

The Healthcare Consortium

For Your Health

“Staying Safe This Summer”

With summer just around the corner, many of us are spending more time outdoors enjoying everything Columbia and Greene Counties have to offer. Whether you're gardening, attending community events, swimming, hiking, or simply relaxing outside over the next few months, it is important to stay safe from the heat, sun exposure, and pests.

As temperatures continue to rise throughout June and into the hottest months of the year, it is important to prepare for extreme heat. Older adults, young children, and people with chronic health conditions are especially vulnerable to heat-related illnesses. The New York Department of State recommends staying hydrated, taking breaks in the shade or air conditioning, and avoiding strenuous outdoor activity during the hottest hours of the day to help prevent heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Heat-related illnesses can develop quickly and may include symptoms such as dizziness, nausea, headache, rapid pulse, and confusion. If you know that your home is likely to become too warm during a heat wave, make a plan to visit one of the cooling centers found around the counties. You can locate your nearest cooling center through the New York State Department of Health's Cooling Center Finder at www.health.ny.gov/environmental/weather/cooling.

In addition to the heat, sun exposure is another summer health risk that is easy to underestimate. Around 4,500 New York State residents are diagnosed with melanoma each year, and approximately 350 New Yorkers die from the disease annually. According to the CDC, unprotected skin can be damaged by ultraviolet rays in as little as 15 minutes. When spending time outdoors, use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. SPF 15 blocks approximately 93% of UV rays, while SPF 30 blocks about 97%. Apply sunscreen to dry skin 15 to 30 minutes before going outdoors and reapply after swimming or heavy perspiration. Wearing a hat and sunglasses and seeking shade during the middle of the day can provide additional protection. Remember that UV exposure can occur even on cloudy days, making sun protection important throughout the summer, not just on the hottest or sunniest afternoons.

And in our area, we know that one of the greatest risks during the summer comes in the form of pests. Mosquitoes, ticks, and other biting insects become more active during the warmer months and can carry diseases that pose serious health risks. Tick activity remains high throughout New York State, and spending time in grassy, wooded, or brushy areas can increase your risk of Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses. When outdoors, wear long sleeves, long pants, and closed-toe shoes whenever possible, and use an EPA-registered insect repellent. Performing frequent tick checks throughout the day and again when you return home can help prevent ticks from attaching. After spending time outdoors, showering and placing clothing in a hot dryer can help remove ticks before they have a chance to attach. Mosquitoes are most active around dawn and dusk, so taking precautions during those hours can help reduce your risk of bites. Be sure to check children and pets thoroughly after spending time outside.

A few simple precautions can help you enjoy all that summer has to offer while staying healthy and safe. By planning ahead to protect yourself and your loved ones, you can make sure the summer is nothing but fun.

The Healthcare Consortium is a non-profit organization with a mission of improving access to healthcare and supporting the health and well-being of the residents in our rural community. The agency is located at 325 Columbia St. in Hudson. For more information: visit www.columbiahealthnet.org or call 518-822-8820.