

# Show Me Health

## Outdoor Safety

Susan Rice, RN

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Warm weather and longer daylight hours are bringing Missourians out of hibernation. All of those spring activities we have been looking forward to are possible. While enjoying the outdoors, there are just a few basic healthy practices to consider.

Sunshine feels great this time of year but too much can increase your risk for skin cancer, the most common form of cancer in the United States. The sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can cause skin damage and lead to skin cancer on both sunny and cloudy days. UV radiation increases in the summer. Damage control is simple, cover exposed skin using sunscreen with a sun protective factor (SPF) of 15 or higher and both UVA and UVB protection. Wear sunglasses that block as close to 100% of UVA and UVB rays as possible. A wide brimmed hat protects better than a ball cap. Combine protection methods, hat and sunglasses, shirt and sunscreen, shade and sunglasses. Just a few serious sunburns as a child can lead to skin cancer in later life.

Outdoor activity in Missouri can lead to tick and mosquito exposure. Use an insect repellent with DEET, following label directions for application. Some DEET containing sprays can only be applied to clothing while others can be sprayed on exposed skin. Do not use DEET on infants less than 2 months of age. For more details regarding kids and bug spray, check the American Academy of Pediatrics website at [www.aap.org/topics](http://www.aap.org/topics). Wear light colored clothing to make ticks easier to see when they're crawling up your pant leg. That is, unless you are turkey hunting, then rely on DEET spray. Be sure to look for ticks when back indoors. Some are the size of a pinhead, so look carefully. Remove any attached ticks with tweezers, then wash and treat the site with antibiotic ointment. If a rash develops or you get a fever, body aches or generally feel sick, see your doctor immediately. If there is a suspicion of tick-borne illness, treatment should not be delayed pending laboratory confirmation. Tick-borne disease can be easily treated but failure to do so can be life-threatening.

Mosquitoes can carry viral illnesses such as West Nile Virus (WNV) and encephalitis, to humans. Most infections are asymptomatic. Fortunately only a few progress to serious illness. Because mosquitoes don't require a lot of standing water for a hatch to be successful, bite avoidance is important. Use insect repellent with DEET or Picaridin. Read and follow label directions. Mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk, so these may be times to stay indoors. Long sleeves and pants can be a barrier for biting mosquitoes.

For all the outdoorsmen who wash their hands in a creek or lake, just one word: don't. There are a host of water-borne illnesses that can spoil your fun for weeks to months. Practice good handwashing, especially before eating or meal preparation and avoid hand to face and mouth activity. If

you're not sure about the quality of the water at your camp site, bring your own. There are easy ways to safely purify water by boiling, filtration or disinfection. Check the Centers for Disease Control website for details, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). If clean water and soap aren't available to wash your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, rubbing it all over your hands and fingers until they are dry.

The final outdoor safety message concerns all-terrain vehicles (ATV's). As a mother, my first inclination is to say avoid them at all costs. Since that advice will be ignored, there are some practices that make for safer riding. The first is to take the training course offered by the ATV Safety Institute. Always wear a certified helmet, since many ATV injuries are head injuries. Other protective gear, such as goggles, gloves, over the ankle boots, long sleeves and pants can help protect against injury. Since most ATV's are designed for only one person, don't add a passenger that can interfere with your ability to drive interactively. Stay off paved roads. In a car or truck versus ATV, you lose. Don't allow children to operate adult-sized ATV's. Finally, don't operate an ATV while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. ATV's require good judgment and reaction time.

Spring is just beginning, so enjoy Missouri's outdoors safely. Stay well because we'll have winter to complain about before you know it.