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Massachusetts Department of Public Health Offers Summer Safety Guidance

BOSTON (June 12, 2023) – With summer approaching, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) reminds residents to take recommended common-sense precautions to keep everyone, especially young children, safe this summer.

Prevent Tick Bites

Certain kinds of ticks can bite and make you sick with diseases such as Lyme disease and Powassan virus. Ticks are most commonly found in damp, grassy, brushy, or wooded areas, including your own backyard. Ticks only attach when you come into direct contact with them — they cannot jump or fly. Follow these steps to help protect yourself from tick bites:

- Check yourself for ticks once a day — it's the single most important thing you can do.
- Use repellents with an EPA-registered active ingredient; always follow the directions on the label.
- Weather permitting, wear long-sleeved, light-colored shirts and long pants tucked into socks. This will help keep ticks away from your skin and make it easier to spot ticks on your clothing.
- After spending time outdoors, a shower can help rinse off a tick before it becomes attached and putting your clothes in the dryer on high heat for 10 minutes can help kill ticks.
- Pets that spend time outdoors are exposed to ticks, too, and may bring ticks back inside. Talk to your veterinarian about the best ways to protect your animals from ticks and tick-borne disease.

Prevent Mosquito Bites

Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and West Nile virus (WNV) are two mosquito-borne diseases that occur in Massachusetts. While there were no cases of EEE in Massachusetts last year, there were eight people with WNV. Mosquito surveillance is essential to monitor activity as the summer unfolds. DPH posts updates about activity throughout the season on the [Massachusetts Arbovirus Update](#) page.

While the risk for human infection of EEE or WNV won't occur until mid to late summer, people have an important role to play in protecting themselves from these illnesses which can be very serious. To prepare for mosquito season:

- Drain standing water in and around your house or yard to prevent mosquito breeding.
- Repair window and door screens to keep mosquitoes out of your home.
- Use a mosquito repellent with an EPA-registered ingredient according to the directions. Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks to reduce exposed skin when weather permits.

For more information about preventing mosquito and tickborne illness, visit DPH's [Mosquitoes and Ticks](#) page.

Water and Pool Safety

Drowning is a leading cause of death among young children, nationally and in Massachusetts, with backyard pools posing the highest risk for children under age 5. To help prevent water-related injury and drowning:

- Supervise children in and around water at all times.
- Whenever infants and toddlers are in or around water, including the bathtub, an adult should be within an arm's length at all times providing "touch supervision."
- Teach young children to always ask for permission before going near the water.
- Do not dive headfirst into the water.
- Do not swim during a storm or when there is lightning.
- Completely separate the house and play area of the yard from the pool area with a fence. Consider automatic door locks or alarms to prevent access.
- Remove floats, balls, and other toys from the pool after use so that children are not tempted to reach for them. After children are done swimming, secure the pool so they cannot get back in.
- Keep rescue equipment (such as a shepherd's hook or life preserver) and a phone near the pool.
- For children who cannot swim, use a properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket. DPH, in cooperation with the USCG, has created a fit test video that can assist with proper fit testing of life jackets: <https://youtu.be/1I3VZf-NqPc>.
- Do not use toys such as "water wings" or "noodles" in place of life jackets. These are not designed to keep swimmers safe.

In public swimming areas:

- Select swimming sites that have lifeguards whenever possible, and swim only in designated swimming areas.
- Always swim with a buddy.
- Look for signage at beaches. DPH collects [beach water quality data](#) and notifies the public about bacteria levels to minimize swimming-associated illness and injury.
- Know the limits of your swimming skills. Through the [Learn to Swim](#) program, the state will provide free swimming lessons to children at select pools across the Commonwealth starting in July 2023.

Consider becoming a lifeguard: the Commonwealth is recruiting lifeguards at its inland and coastal beaches, as well as swimming pools. This year, the Healey-Driscoll Administration raised the hourly pay for pool and waterfront staff to between \$22 to \$27. Qualified applicants can receive up to \$1,000 in signing bonuses. For more information, visit the Department of Conservation and Recreation's [lifeguarding website](#).

Window Safety

Falls are the leading cause of injury to children. Falls from windows involving young children are especially serious – and preventable. Screens are not strong enough to protect children from falling out of windows. To prevent window falls, parents and caregivers should:

- Keep furniture – and anything a child can climb on – away from windows.
- Open windows from the top, not the bottom, when possible and lock all unopened doors and windows.
- Be sure children are always supervised.
- Install quick-release window guards which can be found in most hardware stores.

To learn more about childhood injury prevention, visit the [DPH injury prevention and control program](#) website.

Additional tips on preventing falls among children can be found on the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [fall prevention website](#).

Car Safety

Leaving children and animals inside of a vehicle can be very dangerous. In the summer months in New England, the temperature in a closed car can rise quickly, and the vehicle can become a deadly place for a child or animal left, even for just a moment. To keep young children and animals safe in and around cars:

- *Never* leave children or animals alone in a parked vehicle, even when they are asleep or restrained, and even if the windows are open.

- Always check inside the vehicle – front and back – before locking the door and walking away.
- If a child is missing, check your vehicle first, including the trunk.
- Do things to remind yourself that a child or animal is in the vehicle, such as placing your purse or briefcase in the back seat so you will check there when you leave the vehicle.
- Always lock your car and keep the keys out of children’s reach.
- Ensure adequate supervision when children are playing in areas near parked motor vehicles.

If you see a child or animal alone in a hot vehicle, call the police. If they are in distress due to heat, get them out as quickly as possible and call 911 immediately.

Remember, all children ages 12 and under should ride in the back seat, properly restrained, even during quick errand trips. Infants and toddlers should remain in rear-facing car seats until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car safety seat manufacturer. At a minimum, children should ride rear facing until they are at least 1 year old and weigh at least 20 pounds. You can find more information on child passenger safety on the DPH [website](#).

Preventing Rabies Exposures

All mammals (animals with fur) can get rabies and there are usually more than 100 rabid animals found every year in Massachusetts. Most of these cases occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, woodchucks, and foxes, but some pets (especially cats) and farm animals also get rabies.

People can be exposed to the rabies virus when an infected animal bites them, or when the animal’s saliva gets into a scratch or the person’s eyes, nose, or mouth. People who are bitten or scratched by an animal, or who find a bat in a room where someone was sleeping, or with a young child or pet, should call their local board of health or the DPH Division of Epidemiology at 617-983-6800 for advice.

Other rabies prevention steps include:

- Teach children never to approach animals they don’t know – even if they appear friendly.
- Report any animal that seems sick or injured to the local animal control official.
- Enjoy wild animals from a distance and do not keep wild animals as pets.
- Make sure pets are vaccinated against rabies. By law, all dogs, cats, and ferrets must be regularly vaccinated against rabies.
- Don’t leave food or water for pets outside. Even empty bowls will attract wild and stray animals.

- Do not let pets roam freely. Keep them in a fenced yard or on a leash.
- Keep garbage securely covered. Open garbage will attract wild or stray animals.
- Keep chimneys capped and repair holes in attics, cellars, and porches to help keep wild animals like bats and raccoons out of the house.

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