

Stay safe on the farm

Growing up on a farm a couple miles from the clinic where she works, [Bethany Huelskoetter, APRN](#), knows the importance of playing it safe in a rural setting, whether you're young or old. With National Farm Health and Safety Week coming up, Huelskoetter, a nurse practitioner at OSF HealthCare, says now is the time to review the basics of farm safety.

- Heavy machinery: For big equipment like a tractor or auger, know how to use it before you get in the driver's seat. Know how to shut the machine off quickly in an emergency. When behind the wheel, know your surroundings. Go slowly and be very cautious in places like driveways where kids run around. Wear fitted, not loose, clothing.

"Machines have shafts and moving parts," Huelskoetter explains. "You don't want to have loose sleeves or something that can get caught in that mechanism and cause a catastrophic injury."

- Driving smaller vehicles: Children and young adults are often found whizzing around a rural property on an all-terrain vehicle or motorbike. That can go south quickly, Huelskoetter warns. A passenger could be flung from the vehicle and get injured or killed.

Wear a helmet and buckle the seatbelt. Don't drive too fast, and don't make sharp turns, especially on loose gravel. Sit in the vehicles the way they are intended. Don't hang off the back or side. And never operate after drinking alcohol.

- Toxic materials: Farmers and homeowners often handle chemicals like pesticides. Huelskoetter advises reading the label so you know what you're touching. The label should also tell you what protective equipment to wear and whether the product is toxic to pets.

The [American Association of Poison Control Centers](#) website has a national hotline and state-by-state resources for exposure to or ingestion of toxic materials. Huelskoetter says to have that phone number in your cell phone. When you call, someone will ask you basic questions about what happened and tell you what to do. You may be able to treat the issue at home, or the hotline may advise you to go to the nearest emergency department.

- Animal bites: Kids playing in nature may encounter "all kinds of crazy things," Huelskoetter says. Bites from spiders, snakes and raccoons can happen. The first step, she says: clean the bite thoroughly with soap and water. Then, cover it with a band aid or clean cloth and go to the hospital.

"You never want to mess around with an animal bite," Huelskoetter says. "Animals' mouths are very dirty. So you want to start the bitten person on antibiotics quickly."

Huelskoetter adds that while we view dogs and cats as domesticated, you never know if they have not been vaccinated and are carrying diseases like rabies.

- Heat: Two common heat illnesses are heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Huelskoetter says heat exhaustion generally describes when you overheat. Experts advise to move to a cool place, sip water and put cool, wet cloths on your body. If symptoms don't improve or you start vomiting,

call 9-1-1. Symptoms of the more serious heat stroke include hot, red, dry or damp skin, a fast, strong pulse, headache, dizziness, nausea and confusion. Call 9-1-1 right away. Untreated cases of heat stroke can cause permanent damage to organs or death.

Some tips to avoid heat illness: Avoid being outside in the middle of the day. Take breaks in a cool area during the day. Keep a cooler full of water and drinks with electrolytes, like Gatorade. Sugar-free sports drinks are a healthier choice than the regular ones. Have some healthy snacks, too, like popcorn, pretzels or nuts.

“Whenever your body is sweating, it’s depleting its calories and energy,” Huelskoetter says. “So your body doesn’t just need water. It also needs nutrients to help you keep going throughout the day.”

- Be prepared: Work or play with a buddy. That way, someone is there if you get hurt. If you must go alone, let people know your plans before you leave for the day. Where on the property will you be? When are you expected back? If you don’t return at the right time, that’s a sign for your loved ones to look for you. Keep your phone charged in case you need to make an emergency call. Take a mobile charger with you. And if an emergency happens, call 9-1-1 and [take an ambulance to the hospital](#). Don’t drive yourself or have someone drive you.