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Hot Tips for Summertime Safety

**Closing the Gap
on HIV/AIDS in
the Elderly**

**Brattleboro Retreat
Serves GLBT
Community**

**Happy Birthday,
Medicare!**



Cover Story

- 4 Hot Tips for Summertime Safety**
Jane M. Bradley

Special Feature

- 10 Closing the Gap on HIV/AIDS in the Elderly Population**
Richard Callaway, MD, and Sarah Jameson

Features

- 18 Brattleboro Retreat Tackles Mental Illness and Addiction within LGBT Community**
Rachel Becker
- 24 Community-Based Clinical Trials and Their Implications for Older Adults**
Jennifer Higgins, PhD

Departments

- 30 Viewpoint: Happy Birthday, Medicare**
Leslie Nyman, Diana Stein, Alice Swift and Jon Weissman
- 34 FDA Watch**
- 36 GrandRounds**

Cover Image: Hot weather puts everyone from elite athletes to those enjoying a recreational baseball game at risk for dehydration and sports-related injuries during the summer months.

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Hot Tips for Summertime Safety

by Jane M. Bradley

Fast Facts

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- **Mark Kenton, DO**, emergency medicine physician and medical director of Springfield College's athletic training program, Mercy Medical Center, Springfield, MA
- **Bill Morgan, MD**, chair of the department of orthopedic surgery and sports medicine at Fallon Clinic, Worcester, MA

From tiny ticks in tall grass to hidden boulders in deep pools, summer is a dangerous season. When the weather heats up, hospitals experience an annual upsurge in emergency room visits. Seasonal hazards include sun exposure, heatstroke, insect allergic reactions and tick bites, as well as lawn mower lacerations, car crashes, head injuries, and swimming and diving accidents. Spinal cord injuries leave someone paralyzed every week during the summer months.

When warm weather arrives, adults and kids race outdoors to play sports and games. Each summer brings alarming news reports about mosquitoes infected with West Nile virus or the rare, but far more deadly, Eastern equine encephalitis. Lyme disease can be effectively treated with antibiotics, especially if caught in its early stages. While rigorous outdoor exer-

cise offers heart-healthy benefits, activities like baseball and cycling may put athletes at risk for injuries.

“People—especially children—are typically very active in the warm-weather months, so we tend to treat a lot of children for sports-related injuries during the summer,” says Dr. Bill Morgan, MD, chair of the department of orthopedic surgery and sports medicine at Fallon Clinic, a multi-specialty medical group practice located throughout Central Massachusetts. “In many cases, these injuries are preventable if parents and children follow some simple safety precautions.”

“This time of year we often see the ‘weekend warrior’ type of sports injury,” adds Mark Kenton, DO, of Mercy Medical Center, board-certified in emergency medicine and medical direc-



tor of Springfield College's athletic training program. "People who work all week play in adult baseball leagues on weekends once nice weather arrives. Poor conditioning can lead to muscle strain or sprain. People forget that they need to warm up and increase flexibility by stretching."

Here are a few ways to avoid injury and enjoy summer activities:

- ✦ Always wear appropriate protective gear, including helmets, elbow and knee pads, mouth guards and well-fitting shoes appropriate for the activity.
- ✦ Be sure to stretch adequately before engaging in any physical activity, especially one that requires running or agility. Stretching helps to greatly minimize injury.
- ✦ Dehydration can come on quickly during warm weather. Always have easy access to drinking water when exercising outdoors. Children are especially susceptible to the effects of heat and humidity. Sunburn, fever, dehydration, high blood pressure or heart disease, disability, mental illness, poor circulation, or use of alcohol and certain drugs can reduce the body's ability to cool itself by sweating. Replenish fluids frequently, wear a moisturizing sunblock and avoid alcohol.

Heat illness can range from a harmless heat rash to uncomfortable cramping, heat exhaustion and even a life-threatening exertional heat stroke requiring emergency care. "Be sure to wear breathable clothing, drink cool fluids, and take frequent breaks to rest in the shade when exercising in hot or humid weather," says Gregory Czarnecki, DO, a team physician and sports medicine expert who embraces a holistic philosophy that focuses on the musculoskeletal system—the



Mark Kenton, DO, emergency medicine physician and medical director of Springfield College's athletic training program, Mercy Medical Center, Springfield, MA



Robert P. Hoffman, MD, chairman of the Infectious Disease Department, Mercy Medical Center, Springfield, MA

nerves, muscles and bones. "Time your exercise to early morning or late afternoon. Cramps result when the heat affects fluid balance. Drink water during the first hour of exercise, then alternate with Gatorade and/or electrolyte tablets dissolved in water. If your core temperature continues to rise, rapid cooling is necessary."

✦ Listen to your body. If you feel pain during an activity, or experience an injury—even a minor one—be sure to stop. Sprains or strains should be treated with the "RICE" method (**R**est-**I**ce-**C**ompression-**E**levation). Seek prompt medical attention if symptoms worsen. "Depending on the injury, you may need to seek medical care to rule out a fracture," adds Kenton. "Because only bones can be seen with an X-ray, an injury to a ligament or a cartilage tear may need follow-up magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) if pain persists."

Back pain sometimes results from weakness or injury to the muscles and ligaments. In most cases, chronic ligament injuries are

difficult or impossible to detect with MRI, while the pain caused by loose ligaments in the lower back is often indistinguishable from the pain of sciatica caused by a herniated disc. A pulled muscle, strained joint or torn ligament releases a protective inflammatory cascade. Numbness, tingling and weakness may mimic nerve pain, making diagnosis difficult.

"An acute back strain is often the tip of the iceberg," says Czarnecki. "Often this is the warning of an underlying musculoskeletal problem that has been present despite minor or no previous symptoms, especially in an aging individual. Strengthening and retraining muscles to improve balance and support, spinal manipulation and sometimes bracing can prevent re-injury. If pain worsens in severity, or changes from previous symptoms, see your physician. Early intervention is crucial because back pain can become chronic if left untreated."

✦ Scrapes and abrasions are common injuries that require wound covering and monitoring. Any break in the skin can

lead to a skin infection, including the difficult-to-treat MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*). "MRSA is the most common serious skin infection because the bacteria are well-adapted to live on skin," says Robert P. Hoffman, chairman of the Infectious Disease Department at Mercy Medical Center. "Although it has always been a fairly aggressive infection, it is now more virulent than a couple of decades ago and less susceptible to treatment with antibiotics. Some of the older drugs derived from tetracycline remain very effective for mild to moderate MRSA. Intravenous treatment with vancomycin is usually effective for severe cases. Several newer, but very expensive drugs, are available to treat serious infections, but is their cost justified? If we use them too much, will resistance develop?"

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends a minimum of 30 minutes daily, at least five days a week, of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity.

Alternatively, vigorous exercise (high intensity) may be a substitute. The recommended minimum for vigorous exercise is 20 minutes three days per week. A brisk walk is considered a moderate-intensity activity, while jogging is considered vigorous.

Even if you follow these tips, injuries are bound to happen. In the event of an injury, be sure to seek medical attention immediately. Trauma, the leading cause of death and disability in young people, requires an immediate and decisive response. Athletes who suffer a concussion can experience a decline in their mental and physical processes even decades later. Potential victims of a head injury or a suspected concussion should be transported to the hospital as rapidly as possible for life-saving treatment. 🏥