

The Allergy & Asthma Clinic

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Summertime fun during the Covid pandemic

Many of us are spending more time taking long walks, hiking and biking since our normal summertime rituals, such as baseball games, beach parties, barbecues and camping with friends and extended family are off the table. Being outdoors is great for your health, but it has its challenges, such as unavoidable bug bites or insect stings. For some contact with plant life can also be a problem. Swimming in chlorinated pools can also cause eczema flares. Fortunately, there are a number of steps you can take to prevent and treat these nuisances so you can enjoy all that summertime has to offer.



Insects: Apply insect repellent before going into the woods or other areas where you may come in contact with bugs. Use insect repellents according to directions. Wear smooth-finished clothes that cover your body, such as long-sleeved shirts and long pants. Button long sleeves and tuck long pants inside boots. Avoid loose clothes that might entangle a biting or stinging insect. Avoid bright colors. Avoid going barefoot or wearing sandals outdoors. Avoid wearing perfumed lotions, aftershave, or scented hair products during the warm months. Do not put your picnic out until you are ready to eat. Repack picnic food as soon as you are finished serving. If you are bitten, apply cool compresses to decrease swelling and calm the itch. You can also take a 24 hour antihistamine such as Zyrtec and additional Benadryl if needed. Apply over the counter 1% hydrocortisone cream twice per day until the swelling/itching resolve. If you know you or your child has a life threatening reaction to bee or wasp stings, make sure to pack your epinephrine auto injector so it is available in the event of an anaphylactic emergency. If you suspect you are allergic to certain insects such as bees, wasps, hornets or yellow jackets, you may benefit from allergy testing for these stinging insects.

Poison Ivy, Oak and Sumac rash: Poison ivy rash is caused by sensitivity to an oily resin called urushiol (u-ROO-she-ol),

which is found in the leaves, stems and roots of poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac. When enjoying the great outdoors, be sure to stay on established paths and trails. Learn what the plants and bushes really look like in an outdoor setting and avoid them. Wear proper clothing, covering as much exposed skin as possible. You can prevent poison ivy rash or poison oak rash by swift removal of the toxic oil as soon as possible. The FDA recommends applying rubbing alcohol to the exposed area, rinsing with warm water, and then washing with soap and water. Many products are available to help make that process more effective and more convenient. Single use alcohol pads and hand sanitizer and products like Tecnu Outdoor Skin Cleanser, available on line, can also be used on gear and clothing. Try not to scratch affected areas, as this may cause infection. If you have a mild case, you can apply cool compresses to the skin and consider applying calamine or hydrocortisone cream. If blisters develop, leave them alone. The overlying skin protects the raw wound underneath and prevents infection. For more severe or widespread rashes, especially if it's on your face or genitals, make an appointment with your physician for evaluation. More severe case may require taking corticosteroid pills, such as prednisone, to clear up the allergic reaction.

Swimming: If your family enjoys a backyard swimming pool and any family members suffer from a skin condition such as eczema, swimming in chlorinated or salt water can cause the symptoms to flare. To help prevent this, prior to swimming, apply a thick moisturizer such as Eucerin cream first, and then apply sunscreen. When you have finished swimming, shower and reapply moisturizer right away.



If you have any questions regarding your summer outings and managing your allergies, please make a telehealth or in person appointment with one of our Allergy Health Care Providers to discuss the best prevention and treatment options available for you and your family. We want you to stay healthy and enjoy our beautiful summer weather!