

SUMMER HEALTH AND TRAVEL TIPS

Traveling with children can be stressful from the start – packing the car with enough activities, sunscreen and beach supplies may cause your bumper to drag on the ground all the way to the Delaware beaches. But, when taking the kids to the beach, be sure to keep safety in mind.

What are the top concerns when traveling with kids? In our office, what we are asked most about is how to keep children safe in the sun and water. Other commonly asked questions are about insect repellants and carseats. Beacon Pediatrics is here with information to help keep your family safe this summer.

What to bring:

When you are packing up, in addition to the bathing suits, towels, and sand toys, remember to bring all medications you and your children are taking (including any that are used as-needed like an Epi-Pen and albuterol inhaler). Keep a card in your wallet for each family member with his or her health information including name, date of birth, primary language, medical issues, allergies, medications, parent(s) contact information, and the name and phone number of his or her primary care physician. Other things to consider bringing include a small first-aid kit with band-aids and antibiotic ointment as well as baby wipes, plenty of water, and snacks.

Car safety:

Always use a carseat for infants and children. Children should be backward facing until they are two years old or until they reach the highest height or weight allowed for the seat. The sticker on the side of the seat should have its maximums listed. Children should then remain in a front-facing carseat and then a booster seat until they are 4 ft 9 in (57 inches or 145 cm) tall. Children should ride only in the back seat until they are 13 years old. And *never* leave a child unattended in a car even for a minute; the inside of a car can heat up quickly to dangerous or even deadly temperatures.

Crowd safety:

Crowds on the boardwalk can be overwhelming, so here are some strategies to help everyone be safe. Hold hands or have them walk in front of you, keeping them in your sight at all times. Teach them to seek out a lifeguard, police officer, or a woman with a young child for help if they get lost. And then stay in one place. Make sure they know their name, your name, and your telephone number by heart, and consider putting a waterproof wristband on them with this information in case you do get separated.

Water safety:

Swimming at the beach and pools is great fun and great exercise, but water is also one of the greatest dangers for children. Drowning is a leading cause of death in children, second only to motor vehicle accidents. Children can drown in even one inch of water. Empty all water

containers such as buckets and baby pools when you're done using them. Inflatable toys and pool noodles are not life-saving devices. A rule that should always be followed with younger children is that an adult needs to be *within arm's reach at all times*. Children should always be wearing a life jacket whenever they are in a boat or raft. Older children, even if they know how to swim, need to have an adult watching them *at all times*. This is especially true in the ocean, as the waves and riptides can be overwhelming and kids can quickly tire out. Do not depend on the lifeguard; they are there to help but *you* must be primarily responsible for your children. Teach your kids also to use a buddy system, and do not allow dunking or other horseplay that could result in an injury.

Sun safety:

Fun in the sun is an essential part of your visit to the beach! Being smart about sun safety can help reduce not only skin cancer risk but also prevent painful burns and illness. Babies under 6 months should not be in the sun at all, as sunscreen is not recommended for use under 6 months of age. Keeping them in the shade is fine but keep an eye on them because babies can overheat easily. In older babies and children, choose a sunblock with a SPF of 30 or higher, that is "broad spectrum" thus protects against both UVA and UVB rays. We recommend a mineral-based (zinc oxide/titanium dioxide) one as they are known to be safe as well as gentle for sensitive skin. And reapply, reapply, reapply! Every two hours at least, plus whenever you towel off or are sweating a lot. Don't forget to apply (and reapply) it to ears, scalp, feet, and under clothing that is not SPF-rated. Also, make sure the sunglasses your child is wearing have UV protection.

Hydration:

Speaking of sweating, don't forget the water! Bring refillable water bottles and consume plenty of water the entire time you are out, even if you don't feel thirsty. You lose a lot more water through your sweat and while swimming than you think! Children overheat more easily than adults due to their higher body surface area to weight ratio, and don't always notice their thirst cues until they are already dehydrated. Also, avoid drinks with a lot of sugar, caffeine, and carbonation whenever possible, as they will not hydrate you nearly as well as water.

Insect repellent:

Insects can be a big problem, especially if you are camping or hiking through long grass or brush. The most effective and safe repellants for children older than 2 months are those that contain DEET, but no more than 30%. Another option that is considered safe but less effective is one that contains Picaridin or essential oils such as lemon eucalyptus or citronella. Permethrin-containing repellants work well but should **ONLY** be used on clothing or gear, not directly on skin. Also, avoid sunscreen/repellent combinations because sunscreen needs to be reapplied more often than is safe to reapply repellent. Check for ticks every evening, especially at the underwear line as they love to crawl up and stop there. If you find a tick, remove it as soon as possible by using tweezers, gripping it from as close to the skin as possible and pulling

straight out without twisting. If you get stung by a bee or other stinging insect, try to remove the stinger without squeezing it, by scraping it back out of the skin with a credit card or fingernail.

The summer is a wonderful time to explore, play, and enjoy nature together. By far the most important thing you can do to keep your child safe is to be there with them, to supervise as well as participate in the fun. Enjoy!

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Information for this article was found and verified with literature from the American Academy of Pediatrics, at AAP.org and healthychildren.org

References if needed:

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