

Enjoy a safe and happy Independence Day



Independence Day is a celebration of the United States of America. The holiday is marked by fanfare and large parties, complete with barbecues, fireworks and parades.

As fun as July 4th festivities typically are, injuries, particularly those involving fireworks, are a concern that celebrants should not take lightly. An estimated 11,000 people visited the emergency room for fireworks-related injuries in 2016, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. However, fireworks aren't the only danger this time of year. In order to remain safe, individuals can heed these tips.

- Do not drink and drive. Alcohol consumption may accompany Independence Day festivities. For those planning on using a car to get to and from parties, it is essential to designate a driver who will not imbibe. Otherwise, utilize any number of ridesharing services or available taxis.

- Swim smartly. Always swim with a buddy, and consider hiring a lifeguard if you'll be hosting a pool party and cannot keep a watchful eye on guests in the pool. Adults also should not swim intoxicated, as it can impede the ability to stay afloat and may lead to risky behaviors.

- Leave fireworks to the professionals. Watch a public fireworks display

instead of lighting fireworks on the street or in the backyard.

- Exercise caution with sparklers. Kids running around with sparklers in hand could be a recipe for disaster, as sparklers burn extremely hot. Make sure children do not wave them around or others can get burned. Keep a bucket of water handy to properly extinguish the sparklers.

- Review safe boating practices. If July 4th festivities find you out on the water, be sure that life jackets are worn and set boating and water safety rules for the family.

- Check in with a vet. The Fourth of July can be traumatic for pets not accustomed to fireworks and other loud noises or crowds. Behavior therapy, medication and ensuring that pets do not run away from home and get lost may be necessary.

- Watch food temperatures. Do not leave food out in the hot sun for too long; otherwise, harmful bacteria can grow and potentially cause foodborne illnesses. The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service says to never leave food out of refrigeration for more than two hours. If the temperature is above 90 F, food should not be left out for more than one hour.

These are some of the safety strategies that can keep Independence Day celebrations both safe and enjoyable.

Safety first when handling fireworks

Days at the beach. Family trips to the ice cream parlor. Vacations. These are just a few of the things that evoke the spirit of summer, a time of year when school is out and everyone seems to exhale a little and enjoy the warm weather.

Awe-inspiring fireworks displays also come to mind when imagining summer. Whether it's the Fourth of July or town gatherings along a local waterfront, fireworks displays are a big part of many people's summers. Unfortunately, the potential for accidents and injuries is high when fireworks are involved, particularly when displays aren't left to the professionals.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission notes that, on average, 280 people per day visit emergency rooms with fireworks-related injuries in the month around the July 4th holiday. More than 53 percent of fireworks-related injuries in 2017 were burns.

Fireworks are always best left to the professionals, and many communities have criminalize the use of fireworks by amateurs. But many people still light fireworks, and those that do should follow these safety precautions.

- Never let kids handle fireworks. Fireworks, even sparklers, should never be given to children. The National SAFE KIDS campaign notes that sparklers burn at 2,000 F, which is hot enough to cause third-degree burns. So while they might seem like harmless symbols

of summer, sparklers pose a significant threat to youngsters.

- Follow directions. Fireworks come with detailed directions for a reason, and that's to keep users safe. Strictly adhere to these directions and go over them with anyone who intends to light fireworks.

- Never use fireworks indoors. Fireworks are for outdoor use only.

If it rains, do not light fireworks indoors and then throw them outside before they go off.

- Make sure spectators keep a safe distance. Do not light fireworks until all spectators are out of range should something go awry.

- Recognize that fireworks are not toys. They might be a marvel, but fireworks are not toys. As a result, they should never be aimed or thrown at another person, nor should they be lit or launched from a body part.

- Do not attempt to reignite malfunctioning fireworks. Attempting to reignite malfunctioning fireworks can lead to serious injury.

- Light fireworks on smooth, flat surfaces. When lighting fireworks, do so only on smooth, flat surfaces, making sure to direct them away from people, homes, dry leaves, and flammable materials.

Fireworks are best left to the professionals. Consumers who insist on lighting their own should only do so with the utmost caution.

