

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

The “Buzz” on Summer Skin Hazards

The sun is beating down and temperatures are rising. Outdoor workers can be exposed to many hazards besides the obvious sun and heat – bugs that bite and sting and poisonous plants that may cause rashes. Prevention is the key.

Don’t be a “Bug Bistro”

Mosquitoes, black flies, mites, chiggers, fleas and ticks all use their mouths to suck blood from humans. Bees, hornets, yellow jackets and wasps use a stinger to inject their venom. Spiders and ants both bite and sting.

Insects are most active at dawn and dusk. Be aware of the potential insect nest locations. Hornets and wasps nest in bushes, trees and under eaves of buildings. Yellow jackets will frequently create nests underground that may be disturbed when mowing or weed trimming. Spiders prefer dark, mostly undisturbed areas.

Bug bites most often result in minor skin reactions like swelling, redness, pain and itching. Tick bites do not usually cause an immediate reaction, but are dangerous because they can transmit Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and other diseases.

Can you identify Hazardous Plants?

In much of North America, the most common hazardous plant is poison ivy. Poison ivy is fairly easy to spot. Each dark green stem has three shiny, oval-shaped leaves. In fall, the leaves may turn dark red or purple. Even in winter, despite its brown and

brittle appearance, poison ivy still contains urushiol, the oil that results in an itchy rash. No direct contact with the plant is necessary to develop a rash – the oil sticks to leather, animal fur, clothing and gardening instruments. Poison oak is very common in wooded areas. Poison sumac is often found in damp areas or roadside ditches where water has a tendency to collect.

Some interesting facts about Urushiol:

- Only 1 nanogram (billionth of a gram) needed to cause rash
- 1/4 ounce of urushiol is all that is needed to cause a rash on every person on earth
- 500 people could develop a rash from the amount of urushiol needed to cover the head of a pin
- 1 to 5 years is normal for urushiol oil to stay active on any surface, including dead plants

The name is derived from **urushi**, Japanese name for lacquer - When the Japanese restored the gold leaf on the golden Temple in Kyoto, they painted the urushiol lacquer on it to preserve and maintain the gold. Guess you could say that you would be caught “red handed” if you stole it.

Prevention is Key

Dress for Success:

- Cover up with long pants, long-sleeve shirts, socks, shoes and a hat.
- Tuck shirts into gloves and pants into socks/boots.
- Protect your hands with gloves.

- Avoid using colognes, perfumes, scented soap and hairspray – insects are attracted to sweet smells.
- Always check yourself for ticks, especially after working in wooded, swampy or grassy areas.

Education and prevention are the best ways to steer clear of pests and hazardous plants. Familiarize yourself with the plants and pests of your region. Dress to keep urushiol off your skin and to protect yourself from insect bites/stings to enjoy an “itch-free” summer.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.