

Health & Safety Tips

Summer Safety Tips

June 2005

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Bee and wasp stings

A small percentage of the population is severely allergic to stinging insect venom. Unlike most other allergies, insect bite allergy can cause a life-threatening disruption to breathing and circulatory systems called anaphylactic shock. Most people, fortunately, will experience only a “local” reaction to the bite which manifests as redness, pain, swelling and some itching at the site. A normal reaction lasts a few hours. A severe reaction, for those extremely sensitive, can occur within minutes of the bite. The victim may feel dizzy, nauseated and weak. There may be stomach cramps and diarrhea, itching around the eyes, a warm feeling, coughing, hives, vomiting and swelling. There could be wheezing, shortness of breath, hoarse speech, drop in blood pressure, shock, unconsciousness and darkened skin following. This person needs immediate medical attention.

Persons, especially those known to be allergic to stings, should practice simple precautions to avoid being stung.

- *When eating outdoors, keep food covered until ready to eat. Any scent of food will attract bees and wasps.
- *Keep garbage in tightly sealed containers
- *Do not disturb a nest in a tree or the eaves of the house.
- *If a bee or wasp gets in the car, *stay calm* and safely pull off the road, open the window and allow the insect to escape.

- *Pick fruit as soon as it ripens, try to keep lawns free of dandelion and clover and avoid close contact with flowering trees.
- *Avoid scented products such as hair spray, suntan lotion, after shave and soaps.
- *Avoid shiny buckles and jewelry.
- *Avoid brightly colored loose fitting clothing. Flowery prints and black attract insects.
- *Highly sensitive individuals should ensure that another person is with them when participating in outdoor activities. It is wise, as well, to wear an identification bracelet or necklace such as “Medic-Alert”.

Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection caused by the bite of an infected tick. Ticks are most active during the summer months.



There are many types of ticks in Nova Scotia, however, for Lyme disease the tick of concern is the deer tick. The symptoms of Lyme disease are:

- *rash that looks like a “bulls-eye”
- *fever
- *headache
- *tiredness
- *stiff neck or soreness all over
- *pain or swelling in the joints

Usually it takes 3 to 32 days to develop symptoms.

To prevent Lyme disease avoid tick bites:

- *Avoid high grass and contact with vegetation.
- *Don't sit directly on the ground.
- *Keep the grass around your home mowed short.
- *Consider using insect repellent containing DEET.
- *Wear light colored clothing with a tight weave.
- *Cover as much open skin as possible with clothing.
- *Keep long hair tied back.
- *Check yourself, children and pets for ticks after a walk in a tick infested area.
- *Remove ticks as soon as you find them.

The risk of Lyme disease in Nova Scotia remains very low but precautions should be taken to avoid being bitten by ticks.

West Nile Virus

West Nile virus infection is caused by a virus spread by mosquitos that have fed on the blood of an infected bird. Most people infected with the virus have no symptoms at all, or only mild symptoms that can occur from 3 - 14 days after being bitten. Symptoms may include:

- *fever
- *headache
- *muscle ache
- *tiredness
- *joint pain
- *swollen glands
- *rash

People with a weakened immune system and those with chronic disease are at greater risk for serious health effects that could include meningitis or encephalitis.

To make your yard less "welcoming" to mosquitos:

- *Regularly drain standing water from pool covers, saucers under plants, garbage cans etc.
- *Empty wading pools, pet bowls and bird baths twice a week.
- *Cover rain barrels with screens
- *Clean out eave troughs regularly to avoid clogs that can trap water.

To prevent mosquito bites:

- *Use insect repellents containing DEET
- *Limit outdoor activities at dusk and dawn.
- *Keep as much skin covered with clothing as possible.
- *Make sure that door and window screens fit tightly and repair any holes.

In 2004 there were no reported human cases of West Nile in Nova Scotia, and of the 472 dead birds tested none reported positive for the virus. You can access Health Canada's surveillance program at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/wnv-vwn/index.html>.

Gardening Ergonomics

The rewards of gardening are enormous, however we must remember that one of our most important gardening tools is our body. Proper body positioning, well designed garden tools and frequent rest are key.



Use proper body positioning and the right tools to minimize muscle fatigue and injury:

- *Before you begin gardening take a few minutes to stretch.
- *Bend at the knees and hips to lift heavy objects.
- *Stand erect when using long-handled garden tools.
- *Consider raised beds to minimize bending and lifting.
- *Work below shoulder level whenever possible, if not possible perform the task for 5 minutes or less then take a break.
- *Use both arms whenever possible.
- *Avoid twisting the forearms back and forth on a repetitive basis.
- *Change tasks frequently.
- *Keep hand tools sharp.
- *Avoid tools which require awkward body positioning.
- *Keep tools with moving parts in good working order and oiled.
- *Hold objects with a light grasp avoiding a tight sustained grip.
- *Use lightweight but sturdy tools.
- *Shorter tool handles provide better leverage control.
- *Handles should be cylindrical in shape.