

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Five Health Tips That Can Help You Enjoy the Great Outdoors!

Coldwater, MI. Being active is important and Michigan has lots of great places to walk, jog, hike, bike and camp. In order to help you enjoy your summer activities to the fullest, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers the following summer time tips:

When Outdoors, Apply Insect Repellent: Warm weather makes it easier to spend more time outside, but it also means you are more likely to get bug bites and stings. Mosquitoes can carry diseases, such as West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis. Ticks may carry Lyme disease. Most reactions to bees and other stinging insects are mild, but severe allergic reactions can be deadly. In order to keep the pesky bugs away when outdoors, apply an insect repellent. Repellents that contain DEET or Picaridin have been shown to be most effective. Use enough repellent to cover exposed skin or clothing, being careful not to apply to cuts, wounds, or irritated skin. Be sure to avoid spraying products directly on your face. Spray the product on your hands and then rub them carefully over the face, avoiding eyes and mouth.

Check for Ticks: Wearing light-colored clothing while outdoors will make spotting a tick easier. Be sure to check for ticks after outdoor activities. Ticks like to hide in warm moist places, so be sure to check: under the arms; in and around the ears; inside the belly button; back of the knees; in and around the hair; between the legs; and around the waist

If you find a tick, remove it with tweezers. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull it straight up. After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol, an iodine scrub, or soap and water. Also, be sure to check your pets that go outdoors for ticks as they can transport them inside. Using tick control products, such as tick collars, sprays, shampoos, or "top spot" medications, can help your animals tick-free.

Know About Poisonous Plants: Common problems with poisonous plants arise from contact with the sap oils that can cause an allergic skin reaction. Michigan forests are known to contain poison ivy and poison sumac. Less known, but even more threatening is the majestic Giant Hogweed, a tall flowering plant, which has been reported in the area.

These plants can cause a host of health problems ranging from itchy rashes to painful and burning blisters. If sap from Giant Hogweed gets into the eyes, it can cause blindness.

The best way to avoid contact with poison ivy and sumac plants is to:

- Wear long sleeves, long pants, boots, and gloves when working outdoors. Clothing that does get exposed to these plants should be washed separately in hot water with detergent to get rid of any sap residue.
- Clean gardening and lawn tools with rubbing alcohol (isopropanol or isopropyl alcohol) or soap and lots of water. Urushiol, the sap oil from the plant that causes the skin rash, can remain active on the surface of objects for up to 5 years. Be sure to wear disposable gloves during this process.
- Do not burn plants that may be poison ivy or poison sumac. Inhaling smoke from burning plants can cause severe allergic respiratory problems.

Avoid any contact with Giant Hogweed. *It is very hazardous.* If you have seen a plant that appears to be Giant Hogweed contact the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development at 1-800-292-3939.

Be Aware of the Dangers of the Sun: Over-exposure to the sun can increase your risk for heat-related illnesses and/or skin cancer. The skin needs protection from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays whenever you're outdoors. To prevent being over-exposed to harmful UV rays, be sure to do the following:

- Seek shade, especially during the midday when UV rays are strongest.
- Cover up by putting on a t-shirt, long shorts or a beach cover-up which can provide some protection from the sun.
- Get a hat, preferably one with a wide brim that shades the face, scalp, ears and neck.



Poison Ivy



Poison Sumac



Giant Hogweed

- Wear sunglasses to protect the eyes and block both UVA and UVB rays.
- Apply sunscreen that contains at least a SPF 15 blocker and offers UVA and UVB protection. Don't forget to reapply every 30 minutes and after getting out of the water.

Stay Hydrated: High temperatures and humidity increases the body's need for fluids. Be sure to take in plenty of fluids if you are active outdoors during the summer months. Good sources of fluid include water, sports drinks, juices, soups and smoothies. Fruits and vegetables are also good sources. By incorporating the following suggestions into your daily practices, you can help to assure you are taking in enough fluids:

- Carry a water bottle for easy access when you are at work or running errands.
- Freeze some freezer-safe water bottles. Take one with you for ice-cold water all day long.
- Choose water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages. Substituting water for one 20-ounce sugar-sweetened soda will save you about 240 calories.
- Give your water a little pizzazz by adding a wedge of lime or lemon. This may improve the taste, and you just might drink more water than you usually do.
- If you choose to exercise outdoors, be sure to replenish your fluid losses by drinking during the exercise and by drinking several glasses of water once you are done.

Summer is a great time to get out doors and have fun in the sun! Be sure your summer is extra enjoyable by following these five healthy summer tips! To learn more about how to stay healthy, visit our website at www.bhsj.org and click on our Frequently Asked Questions button where you can learn more about how to keep you and your family healthy and safe, all year round!

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