

## How to keep kids safe during the summer

**COMMENTARY** JULEYKA LANTIGUA-WILLIAMS | MCT

Keeping our children safe is the top priority for all parents, and it takes on more urgency during summertime. Fortunately, there are many ways to keep your children safe this season, no matter where your family chooses to have fun.

**In the water:** Pools, hot tubs, water parks, lakes, rivers and oceans present a fatal risk. Drowning is the second leading cause of injury-related death among children 14 years old and younger, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It ranks behind only car accidents.

So make sure children wear flotation devices and stay in appropriate areas of the pool or water parks. And make sure a lifeguard or a responsible adult is watching at all times. Kids have been known to drown in even shallow plastic backyard wading pools, according to a recent study in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Recreational water areas are also breeding ground for germs, so caution children not to swallow pool water and to take a shower before and after swimming.

**On the water:** Recreational boating is enjoyed

by more than 70 million Americans each year, making it one of the most popular summer activities. However, it presents its own set of unique safety challenges for parents. To stay safe, everyone should wear properly fitted life jackets. Parents should abstain from consuming alcohol, as it may impair their ability to supervise children and react in an emergency.

**On the field:** Summer sports like Little League, mountain biking and inline skating can enrich a child's summer experience in many ways, but may also create opportunities for injury. Concussions and broken bones can result from falls and accidents on playgrounds and other hard-surface areas. Every child should wear protective gear, such as wrist guards, knee and elbow pads and especially a helmet.

**In the sun:** "There's no other way to say it: Tanned skin is damaged skin. Any change in the color of your child's skin after time outside — whether sunburn or suntan — indicates damage from UV rays," says the CDC. Kids' skin needs pro-

tection from ultraviolet rays any time they're outdoors. So have your kids use sunscreen, cover up with clothing, put on sunglasses and avoid the midday sun.

**While camping:** Be sure your family's vaccinations are up to date. And warn your child never to hike or swim alone. Use insect repellent. Check for ticks, and remove them promptly. Have your child wear long sleeves whenever possible. Light-colored clothing also helps to spot ticks easily.

Don't let all these risks get in the way of having a fun summer. Knowing the risks and preparing for them will keep your kid safe — and your mind free.

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