NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

Health and Safety Alert

Summer Safety – Summer Fun 2026

Memorial Day Weekend traditionally marks the start of summer fun. Below are some reminders to ensure everyone is safe and healthy while enjoying the numerous activities that the summer weather allows. These tips provide general guidance to reduce the risk associated with summer conditions. Agency staff should still provide care specific to each person receiving services based on their individual needs and circumstances.

Sun Safety

RISKS: Too much sun is unhealthy. It can cause sunburn to skin in as little as **15 minutes**. Even on hazy or cloudy days, the sun's rays can be harmful.

PROTECTIONS FOR SUN EXPOSURE:

- Apply SPF 30+ broad spectrum sunscreen 15- 30 minutes before sun exposure. Reapply frequently, every 2 hours (more frequently when swimming/active) covering all exposed areas.
- Wear UV protective sunglasses and a hat to protect eyes, ears, and head.
- Certain medications cause sun sensitivity. Be aware of any risks with the people you support.
- Provide protective supplies and clothing during activities like camp or family visits.
- If a person appears to have sunburn, contact the RN for guidance. If blistering is apparent, contact the physician.
- Additional information is available from the American Cancer Society at the following link: https://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/sun-and-uv.html

Prevent Heat-Related Illnesses

RISKS: People suffer heat-related illness when their bodies are unable to cool down which can result in serious health complications up to and including death.

PRECAUTIONS: **Heat-related illnesses and deaths are preventable**

- Training should be provided for staff in the prevention and recognition of heat-related illnesses.
- Individualized plans may be needed for those at higher risk, including those with difficulty recognizing/communicating illness symptoms.
- Be aware of outdoor temperatures and modify or reschedule outdoor activities accordingly.
- Encourage hydration by drinking plenty of water and with water-rich foods (e.g., watermelon)
- If someone requires physician-ordered fluid limitations, work with the RN and the physician to determine how to assist them in hot weather.

- **Vehicles**: In as little as 10 minutes temperatures inside a parked vehicle can rapidly rise to a dangerous level (118° F or higher).
  - Do not leave people in a vehicle, even with windows down, no matter how brief.
  - Establish a routine to be sure all occupants leave the vehicle when unloading.

TYPES OF HEAT-RELATED ILLNESSES:

Heat Exhaustion – Heat exhaustion can lead quickly to heat stroke. If symptoms are present, seek medical help immediately by calling the RN or 911 without delay.

Signs and symptoms include:

- Heavy sweating, paleness, skin may feel cool.
- Muscle cramps, fatigue, weakness, dizziness, headache, fainting, nausea or vomiting; and
- Pulse rate may be fast and weak, and breathing may be fast and shallow.

Heat Stroke – This is a **medical emergency**. When a person's body temperature rises to a dangerous level, it can lead to organ damage and death.

Signs and symptoms include:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103 °F).
- Red, hot, dry skin and absence of sweating; and
- Rapid, strong pulse rate, throbbing headache, dizziness, nausea or vomiting.

IMMEDIATE STEPS TO TAKE:

- **Contact 911** immediately** if heat stroke is suspected or a person is exhibiting extreme symptoms of heat exhaustion.
- After contacting 911**, move the person to a cool, shady area. Attempt to cool them down with cool water compresses or ice packs wrapped in cloth placed on neck, wrists, ankles, and armpits. Monitor body temperature, if possible.
- Only give fluids if person is alert and able to swallow and have them sip slowly. Stop giving fluids if vomiting occurs.

  For more information, please visit:
  www.health.ny.gov/publications/1243/ and http://noheatstroke.org

Food Safety: Avoid Food Poisoning

RISKS: Heat and humidity can cause harmful bacteria to quickly multiply on food resulting in Food-borne illness (food poisoning).

