

Stay safe outdoors with these summer tips

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SUN EXPOSURE, INSECT BITES

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A study last year found that nearly half of U.S. sunscreens didn't offer enough UVA protection to meet European Union standards. Some experts say the situation won't improve until the FDA approves modern ingredients with better protection.

Memorial Day kicked off the "101 Critical Days of Summer" and Fort Meade is focused on letting residents and employees know how to safely enjoy the season that runs through Labor Day.

Despite the recent spate of rain, sun exposure is a serious risk during the summer and year-round, said Karen Bartholet, a public health nurse at Kimbrough Ambulatory Care Center.

"It is important to protect your skin from the effects of the sun all year, although UV rays are the greatest during spring and summer in North America — especially between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.," Bartholet said. "It is important to wear a sun protection factor of 15 or higher.

"When using sun protection, be sure to use a broad spectrum sunscreen that will offer sun protection against both ultraviolet A and ultraviolet B rays. Be sure to read the directions carefully and know how often to reapply."

Damaging Rays

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, reapplication should occur after swimming and strenuous activity, and regularly throughout the day. The CDC also advises waiting 30 minutes after the initial application of sunscreen before going outdoors.

Just a few serious sunburns can increase your risk of skin cancer. And you don't have to be at the pool, beach or on vacation to get too much sun.

In addition to using appropriate sunscreen, there are other ways to reduce the risk of sun damage, according to the CDC.

UV rays are strongest and most harmful midday, so it's best to plan indoor activities then. If this is not possible, seek shade under a tree, an umbrella or pop-up tent.

Use these options to prevent sunburn, not to seek relief after it's happened.

Cover up.

Long-sleeved shirts and long pants and skirts can provide protection from UV rays. Clothes made from tightly woven fabric offer the best protection.

A wet T-shirt offers much less UV protection than a dry one, and darker colors may offer more protection than lighter colors.

Some clothing certified under international standards comes with information on its ultraviolet protection factor.

Get a hat.

Hats that shade the face, scalp, ears and neck are easy to use and give great protection. Baseball caps are popular, but they don't protect ears and neck. If you choose a cap, be sure to protect exposed areas with sunscreen.

Wear sunglasses.

They protect your eyes from UV rays, which can lead to cataracts later in life. Look for sunglasses that wrap around and block as close to 100 percent of both UVA and UVB rays as possible.

Bug Off

So you've lathered up with SPF. Think you're ready to go out and have fun? Think again.

The sun isn't the only danger to your health when you step outside.

Another consideration when enjoying the warm weather is keeping insects at bay. That starts with getting rid of the threat before insects have a chance to make a meal out of you and your loved ones.

Environmental Protection Agency-registered insect repellents containing DEET, Picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus or 2-Undecanone will help prevent mosquito [and tick] bites, Bartholet said.

Mosquitoes can carry diseases like Zika and yellow fever. Ticks carry disease such as Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

Bug sprays aren't 100 percent effective against tick bites, noted Bartholet. But wearing light-colored clothing, checking daily for ticks and showering after coming inside can help add an extra layer of protection, said Bartholet.

If you do get bitten by a tick, the Department of Defense has a free tick identification and testing service for military health clinics and health care providers. The Human Tick Test Kit Program is provided by the Tick-borne Disease Laboratory at the Army Public Health Center located at Aberdeen Proving Ground.

The HTTKP helps combat the threat of tick-borne diseases to DoD personnel and serves as a "first alert" for tick-bite patients and their health care providers.

The program serves all DoD personnel as well as Reservists, retirees and their families. Any of those bitten by a tick may send the tick to the HTTKP via a military clinic for free identification and testing.

The HTTKP only tests ticks removed from humans, and only accepts tick specimens from the continental United States.

Editor's note: For more information on the program or on how to stay safe this summer, visit <https://phc.amedd.army.mil/Pages/default.aspx>.