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Know the risks that warm weather brings

After a long winter, most North of Boston families are anxiously awaiting the freedom that summer brings for outdoor activity and exercise. It is important, however, to be aware of the unique risks associated with the season and make plans to guard against them to ensure the memories are positive.

Mosquitoes and ticks: Most parents know that these insects should be avoided since they carry serious diseases commonly seen locally including West Nile Virus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and Lyme disease. Keep children away from mosquitoes when possible, especially in the evening when they are most prevalent, and wear long sleeves and pants when in tall grasses and shrubs.

In addition, use DEET carefully to protect everyone in the family including infants older than 2 months of age. DEET is safe in concentrations between 10 and 30 percent, with the stronger preparations lasting longer. Repellent should be applied to children only once a day, according to directions, on exposed unbroken skin, not under clothing.

Sun Exposure: Not long ago, the worry surrounding prolonged sun exposure was a sunburn, considered by some, worthwhile pain on the way to the perfect tan. We now know that with our changing atmosphere, the risks have increased. Sunburns are associated with skin cancer even in young adults. Prevention should begin early as between 60 and 80 percent of lifetime sun exposure occurs before age 18.

Malignant melanoma (skin cancer) is now the second most common cancer in women 25-34 years of age. Babies and infants under 6 months of age should be kept out of direct sunlight. Kids should be dressed in lightweight fabrics that cover them in the sun. Standard clothing fabrics however provide only equivalent SPF (sun protection factor) of about 10. However, many children's stores have innovative clothing available with SPF values of 15-30. Waterproof sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher should be applied 30 minutes before exposure on

children over 6 months old, and reapplied as directed. Be aware that severe burns can still occur if exposure is prolonged.

Overuse, Overtraining, and Burnout: After a long winter inside, summer brings a plunge into athletic endeavors. The June issue of Pediatrics cautions that overuse injuries are increasing, eventually leading to burnout with a long term detrimental impact on sporting activities.

Overuse injury to bone, muscle, and tendon occurs when exercise is strenuous and repetitive without allowing time to heal. Pain often progresses to such a degree that it limits the young athlete's performance. At its worst, the pain is unremitting even at rest.

Avoid the problem all together by keeping athletics in perspective. Consider youth participation in athletics as character building and an opportunity for healthy physical and emotional growth, not a means to prove one's worth. Young athletes should not be in a competitive, sport specific training or activity more than 5 days a week. Allow healing to occur may extend their sporting activity and actually increase their focus and interest.

Even if a child excels at a sport, make them take two to three months off per year from sports specific activities. If the young athlete begins to complain of pain, fatigue, or behavioral issue develop, consider burnout. Have an open conversation with your child to gain an understanding of what the issues might be and jointly develop intervention plans.

Summer presents additional challenges for parents as injury risks multiply when children have increased free time. Be conscientious about the dangers, which also include everything from water sports, to ATV's, lawn mowers, and automobiles. Know where your kids are, understand how they spend their time, and make certain they are aware of dangers inherent to their lifestyle.

More information is available form your pediatrician or at AAP.org

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