PREVENTION:

- **Wash hands often:** Have moist disposable towelettes handy to clean hands often.
- **Keep surfaces clean:** Consider carrying cleaning agents to use on surfaces when outside or at remote sites.
- **Separate and cook.** Keep raw meat juices away from ready-to-eat food. Use separate plates and utensils for raw meat.
- **CHILL.** Unrefrigerated food can become unsafe to eat in as little as one hour.

  Any doubts, throw it out.

- Refer to the guidance issued by the FDA at the following link:
  http://www.fda.gov/food/resourcesforyou/Consumers/ucm109899.htm

Grill Safety: The Key to Successful Cookouts

Enjoy the outdoor grilling that summer allows but be sure grilling is done safely and with safe equipment. Please review the General Grilling Safety Alert for more information:
https://opwdd.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/02/general-grilling-safety-hsa-1-2020.pdf

Safe Practice Near Water & During Water Sports

RISKS: Wherever there is water, there is a risk of drowning. Drowning can occur in seconds. Know the risks associated with the people you support:

- Medical condition(s) such as a seizure disorder.
- Use of alcohol or drugs, including prescribed medications.
- Be aware of water conditions, including calm or rough waves, temperature etc.

PROTECTIONS:

- Always provide adequate supervision with staff specifically assigned to people requiring supervision
- One-to-one supervision should be provided for people with seizure disorders and diagnoses that can increase drowning risk (e.g., dysrhythmias).
- Know each person's ability in the water.
- Be responsive to and anticipate changing conditions.
- Ensure staff can immediately respond to an emergency in the water. It is recommended staff be in the water with the person for optimal supervision.
- Know support equipment needs for the people receiving services during water activities.
- Consider less crowded swimming areas to allow for easier supervision.
- Always wear a Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD) when boating.
- Review Important Information About Drowning Alert (May 2024) which can be found at: https://opwdd.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/06/psa_drowning.pdf

Insect Related Illnesses and Stings

Risks: Insect bites (mosquitoes, ticks) can transmit diseases and cause irritation. Severe allergic reactions are also possible. Persons receiving services unable to recognize or communicate symptoms are at higher risk.

Prevention & Protection:
Always be aware of each person's health histories, allergies, previous reactions and incorporate insect safety into care plans of people being supported.

- **Repellents:** Use insect repellent as appropriate to the person. NOTE: A medical provider's order may be obtained for specialized repellants if the person's health condition indicates the need
- **Clothing:** Wear protective clothing such as long sleeves/pants, closed-toe shoes as weather permits
- **Avoidance:** be cautious when in tall grass, wooded areas, and standing water.
- **Tick Checks:** Thoroughly check skin and clothing after outdoor activities, especially in hidden areas.
- **Allergies:** Be aware of those with severe allergies. Carry and know how to use medical equipment specific to the person (e.g., epinephrine auto-injectors)

Signs & Symptoms:

- **Tick-borne:** Rash (bullseye), fever, chills, fatigue, headaches, muscle and/or joint aches.
- **Stings (Mild):** Pain, redness, swelling, itching.
- **Stings (Severe/Anaphylaxis):** Difficulty breathing, facial/throat swelling, rapid pulse, dizziness etc.

Immediate Actions:

- **Tick Bites: Do not attempt to remove**. Contact a medical professional immediately upon discovery, monitor for symptoms. Call 911 if symptoms progress or become severe.
- **Mild Stings:** Clean the affected area, use cold compress, monitor for worsening symptoms.
- **Severe Reactions: Call 911** immediately** and administer prescribed emergency medication (e.g. epinephrine).
- **Notify:** Document and inform an RN/physician of any observed bites for those in certified settings or with sensitivities.

******Activate emergency medical services as applicable to OPWDD state-operated setting.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Additional information is available through the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) regarding ticks and mosquito-borne illnesses.

Ticks:

- https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/pests/tick.htm
- https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/lyme/

Mosquitoes and Disease:

- https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/mosquitoes/#:~:text=No.,only%20certain%20kinds%20spread%20disease