

# House Calls

by Rikki Schuster

It's finally here! Was that a long winter or what? Thank goodness for sunshine and the beautiful Outer banks. Whether you are a local or a visitor, I'm sure you and your family will find some time to enjoy the great outdoors, the sun, water, and the many activities the Outer Banks has to offer. Please keep in mind, however, that with the increased amount of time spent outside, there is also an unfortunate increase in certain health risks for both children and adults.

One of the most important issues is water safety. Please keep a close eye on your children while playing near the water. The vast majority of drownings among children are related to unsupervised activity near the water. Teach your children how to swim. If you can't teach them, enroll any child four and older in swimming lessons. If you have a swimming pool, be sure the locking device on the gate is working properly, and keep it locked. While boating, be sure both adults and children are wearing their life jackets. Use them like you use your safety belt. They are incredibly underused, and they really do make a difference.

Sunburn is another preventable health hazard of the summer. Although many people correlate vacation with sunbathing, it's important to limit your time in the sun, particularly between ten in the morning and three in the afternoon, when the sun's rays are at their peak. Try to schedule outdoor activities during early morning or late afternoon instead. This will help avoid sunburn as well as heat related illnesses like heat stroke. Remember to apply sunscreen daily, even on cloudy days. You should use a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or greater, and should re-apply often, especially when swimming or exercising. Children under

six months shouldn't wear sunscreen, so keeping them out of the sun is the best policy.

Summertime is also mosquito time, so remember to apply an insect repellent at dawn and dusk, when they are the most active. Wearing long sleeves and long pants definitely decreases your exposure to mosquitoes as well. Whenever possible, remove standing water in your yard, since that is where they breed. Mosquitoes don't have a long flight range, so if you can reduce breeding in your yard, you can reduce your family's risk.

Biking and skateboarding is a popular summer activity for children and is a great way for them to get their daily dose of exercise. Make sure they wear approved helmets that fit properly. Helmets reduce the risk of brain injury by almost 90%. When skateboarding have them also wear wrist, knee, and elbow guards as well. Be sure your children's bicycles are the proper size and adjust the seats to the right height. Teach your children the rules of the road and enforce them, for their protection.

By taking some or all of the simple precautions mentioned, summertime will be both fun and most importantly, safe. Enjoy your summer!

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