

How to Avoid Common Summer Illnesses

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Now that the warm summer months are here, many of us are looking forward to spending time outside with family and friends. Keeping yourself and your loved ones healthy will help ensure you can get the most out of this summer's activities. Here are a few common illnesses you may encounter during summer, and the steps you can take to help protect you and your family.

Food Poisoning

Food poisoning usually peaks in the summer. Warmer temperatures can cause bacteria to grow faster. We also prepare more food outside, which can make it more difficult to follow safe food handling procedures.

Symptoms of food poisoning can include nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhea, upset stomach and fever. To avoid food poisoning this summer, make sure you follow these steps for safe food preparation:

Cook Meat Thoroughly

Purchase and use a meat thermometer to make sure your meat is at a safe eating temperature. The Food and Drug Administration recommends cooking meat to these internal temperatures:

- All Poultry: 165°F
- Beef Steaks, Pork Chops or Lamb Chops: 145°F
- Ground Beef and Pork: 160°F

It's also important to cook meat completely at the grill or campsite. Cooking meat partially and letting it sit can cause bacteria to multiply — bacteria that may not be killed when you grill it later.

Clean Often

After handling raw meat, wash your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using warm, soapy water. Also, be sure to wash any cutting boards, surfaces or utensils you used to prepare the meat. If warm running water is not available, use clean, disposable washcloths or antibacterial towelettes.

Keep Food Cold

If you're traveling with perishable meat or foods with dairy, such as potato salad, make sure you pack them with ice in insulated coolers. Store the cooler in the coldest part of the car and make sure to replenish the cooler with ice as it starts to melt.

Prevent Cross-Contamination

If possible, pack your raw meat separately from other food. Make sure the raw meat is carefully wrapped and sealed in a separate bag or container. It's also important to avoid placing cooked food on a surface that you used to prepare raw meat.

Swimmer's Ear

Many of us spend our summers relaxing by the pool, lake or ocean. Unfortunately, some of the water we swim in contains bacteria that can cause illnesses, and one of the most common water-borne illnesses is swimmer's ear.

Swimmer's ear is an ear infection that's caused by contaminated water that stays in the ear after you're done swimming. Symptoms usually include ear pain, redness and swelling, itchiness inside the ear and pus or excess drainage from the infected ear.

To avoid swimmer's ear this summer, make sure you:

- Avoid Placing Foreign Objects Like Cotton Swabs in Your Ear
- Avoid Removing Earwax, Which Can Help Protect Your Ear from Infection
- Dry Your Ears Thoroughly After Swimming with a Towel or Tilt Your Head and Pull on Your Earlobe to Release Water
- Keep Your Ears Dry When Swimming with a Swimming Cap or Ear Plugs
- Talk to Your Doctor About Using Eardrops After Swimming to Help Dry Your Ear Canal

Summer Colds

While colds are most common in the winter, there are many viruses that can cause a cold during the summer months. Summer colds can have similar symptoms to a typical winter cold, including cough, sore throat, fever, headache, body aches and vomiting.

Good hand-washing can be one of the best ways to prevent a summer cold; make sure you're washing your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds. It's also important to avoid anyone who is sick with cold symptoms, especially people who have a fever.

Heat-Related Illnesses

As the temperature starts to climb in the summer, illnesses like heat exhaustion and heat stroke can happen quickly. These illnesses usually affect:

- Infants and Children
- People Over 65
- People with Chronic Health Conditions Like Heart Disease or Obesity

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion happens when the body loses too much water and salt. If left untreated, heat exhaustion can turn into a more serious condition called heat stroke.

Signs of heat exhaustion can include:

- Fatigue
- Headache or Dizziness
- Muscle Cramps
- Nausea and Vomiting
- Pale Skin
- Rapid Heart Rate
- Sweating

If you suspect you have heat exhaustion, make sure you:

- Drink Water or Another Cold, Non-Alcoholic Beverage Right Away
- Move to an Air-Conditioned Space or Shaded Area
- Use Wet Towels to Cool Your Body or Take a Cold Shower

Heat stroke

Heat stroke is a serious medical emergency. Call 911 and ask to be transported to your [nearest AdventHealth emergency room](#) immediately if you notice symptoms including:

- Aggressive or Irrational Behavior
- Convulsions or Unresponsiveness
- Headache, Dizziness or Confusion
- Rapid Breathing
- Skin That's Red, Dry and Hot to the Touch
- Temperature Above 103°F

After calling 911, make sure you move the person to a cool place and immediately try to lower their body temperature using a cold shower, cold towels or immersion in cold water (up to the neck). Be sure to watch the person's breathing and keep cooling the victim down until the body temperature is 101°F or lower.

Avoid Heat-Related Illnesses

If you're planning outdoor activities during hot days, it's important to take steps to avoid heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Make sure you:

- Avoid Alcohol
- Avoid Being Outside During the Hottest Part of the Day (Usually 11 a.m.–3 p.m.)
- Drink Plenty of Fluids, Even If You Don't Feel Thirsty
- Drink Sports Drinks or Fruit Juice After Exercising to Replenish Salt Lost in Sweat
- Pace Yourself When Exercising
- Wear Lightweight Clothing and a Hat
- Wear Sunscreen and Re-Apply Regularly

Stay Safe This Summer

Summertime can be filled with fun activities and time spent with loved ones, which is why it's important to try and stay safe and healthy. Following these important prevention tips can help ensure your family can avoid illness and make memories that will last for many summers to come.

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