

# Massachusetts Department of Public Health offers summer safety guidance

With summer weather approaching, and as COVID-19 related restrictions on daily activities begin to lift, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) reminds residents to take recommended precautions to keep young children safe this summer.

## **Prevent Tick Bites**

Ticks can make you sick when they bite. They are most commonly found in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas. 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 that contain DEET on your exposed skin and those that contain permethrin on your clothes.
- When walking or hiking, stick to main pathways and the center of trails if you can. Brushing against tall grass and bushes will increase your exposure to ticks.

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.

Because dogs and horses are particularly susceptible, talk to your veterinarian about the best ways to protect your animals from tick-borne disease.

## **Prevent Mosquito Bites**

The 2019 and 2020 mosquito seasons were active for Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) in Massachusetts. This mosquito-borne illness appears generally in 2- to 3-year cycles, traditionally peaking during August. The presence of EEE last year, a relatively mild winter, and historical patterns suggest an active season this year.

While the risk for human infection of EEE or West Nile Virus won't happen until later this 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 clothing to reduce exposed skin when weather permits.

For more information about preventing mosquito and tickborne illness, visit [www.mass.gov/mosquitoesandticks](http://www.mass.gov/mosquitoesandticks).

## **Water and Pool Safety**

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

- Children should be supervised 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."
- 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 the 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.

## **Window Safety**

Falls are the leading cause of injury to children and falls from windows involving young children are especially serious. Window falls are 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 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fall prevention website.

## **Car Safety**

The inside of a vehicle can be a very dangerous place for children left inside. 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, left even for just a moment.

### **To keep young children safe in and around cars:**

- Never leave children 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 is in the vehicle, such as placing your purse or briefcase in the back seat so you will check the back seat 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 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 one year old

and weigh at least 20 pounds. You can find more information on child passenger safety on the DPH website.