aid kit for minor injuries. For major injuries like a head or limb wound, gently move the person to land and call 9-1-1. The word "gently" is important to avoid further injury like paralysis.

Experts also point out that cell phone service can be spotty in the wilderness. So you should also have a global positioning system (GPS) device.