

Summer Safety Matters

for Children with Special Health Care Needs



Sun and Heat Exposure



Water Safety



Fire and Fireworks Safety



Vehicle Safety



Outdoor Safety



Safety while Traveling



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Sun and Heat Exposure

Children with various health care needs may have communication, social, sensory, and behavioral challenges which may prevent them from feeling extreme temperatures or signaling for help. Some may be very sensitive to the heat and others may not be able to feel the heat or be able to communicate when they are hot. Be sure to monitor the length of time your child is outside in the heat and bring him or her out of the heat and sun as you feel necessary.

It's not healthy to be outside without sun protection - even when it's cloudy because the sun emits damaging ultraviolet (UV) rays that can damage your skin and eyes. For those with sensory challenges protecting against damaging heat and UV rays can be challenging. There are many items available that can help including sunscreen sprays, unscented lotions, and solid sticks, as well as sun hats, UV-protection sunglasses, sun-protection clothing, and beach umbrellas.

There are some medications which interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature. Certain medications can increase sun sensitivity which may cause skin to burn with lower than typical sun exposure. Check with your child's pediatrician and make necessary precautions and plans.

It is important to make sure to give the child plenty of water in the heat. He or she may not recognize or be able to tell someone they are thirsty and may become dehydrated. Provide your child with cups of water, drinks with electrolytes, ice pops, and other liquids to keep him or her hydrated.

Some children with disabilities may run away or wander unexpectedly. Always lock your car doors as they may wander into cars. In the summer heat, this may increase risk of heatstroke. Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle.



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Water Safety

Always make sure your child is supervised near any body of water. An adult must always be close enough to see and respond to the child.

Teach your child to ask an adult for permission before going in or entering the water. Ensure he or she knows to swim only in places where there are supervising adults or a lifeguard watching the water.

Make sure your swimming pool is protected by a locked fence. Swimming pool alarms are available to alert you if someone is in the pool.

When your child is at a pool, teach him or her to walk carefully around the pool area. Running can be dangerous. The ground gets slippery and your child can fall and get hurt. Bicycling and skating near a pool is unsafe.

Tell your child to always swim with a friend. Swimming alone is unsafe.

Always use a certified life vest when in water vehicles. If your child doesn't know how to swim, use the life vest in and around any body of water. Special water safety and swimming lessons are available for children with special health care needs.



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Fire and Fireworks Safety

Grills and campfires can be dangerous for any child, especially those who may not recognize danger. Never leave your child unattended in areas by a campfire or grill.

Some children with disabilities may not understand the dangers associated with lighters and matches. Teach your child to alert you when he or she sees lighters or matches.

Fireworks are safe to watch, but should only be lit by experts. Teach your child that he or she should never light fireworks or use matches or lighters around fireworks. If your child gets injured by fireworks, contact your doctor or urgent care center as soon as possible.

Sparklers can be fun and look great outside at nighttime. However, sparklers can be as hot as 2,000 degrees. If you are comfortable with your child holding sparklers, it is important to teach him or her to handle them safely – keeping them away from skin, eyes, and hair. Glow sticks may be a safer option. However if your child has the tendency to bite or chew these types of toys, be aware of chemicals inside glow products that can leak out when punctured. Call your poison control information center with any concerns. Observe your child closely when using sparklers and glow sticks.



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Vehicle Safety

To keep your child safe, it is important he or she are securely fit with a safety belt or car seat – for both short and long car rides. Ask your health care provider about adaptive vehicle safety restraints for the transportation of children with physical and developmental disabilities.

It is important to make sure your child understands that he or she should ask an adult before getting out of the car. A child with developmental disabilities may not recognize or understand parking lot or street safety.

Vehicles get hot very quickly. Never leave a child unattended in a car – not even for a minute.

Child safety door locks can help prevent your child from exiting your vehicle unexpectedly. For more information, look in your car's manual or ask someone familiar with the make and model of your vehicle.

Teach your child to keep his or her arms, legs, and head inside the car to keep him or her safe. Also, teach your child not to throw items outside of the vehicle.



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Outdoor Safety

Children with developmental disabilities may not understand pedestrian safety rules such as crossing streets, looking for oncoming vehicles, remembering directions, and asking for help. Children using wheelchairs and those with physical challenges, may have difficulty with poorly paved areas, curbs, and steep hills. Have your child walk with a responsible adult who can assist him or her with common outdoor safety issues.

Children with disabilities may have increased safety concerns when riding bicycles. Challenges may include balance, bicycle control, recognizing potential dangers, judging speed or distance, reacting quickly in emergency situations, and remembering and using traffic rules. It is important that your child always wears a fitted helmet, which has been certified by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. To increase safety, encourage your child to ride their bicycles with others or with adult supervision. Ask your child's health care provider or local recreation department for information about adaptive bicycle safety lessons that may be available in your area.

When choosing amusement parks, carnivals, and other outdoor entertainment venues, consider that there may be many rides that are physically-demanding, overstimulating, and/or emotionally-intense for your child. Some rides may be dangerous for individuals with physical disabilities or may not be recommended for those with seizures or other health impairments. Review websites and brochures or ask the park manager about the experiences and the abilities required on each ride. Be sure your child understands what is expected before, during, and after each ride.

Children with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities may run away suddenly, wander, or not realize when they are lost. They may find themselves in an unsafe place or situation, involved in unfamiliar social situations, or lost without the ability to seek or ask for help. Be sure to have your child wear an ID tag or medical alert at all times. Consider using a personal tracking device if your child has a tendency to wander away for you or other caregiver.



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Safety when Traveling

When traveling in a car, always secure your child with a safety belt. Specialized car seats and safety restraints are available for children with various special needs. Check with the National Center for Safe Transportation and the car manufacturer before modifying or altering the vehicles safety belts, buckles, or latches.

Plan ahead before a vacation. Contact your airline, train, hotel, and other contacts for your trip for more information and to discuss specific safety concerns. If you are flying, contact the TSA Cares hotline 72 hours ahead of your trip. Let them know of any special equipment, medicines, liquids, and other items you will be transporting during your trip. TSA Cares can assist you during the security clearance process at the airport. Your airline provider can provide assistance while in the airport and boarding the airplane.

When you travel, pack a go-kit for your child. Include, sensory toys, calming items, favorite snacks, books, electronic devices, videos, and games. Have these available at different times during your trip to distract your child if he or she becomes uncomfortable or distressed.

Before traveling, use photos, maps, charts, and/or videos to help your child become more familiar with the location. This will also help to get your child excited for the trip ahead.

Try to maintain some of your child's routines – such as sleeping and eating. Try to avoid making unexpected changes in plans. Give yourself time to relax and unwind.

When leaving your child with a relative, friend, or caregiver, be sure to provide written instructions with thorough explanations about medications, special supplies, equipment use, allergic reactions, seizures, handling emergency situations, emergency contact information, and emergency procedures.



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Let's be safe together.



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